

# ANNOUNCING THE ANNOUNCER

SERIES: GOOD NEWS, GREAT JOY



Catalog No. 20211128

Luke 1:5-20

First Message

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November 28, 2021

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Ed McMahon. Joe Buck. Howard Cosell. Al Michaels. Bob Uecker. Bryant Gumbel. What do these people have in common?

These are all famous announcers. Their job is to tell us about something else. They aren't the thing itself; they just talk about the thing. Take Ed McMahon, for example. He was the Tonight Show emcee for Johnny Carson. His famous line was, "Here's Johnny!"

Think about that for a moment. Ed McMahon didn't do anything. All he did was to announce Johnny Carson. He wasn't the thing; he just talked about the thing. It's an interesting role. Who wants to be an announcer? Don't most people want to be the main thing? Not just talk about the main thing?

This morning is the first Sunday of Advent. We're kicking off our Advent series called "Good News, Great Joy." We will be talking about announcements for the next four weeks, but these are special announcements. We'll be looking at announcements of the Christmas story. Over the next four weeks, we'll see how different people receive the announcement of the Christmas story—Jesus' mother Mary, his father Joseph, shepherds, and wise men. But this morning is one step removed. Our announcement this morning is not about the birth of Jesus. It's about the birth of the one who will himself announce Jesus. So this morning we're looking at Announcing the Announcer.

We're going to see an angel bring news about the birth of a baby boy. This boy is not Jesus. In fact, he will go to great lengths during his life to point out that he is not the one for whom people are waiting. He is only the one who comes before the one who will save the world. This boy is John the Baptist, and he will announce the way for Jesus the Christ.

As we hear the story this morning, I'd like to invite us to put ourselves in the place of Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist. We will see how he receives the angelic message and then considers what he is supposed to do

with it. Those are the two dynamics for us to consider this morning: How do we receive the message of Christmas? And what do we do with it?

We'll start by getting to know Zechariah a bit. Then we'll hear the actual announcement that he receives. It's not a generic piece of information. It's unique to him. Finally, we'll see how he responds. In all of this, we want to see how God gives us the message. Who are we? What is the announcement to us? And what will we do with it.

## Getting to know Zechariah

We are introduced to the main character of our story in the beginning of the gospel of Luke.

**Luke 1:5-7:**

**In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, [ of the division of Abijah. And he had a wife from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. 6 And they were both righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord. 7 But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were advanced in years.**

The beginning of this introduction reads like a LinkedIn profile. Zechariah was a priest from the order of Abijah. For ancient Jews, that was an honored position. He would have been considered important and respected. Zechariah was not only a priest. He was married to the daughter of a priest. That's a second gold star on his resume. This is starting to sound like an important family.

Not only was Zechariah a priest and married to the daughter of a priest, but they were also righteous before God. These were the good guys—not hypocritical or power-hungry or petty or legalistic. They walked blamelessly. Zechariah and Elizabeth were a perfect family.

But...they had no child.

The music comes to a screeching halt, and everyone gets quiet. In the first century, perfect people had lots of children. Zechariah and Elizabeth had all the right things going for them. But if they didn't have children, they would have been outsiders. Our story of the perfect couple has turned into the tragic picture of a tree that bears no fruit.

It's no accident that many of the most powerful stories in the Bible begin with a couple who can't have children. That was one of the most painful things to experience in ancient times. It still is today—I know many of you have walked through that stretch of darkness.

Our story begins by shining the spotlight on a painful area of brokenness for Zechariah and his wife Elizabeth. This was their badge of shame. They may have been great people, but they had no child.

I think some of us feel this way. "I've got a good job. I enjoy my friends. My family is healthy. But."

"I can't really complain. Nothing in my life has really been that hard. Things are going pretty well. But."

There's always something, isn't there? All of us have someplace of brokenness in our lives. A tender place where we feel like life hasn't quite worked out for us. An experience of misunderstanding or insult or abuse. A part of our life that seems harder than we should have to deal with. All of these parts of my life are good, but then there's this other part.

My question for you is: Where are you bruised?

Have you ever met someone and found the conversation accidentally going somewhere raw pretty quickly? I remember when I met a family—I think it was the parents of one of my children's friends. We're just chatting and making small talk. And I ask the person whether they have other kids. Immediately I knew I had touched a nerve. With tears in their eyes, they told me of several miscarriages they had experienced.

It was as if I touched a bruise. The pain from a simple question was immense.

