

The Bible Characters of Christmas

Message 1, Zachariah

About the Series

We all love a good story.

A well-crafted story contains a beginning, middle, and end.

The plot keeps the reader engaged as conflict moves to resolution.

However, it's the characters in the story that give life to the plot.

It's the characters that readers connect with and remember long after a story is told.

Stop and think about some of your favorite characters in a favorite story.

Remember the movie *Cast Away*?

It's about the Federal Express executive, named Chuck, played by Tom Hanks.

Chuck was on a business trip when his cargo plane crashes in the Pacific Ocean.

He survives the crash and floats on a raft to a deserted Island.

Chuck was not found and for four years he will live in isolation, disconnected from humanity.

Eventually packages from the plane, that were to be delivered to people, begin floating to the beach and Chuck opens them.

In one package was a Wilson volleyball.

The volleyball becomes a major character in the story.

Chuck names him Wilson.



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After four years, they finally have an opportunity to make it off the island on a make-shift raft.

Wilson is set on a perch on the raft, but after an intense storm Wilson falls off that perch and into the ocean and floats away.

By the time Chuck realizes Wilson is in the water, he tries to swim to him, but is unable.

The sad music begins to play, and Chuck lays sprawled out on the raft crying and apologizing to Wilson who floats away in the Ocean.

As you watch and engage with the story, you cannot help having feelings of sadness over a volleyball named Wilson who became a lonely man's friend while stranded on an Island.

We may not have volleyballs as friends, but a simple character like Wilson can bring life to a story and make it relatable to the audience watching.

There is no other time of year where the celebration of a season dramatically fills the air like Christmas.

Yet Christmas is a powerful story of how God gave the greatest gift of his Son for the salvation of sinful people.

As God tells this great story, he uses characters that bring his story to life.

In this series on the Characters of Christmas, we will engage with people as they listen to and obey God's plan.

There are moments when what God calls these people to do will appear impossible, but as we will see, obedience rules the day and the impossible becomes a reality.



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Introduction

The first character in the Christmas story is Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist.

While this character is not often associated with the birth of Christ, the baby he will be the father of, is the one who will go before the Lord to prepare his way.

John will be born a few months ahead of Jesus and will go throughout the land preparing people for the coming Messiah.

This story is not about John the Baptist,

What we will learn from Zechariah's story is something we can relate to.

When God shows up in life and calls us to a task, we sometimes believe we have a deficiency in completing the task God is calling us to.

That deficiency can be a crutch and is used to deflect us away from God's plan and to disqualify us from being used of God according to his plan.

Whatever we think our deficiency might be, we must always remember that God has the power to work through us despite what we believe is a problem.

Listen to how God impacts Zechariah's life when Zechariah believed his deficiency would interfere with God's plan.

Let's look closely at several important puzzle pieces in this story.

The Normal Function of a Priest

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. 6And they were both righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord. 7But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were advanced in years.



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In **Luke 1: 5-7** we learn some details concerning Zechariah and his wife Elizabeth.

Luke tells us Zechariah was a priest in the division of Abijah.

Now we learn in **1 Chronicles 24** that David organized the priests according to their appointed duties in their service **(24:3)**

in the temple, according to the procedure established by Aaron as the Lord commanded **(24:19)**.

Zechariah was in the eighth division of this structure established by David **(24:10)**.

Elizabeth was also in the line of Aaron.

Both parents walked blamelessly according to the law.

But they did not have any children because Elizabeth was barren, and both were advanced in years.

When God decides to include people in his plan, age is never an issue he considers.

Scripture is filled with young and older people accomplishing his plan according to his will.

We all need to keep an open mind to the Lord's leading and never disqualify ourselves because of some apparent deficiency.

Maybe you think your age, or a physical handicap disqualifies you from being used of God in life.

You need to set that thinking aside and listen to the Lord's instruction and allow him to work through an obedient attitude.

The Communication of a Divine Message



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It was Zechariah's turn to perform his duties as priest in the temple.

As Zechariah had done many times before, he entered the Temple to the altar of incense to execute his duties as the people waited outside for him to return.

During this normal routine, God decides to interrupt Zechariah's duties with a very powerful message.

God has an interesting way of taking normal routines in life and communicating his plan.

As Zechariah is performing his priestly duties an angel of the Lord is standing to the right of the altar.

As is typical in Scripture, when an angel appears to speak to a person, the first words from their mouth is "do not be afraid."

I think it's safe to say that we would be afraid also if an angel showed up to give us a message from God.

This is what God does and the angel communicates this powerful message to Zechariah.

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."



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We learn many things from this passage concerning John the Baptist.

