

Explore the Bible: December 6

Planned • Luke 1:13-25

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Have you ever attended a gender reveal party? Family and friends wait with great anticipation for the bursting of the balloon that reveals the gender of the child to come. Although some fingers might be crossed when the balloon pops, the result produces shouts and squeals of delight whether the showering of confetti be pink or blue.

As we enter the Advent season, how fitting to delve into the synoptic Gospel of Luke. As a physician (Colossians 4:14), Dr. Luke presents us with some factual information unique in the Gospel narratives concerning the birth and early life of our Lord Jesus. As a Greek Gentile believer, Luke brings a unique perspective of not being an eyewitness to the events he carefully researched and reported. He focused on Jesus' humanity, presenting a Savior who was to be "for all the people" (Luke 2:10-11 NIV).

In the first chapter of his Gospel narrative, Luke presents two incredible scenarios involving "gender reveals." The first is an extremely unlikely birth (John). The second is a supernatural birth that would change the course of all history (Jesus). As our study this quarter progresses, we'll journey through Jesus' early ministry including accounts of the beginning of kingdom teaching, His encounters with opposition,

the calling of His disciples, the Savior's displays of compassion and healing power, and His requirements for His followers.

As we ponder these familiar Scriptures, may we prayerfully seek to glean new insights into these biblical accounts and as a result, may our faith be challenged, enriched, and deepened.

Biblical scholars have discovered 400 years of silence between the end of the Old Testament and the beginning of the New Testament. No prophets appeared during that time to speak God's message to His people. That is, until this particular day during a seemingly-ordinary religious observance.

Even with a dearth of prophetic messages, the Jewish priesthood continued carrying out specific activities. There were 24 groups who took their turn handling temple responsibilities. Today's passage tells of a day Zechariah's group was on duty in Jerusalem, and "he was chosen by lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense" (Luke 1:8-9 NIV).

In the following of this tradition, God arranged for Zechariah to be one who would carry out this sacred responsibility – but suddenly this godly man was not alone in this holy place!

As the people stood outside praying, the angel Gabriel appeared beside Zechariah and understandably, "fear fell upon" the aged priest (v. 12). This heavenly messenger sought to allay Zechariah's fear by sharing an encouraging, although astounding message: "Your prayer has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son..." (v. 13).

The message contained a four-part promise. As Zechariah surely waited with awestruck wonder, Gabriel explained what was to transpire. First, his miracle son was to be named John. Secondly, John would be a source of joy and delight to his father, and "many will rejoice at his birth" (v. 14). This second point obviously extended past his childhood days,

pointing to the years ahead, preaching and preparing the way for the Messiah (Luke 3:1-6).

A third part of the angel's message declared John would be "great before the Lord," and "filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb" (v. 15). Verse 16 reveals the fourth part of the promise: "He will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God."

John, who came in the "spirit and power of Elijah" (v. 17), fulfilled Old Testament prophecies found in Isaiah 40:3-5 and Malachi 3:1. (In Matthew 11:14, Jesus Himself refers to John in this way.)

Luke 1:6 describes Zechariah and Elizabeth as devoted and faithful servants of God, but after decades of marriage their prayers for a child remained unanswered. The incredulous Zechariah found Gabriel's message hard to accept. Physically, it seemed impossible! The doubt of this faithful servant brought about a quick disciplinary measure: Zechariah would be unable to speak until the promise was fulfilled (v. 20). When he emerged voiceless from the temple, the people knew he'd seen a vision.

After finishing his temple duties, Zechariah returned home. We know the rest of the story. His wife Elizabeth conceived, realizing the Lord had "looked on [her]" (v. 25). Keeping herself hidden for five months, she joyfully awaited this precious gift!

Indeed, as believers we can depend on God to keep His promises. We don't need angelic messengers to deliver them. We have our Bible. Things may not happen as we wish or on our schedule, but our Lord is gracious and faithful... and always right on time.

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