Many of us have those places in our lives. I'd like to give you a moment to consider that place. You don't have to share it with anyone. Just bring to mind that tender place in your heart where you might be bruised.

Mostly we try to hide these parts of our lives. We are protective of them. Sometimes we are even ashamed of them. But what we see in the Bible is that our God is particularly drawn to those places of deep pain. It's like the way my dog gets when he sees a squirrel in our backyard. Nothing else matters. His laser-sharp focus is drawn to that squirrel, and he just stares at it.

That's the way God is with the tender places in our lives. He is drawn toward them. God loves to work in the place of your deepest hurt. That's exactly what happened for Zechariah and Elizabeth. Let's see how the story continues.

## The announcement

After being introduced to Zechariah, we are told of a very special day for him. He had been selected by chance to perform the temple sacrifices inside the Holy of Holies. This would only happen once in a lifetime for a priest in the first century. It would have been the highlight of his career. While he was inside, he was visited by an angel, who made an announcement.

### Luke 1:13-17:

**But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. 14 And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, 15 for he will be great before the Lord. And he must not drink wine or strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. 16 And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, 17 and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared."**

This angel tells Zechariah something incredible: a baby will be born. It's a miraculous event. As we look at what the angel says, I want us to notice three different recipients of this news.

First, notice how the angel addresses Zechariah himself. He says, "your prayer has been heard," "your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son", "you shall call his name John," and finally, "you will have joy and gladness."

Think again about who Zechariah is. Remember his place of tenderness—that part of his life where he felt forgotten and neglected. This angel is announcing something that will change the course of history. This is the culmination of God's plan for the salvation of his fallen creation.

But at the same time, for this man Zechariah, the news of John the Baptist is simply about a baby born to him and his wife. It's a tender gift in the place of their most painful hurt. Your prayer has been heard. Your wife will bear a son. You will have joy.

God gives Zechariah a calling that somehow meets him in his deepest place of need. This is how our God works. We aren't just put to work. We are healed and redeemed and restored as we serve God. The announcement of John the Baptist was good news for Zechariah. It was for him.

That's for each of us as well. Somehow this announcement is good news for us. The announcement of Jesus is for you.

Think again about that tender place in your life. What would it look like for God to touch that place and begin a process of healing for you? How does the message of Christmas—God become flesh for the sake of the world—speak into your unique circumstances?

Maybe you're having physical pain, and the idea that God would take on human flesh gives meaning to your suffering. Maybe you have lost a child and the birth of God's son, whom he will lose, connects you to God's heart. Maybe you are frustrated with a world where nothing seems ever to get better, and it's encouraging to remember that God took decisive action in this world to correct injustice and bring peace.

The announcement begins by addressing Zechariah himself. But then the focus shifts to describe who this baby will be. We hear that "he will be great", "he must not drink", and "he will be filled with the Holy Spirit."

The announcement is about someone unique. This particular news is about the birth of John the Baptist. But the news of Christmas is all about the birth of Jesus. It's all connected. We hear that John will be a special kind of person. The announcer has to be unique in order to bring news of the Christ.

All of this points forward to a baby born in a manger who is God incarnate. The announcement is about Jesus.

Advent is about waiting. During this season, we can learn to wait. Of course, we wait for Christmas to arrive. But what we are really waiting for during this season is for Jesus to return. This is a time of reflecting on the coming of Jesus.

If you're looking for a book to read during Advent, try the book of Revelation. If you want something to pray, try the simple invitation, "Come, Lord Jesus." It's even part of the Lord's Prayer: May your kingdom come on earth. We can never forget that Christmas is not about looking back. It's about looking forward and anticipating Jesus' return to earth.

So the announcement given to Zechariah is for him. It is about Jesus. But the promise is for everyone. The ministry of this announcer is powerful. He will "turn the children of Israel to the LORD", "turn the hearts of fathers to their children", and "make ready for the LORD a people prepared".

The goal of this news is transformation. The reason why this is good news is that it will bring change. People will return to the LORD. Families will be restored. God's people will be built up.

As much as we don't like change, most of us really want the world to change. We want things to be different. We want justice for the oppressed. We want to experience peace. We want sins to be forgiven and evil to be restrained.

Zechariah is the first to receive the news that something in history is happening which will accomplish all of those things. The announcement is for the world.

The news that we celebrate at Christmas is good news because we hear about God fixing everything that's wrong.