We are told he will be great before the Lord, and that he will be filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb, demonstrating the sovereignty of God in salvation, and we learn the specifics of his ministry to prepare people for the coming Messiah.

As we engage with the angel's communication, what comes into view is the importance of this character and the reason why he should be part of our Christmas story.

Without John the Baptist, the prophetic Scriptures concerning his ministry would not be fulfilled (***Malachi 3***), therefore, destroying the authority of God's Word.

But God is executing his plan, in his time, with his people.

We read these biblical accounts of normal ordinary people interacting with God's messengers and message.

If we're not careful, we can accuse these people of not listening to what God has instructed.

I often wonder how I would respond.

I do not believe I would be joyfully jumping up and down because of what God was telling me in that dramatic moment.

In fact, I might be tempted to run the other way or look for another sign to verify what God was telling me in that moment.

Truth is, God does communicate to me in other ways, primarily through his Word.

As I read and engage with God's message to me, I must ask myself, how obedient am I to his instructions?



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Zechariah begins a conversation with the angel, who is identified as Gabriel and who makes this powerful, identifying statement ***“I stand in the presence of God, and I was sent to speak with you and to bring you this good news” (1:19).***

Remember, angels are messengers dispatched by God and only communicate what God wants them to say.

When we hear Gabriel telling Zechariah what will happen, this becomes God’s personal message to Zechariah.

He doesn’t jump for joy but wonders how the plan will happen.

They are both advanced in years and Elizabeth is barren (reminds us of Abraham and Sarah).

The sign Gabriel gives Zechariah comes in the form of a mild rebuke.

Zechariah will not be able speak for nine months, until the baby born.

Zechariah’s time in the temple was longer than expected by the people because of this angelic conversation.

When he finally emerges from the Temple, he is unable to speak.

He returns home to Elizabeth where she conceives a child.

This pregnancy will stay with Elizabeth for five months.

When was the last time you sought God’s plan for your life?

For Zechariah and Elizabeth, it appears that at some point they were praying for a child **(1:13)**, and God would answer that prayer, but Zechariah would still wonder.

We do the same thing, we want to be used of God and when he gives us clarity concerning direction, we question his leading.



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As our prayers align to God's will, his plan will be made clear in time and the only response is obedience, no matter how crazy the plan may appear.

We try desperately to elevate a deficiency in life that we might use to disqualify us from a task God calls us to do.

We can all relate to Zechariah's action as God revealed his plan, perhaps you are there right now, questioning his direction in your life.

Perhaps this task in your life is what God had wanted for you from before you were born.

Embrace the task and obey without hesitation.

Then watch what God will do in your life.

The Divine Message Becomes a Reality

Nine months following Gabriel's appearance to Zechariah in the temple, the day came when their child was born.

People were gathered around Elizabeth, rejoicing with her.

They finally had the child they were longing for, a son.

The birth of this child was truly the work of God, for Zechariah and Elizabeth were old and barren.

This birth was nothing short of a miracle.

If you have children or awaiting your first child or have many children, we know the joy of birth, and the excitement others share with us in these moments, especially when conception has been difficult.

This is the picture we see in the text as a new baby boy was born into the world and others have gathered around to celebrate.



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According to Jewish law, on the eighth day following birth and in accordance with the Lord, Zechariah and Elizabeth brought their child to be circumcised (**Leviticus 12:3**) and to name him.

It was common to name the child after his father.

So, everyone expected this boy to be named Zechariah. However, as God had instructed them, Elizabeth and Zechariah name their boy John.

People were confused at this name because no one in the family was named John.

Since Zechariah could not speak, they motioned to him seeking to affirm this unique name.

Zechariah responded, with what would be the first text message, by writing on a piece of paper, "His name is John" (1:63).

At this moment, after nine months of silence, Zechariah was able to speak as he opened his mouth, he began by blessing God.

The forerunner of the Messiah has been born and his task is set before him.

As John grows and develops his life is prepared for a very important task, to prepare people for the Messiah's appearance.

Conclusion

You may find yourself connecting to a character while being challenged.

Zechariah was praying that God would give him and his wife a child.

As Zechariah performed his duty as priest, God interrupted his task with a divine announcement.



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You may be praying for God's leading in your life and God is calling you to change jobs, not marry a person, or go into ministry.

Maybe you are thinking as Zechariah did, how can this be?

God knows about your life, what are you putting in that space that is causing you to miss out on God's plan?

As we seek and pray for God's will and plan in our lives, and we step out to obey regardless of what we think is a deficiency we begin to see the amazing work of God in our lives which causes us to magnify and glorify him, which is the ultimate purpose of his calling in our lives.

May we look beyond our issues and trust God for his work to be done through our lives for his glory.



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