

Jerusalem
The Message 05 in the series, “Journey to Bethlehem”

“When Herod was king of Judea, there was a Jewish priest named Zechariah. He was a member of the priestly order of Abijah, and his wife, Elizabeth, was also from the priestly line of Aaron. Zechariah and Elizabeth were righteous in God’s eyes, careful to obey all of the Lord’s commandments and regulations. They had no children because Elizabeth was unable to conceive, and they were both very old. One day Zechariah was serving God in the Temple, for his order was on duty that week. As was the custom of the priests, he was chosen by lot to enter the sanctuary of the Lord and burn incense. While the incense was being burned, a great crowd stood outside, praying. While Zechariah was in the sanctuary, an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing to the right of the incense altar. Zechariah was shaken and overwhelmed with fear when he saw him. But the angel said, ‘Don’t be afraid, Zechariah! God has heard your prayer. Your wife, Elizabeth, will give you a son, and you are to name him John. You will have great joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great in the eyes of the Lord. He must never touch wine or other alcoholic drinks. He will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even before his birth. And he will turn many Israelites to the Lord their God. He will be a man with the spirit and power of Elijah. He will prepare the people for the coming of the Lord. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and he will cause those who are rebellious to accept the wisdom of the godly.’ Zechariah said to the angel, ‘How can I be sure this will happen? I’m an old man now, and my wife is also well along in years.’ Then the angel said, ‘I am Gabriel! I stand in the very presence of God. It was he who sent me to bring you this good news! But now, since you didn’t believe what I said, you will be silent and unable to speak until the child is born. For my words will certainly be fulfilled at the proper time.’ Meanwhile, the people were waiting for Zechariah to come out of the sanctuary, wondering why he was taking so long. When he finally did come out, he couldn’t speak to them. Then they realized from his gestures and his silence that he must have seen a vision in the sanctuary. When Zechariah’s week of service in the Temple was over, he returned home. Soon afterward his wife, Elizabeth, became pregnant and went into seclusion for five months. ‘How kind the Lord is!’ she exclaimed. ‘He has taken away my disgrace of having no children...’ And when her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had been very merciful to her, everyone rejoiced with her. When the baby was eight days old, they all came for the circumcision ceremony. They wanted to name him Zechariah, after his father. But Elizabeth said, ‘No! His name is John!’ ‘What?’ they exclaimed. ‘There is no one in all your family by that name.’ So they used gestures to ask the baby’s father what he wanted to name him. He motioned for a writing tablet, and to everyone’s surprise he wrote, ‘His name is John.’ Instantly Zechariah could speak again, and he began praising God. Awe fell upon the whole neighborhood, and the news of what had happened spread throughout the Judean hills. Everyone who heard about it reflected on these events and asked, ‘What will this child turn out to be?’ For the hand of the Lord was surely upon him in a special way.”

Luke 1:5-25, 58-66 (NLT)

1. God rewards faithfulness.

“If you are faithful in little things, you will be faithful in large ones. But if you are dishonest in little things, you won’t be honest with greater responsibilities.” Luke 16:10 (NLT)

“A faithful person will be richly blessed...” Proverbs 28:20 (NIRV)

Note: God is looking for faithful people to reward.

“For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of *those* whose heart is loyal to Him...” 2 Chronicles 16:9 (NKJV)

“Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers, but whose delight is in the law of the LORD, and who meditates on his law day and night. That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither—whatever they do prospers.” Psalms 1:1-3 (NIV)

2. God is so trustworthy that angels don’t understand our disbelief!

“And as they were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, ‘Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. **Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise.**” Luke 24:5-7 (ESV)

“God is not a man, so he does not lie. He is not human, so he does not change his mind. Has he ever spoken and failed to act? Has he ever promised and not carried it through?” Numbers 23:19 (NLT)

“God also bound himself with an oath, so that those who received the promise could be perfectly sure that he would never change his mind. So God has given both his promise and his oath. These two things are unchangeable because it is impossible for God to lie...” Hebrews 6:17-18 (NLT)

Note: Sometimes God promises you things that can only be received by faith.

“Then the LORD took Abram outside and said to him, ‘Look up into the sky and count the stars if you can. That’s how many descendants you will have!’ And Abram believed the LORD, and the LORD counted him as righteous because of his faith.” Genesis 15:5-6 (NLT)

3. God can take what we see as a disgrace and use it for His glory.

“As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man who had been blind from birth. ‘Rabbi,’ his disciples asked him, ‘why was this man born blind? Was it because of his own sins or his parents’ sins?’ ‘It was not because of his sins or his parents’ sins,’ Jesus answered. ‘This happened so the power of God could be seen in him. We must quickly carry out the tasks assigned us by the one who sent us. The night is coming, and then no one can work. But while I am here in the world, I am the light of the world.’ Then he spit on the ground, made mud with the saliva, and spread the mud over the blind man’s eyes. He told him, ‘Go wash yourself in the pool of Siloam’ (Siloam means ‘sent’). So the man went and washed and came back seeing! His neighbors and others who knew him as a blind beggar asked each other, ‘Isn’t this the man who used to sit and beg?’ Some said he was, and others said, ‘No, he just looks like him!’”
John 9:1-9 (NLT)

Note: God’s ways are higher than our ways.

“‘My thoughts are nothing like your thoughts,’ says the LORD. ‘And my ways are far beyond anything you could imagine. For just as the heavens are higher than the earth, so my ways are higher than your ways and my thoughts higher than your thoughts.’” Isaiah 55:8-9 (NLT)

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