That's the disconnect in our culture. Everyone agrees that something is wrong with the world. In fact, everyone agrees that there is a lot wrong with the world. Many people in our world actually agree on most of the problems.

It's the solution that's the issue. Not everyone can see that the birth of Jesus Christ two thousand years ago is the beginning of the solution to everything. Our job as announcers is to help them connect the pain and hope they feel to the healing and promise offered in Jesus Christ.

I think every culture has a unique way in which the gospel doesn't make sense. Or, to put it another way, our enemy manages to somehow make good news sound like bad news in particular ways. In our culture, the message of one man whose life, death, and resurrection bring restoration to the whole world sounds narrow and exclusive.

It's incredible, actually. That the message of Christmas—which is inclusive and broke down cultural barriers of the day—is perceived as exclusive and restrictive in our culture today. It makes sense in our culture to say that the message of Jesus is for Christians. No one will be offended by that. But that's not the whole story. The birth of Jesus is for the world. We cannot forget that. We cannot be talked out of that truth. We cannot water down this message of hope for the world.

We are the announcers of an announcement that is for the world.

## The response

Zechariah has experienced something miraculous: an angelic announcement that his personal pain will be healed, his son will be a remarkable man, and the world will experience restoration. Let's see how he responds.

**Luke 1:18:**

**And Zechariah said to the angel, “How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years.”**

Simply put, Zechariah responds with skepticism. He cites two obstacles: his age and the age of his wife. And he asks for a sign: “How shall I know this?” Now, I don't want to be too hard on the guy. I have no idea how I'd react. But isn't an angel appearing and speaking to you a pretty good sign in and of itself?

His skepticism has consequences.

**Luke 1:19-20:**

**And the angel answered him, “I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I was sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news. 20 And behold, you will be silent and unable to speak until the day that these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time.”**

Gabriel apparently feels the same way I do. An angel sent from God should be proof enough. Consequently, Zechariah won't be able to speak until his child is born.

This isn't so much a punishment as a natural consequence. Think about the chain of announcements here. Gabriel tells Zechariah about John. John is supposed to tell people about Jesus. And Jesus will tell people about the kingdom of God. But Zechariah was supposed to be in that chain too. He was supposed to tell people what Gabriel told him about his baby.

But as the angel put it, he “did not believe the words.” How can you announce something you don't believe? So his being mute was a sort of natural consequence of his skepticism. The chain of announcement was broken by his doubt.

This is a warning to us as readers. Has God met you in your place of pain in some way? Have you encountered Jesus in your life? If that's the case, what are you waiting for? Don't go mute. Zechariah doubted and was mute. We can believe the message and speak it.

All Zechariah can see is the way things are supposed to work. Old men and old women don't have babies together. End of story. But God breaks apart the normal order of things. He works differently. He always surprises us.

The other day I was with a group of pastors, and one of them was sharing how he'd come to faith. He was in high school and achieved popularity and sports accolades. But he felt like something was wrong. One night he prayed to God and had an incredible experience of indescribable joy. He hadn't read the Bible, didn't hear the gospel, but God reached out to him.

One of the other guys in the group thought to ask whether someone had been praying for him. And there was. In his school, a girl from Young Life had been praying that God would break through his shell and make himself known.

You may think that the people you work with or your neighbors or your family members are just fine the way they are. It seems far-fetched that they would hear and respond to the message of the gospel. Don't allow your doubt to make you mute. You have no idea what God is capable of. This is how our God works. Never underestimate what he can do.



## Conclusion

Think about the famous announcers I mentioned at the beginning of this message. There are two requirements to being an announcer. You need to be able to speak, and you need something to say—a voice and a message.

We are given a calling as God's announcers. You're the announcer, and you have everything you need: a voice and a message. There is no better time to announce the gospel than the Christmas season. We have a message of good news that brings great joy.

We live in a place that desperately needs to hear that message. There is so much hurt in the Bay Area. For many people, it's buried deep, but it's there. Failed goals. Devastating comparisons to other people. Unfulfilling relationships. The list goes on and on.

For some reason, God has put us in the chain of communicating that message. The good news which brings great joy goes through us.

This morning, we saw the angel Gabriel announcing the announcer in our story. John the Baptist would be born to announce the arrival of Jesus Christ. That's what happened in our story. But I'm hoping that what happened here today is that we realized how we are announcers as well. Somehow God gave me the privilege of announcing you as the announcers of the gospel.

There are lots of ways that you can do that. Allow the good news to begin the process of healing for you. And embrace your role as announcer for the world.