

Awaiting Advent

The Promised Messiah

Awaiting Advent – The Promised Messiah
Week 1 – Elizabeth and Zachariah, Answered Prayers

01. INTRODUCTION

Hello everyone my name is _____ and I am excited about our new series where we are digging into the lives of key characters from the nativity story.

Over the next 5 weeks we're going to look at how the Old Testament prophecies about the coming Messiah unfolded in the lives of Elizabeth, Zachariah, Mary, Joseph, and the humble shepherds. And we're going to see in their stories, the faithfulness of God in fulfilling His promises and provide us with profound insights into faith, obedience, and the anticipation of the promised Messiah.

The **word Advent means the arrival, the emergence, the approach...** At a time in the history of the world that was as dark as it had ever been, God had a plan to bring the greatest light the world had ever seen. The people of God were waiting with anticipation for the arrival of their promised messiah, their savior. But God's plan was different than their plans. **The Jewish people had been longing for a savior, but they were looking for the wrong kind of savior, in the wrong places, and hoping for something different than what God had in mind.**

In many ways we can relate to them, but their stories provide context for our own stories, and give us hope in the faithfulness of God, the redemptive power of God and point us to a future we all wait for, with great anticipation.

Big Idea: Seeing the faithfulness of God in the past, brings peace to our present and faith for our future.

02. TRANSITION TO MESSAGE

Most of you are probably familiar with the classic Christmas movie “It’s a Wonderful Life.” The movie begins with George Bailey ready to take his own life in Bedford Falls, New York on Christmas Eve in 1945. As the prayers of his friends are heard in heaven an angel apprentice named Clarence shows up to help George regain his hope. While the movie is certainly **far from accurate theologically**, especially in its portrayal of angels, the **theme of finding hope at Christmas** is a **timeless theme** that is **rooted in Scripture**, as we will discover this morning.

Today we’re going to look at an **astonishing story of hope** and **long-awaited answered prayers** as we explore the story of **Zachariah and Elizabeth**, and *the part they played in the advent of Jesus the Messiah*.

03. MESSAGE

The entire story is found across 48 verses in Luke 1. For the sake of time I’m going to shorten it a bit and give you the highlights.

Luke 1:5–13, 21-22, 24-25, 54-57 (CSB)

⁵In the days of King Herod of Judea, there was a priest of Abijah’s division named Zechariah. His wife was from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. ⁶Both were righteous in God’s sight, living without blame according to all the commands and requirements of the Lord. ⁷But they had no children because Elizabeth could not conceive, and both of them were well along in years. ⁸When his division was on duty and he was serving as priest before God, ⁹it happened that he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to enter the sanctuary of the Lord and burn incense. ¹⁰At the hour of incense the whole assembly of the people was praying outside. ¹¹An angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing to the right of the altar of incense. ¹²When Zechariah saw him, he was terrified and overcome with fear. ¹³But the angel said to him, “Do not be

afraid, Zechariah, because your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will name him John.

²¹Meanwhile, the people were waiting for Zechariah, amazed that he stayed so long in the sanctuary. ²²When he did come out, he could not speak to them. Then they realized that he had seen a vision in the sanctuary. He was making signs to them and remained speechless. ²⁴After these days his wife Elizabeth conceived and kept herself in seclusion for five months. She said, ²⁵"The Lord has done this for me. He has looked with favor in these days to take away my disgrace among the people."

⁵⁷Now the time had come for Elizabeth to give birth, and she had a son. ⁵⁸Then her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown her his great mercy, and they rejoiced with her. ⁵⁹When they came to circumcise the child on the eighth day, they were going to name him Zechariah, after his father. ⁶⁰But his mother responded, "No. He will be called John." ⁶¹Then they said to her, "None of your relatives has that name." ⁶²So they motioned to his father to find out what he wanted him to be called. ⁶³He asked for a writing tablet and wrote, "His name is John." And they were all amazed. ⁶⁴Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue set free, and he began to speak, praising God.

It was a Dark Time in Israel. Part of the reason it was a dark time was because it had been **roughly 400 years since God had spoken** to His people through the prophet Malachi.

Now we know *that doesn't mean God hadn't still been at work* in the lives of His people. **Even when God is silent, he's still working.**

But 400 years is a long time.

After **400 years of silence**, even with all the great stories of old, it still probably felt like God had abandoned them. But now, **God was about to intervene in a way that would give not only them, but the whole world permanent, lasting hope.**

We've talked before about the **importance of names in the Bible** and this is one of those times where the **names of the people**

involved **in the story foreshadow** what **God is about to do** in their lives.

Zechariah means "God remembers."

And we are about to see that even though Zechariah might feel like God has forgotten him, exactly the opposite is true. God remembers Zechariah and He remembers His people.

Elizabeth means "God is my oath."

And God is indeed about to make an oath, a promise, that is going to bring great light to dispel both the darkness that Zechariah and Elizabeth have lived under and the darkness that Israel has experienced as a people.

The bible tells us they were righteous before God and kept His commands. Not perfect they desired to live in a way that pleased God.

And yet, despite their life of service to God, there was a deep sadness in their lives because they had not been able to have children. This is just **one of many places in the Bible** where we discover that devotion to **God does not guarantee that we won't experience difficulties in life.**

But God is about to intervene in their lives in a miraculous way that would overcome the darkness and hopelessness they had lived under for so long.

As we read, the Angel Gabriel came and spoke to Zachariah, and he had great news for him.

Just as his name portends, God remembered him and is about to answer his prayers. He and Elizabeth are going to have a child – and not just any child. Their child is going to be the forerunner who will prepare the way for the long-awaited Messiah.

Advent begins with Zechariah.

Now that's a lot of important background, but before we get out of

here today, I want to look at:

Three Truths of Advent

1. God will surprise you.

400 Years the people of God waited. Malachi ends with a prophetic word that another Elijah is coming.

Malachi 4:5–6 (CSB)

⁵Look, I am going to send you the prophet Elijah before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes. ⁶And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers. Otherwise, I will come and strike the land with a curse.”

And then... for 400 years they wait. Did you know God wasn't calling them to force something to happen? God didn't say, "Hey, I've had enough of you guys, you go figure it out and I'll check back in, in 400 years."

No, he said: "Look, I am going to send..."

When God says he's going to do something, our job isn't to force the end result.

Our job is to be faithful with the next step, even if the next step involves waiting. And as we are faithful and waiting, God will surprise us with his goodness when we least expect it.

- He surprised Abraham and Sarah with children in their old age.
- Now he is surprising Zachariah and Elizabeth in a similar way.
- Later when Jesus comes, he would surprise the wise men with his own wisdom.
- He would surprise the people at a wedding party by turning water into wine.
- He would surprise the wicked people in the temple by flipping tables and chasing them out with a whip.
- He would surprise his disciples by yielding to death on the

cross.

- He would surprise the devil, the demons, and the whole world when he walked out of a grave 3 days after they put him in it.
- **And he isn't done surprising people. He's got good surprises for you!**

But do you know what the key is to a good surprise?

Perfect timing. **So, it's a good thing that:**

2. God's timing is perfect.

2 Peter 3:9 (CSB)

⁹The Lord does not delay his promise, as some understand delay, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish but all to come to repentance.

Abraham and Sarah

We already referenced Abraham and Sarah, but they doubted God's timing and tried to force the issue, but God wasn't late. God was using time to test Abraham and to build his faith, and at the right time, God gave them Isaac.

Joseph

We studied Joseph deeply a couple series ago, but once again we see how God's timing was perfect in his life, though it was hard to see at times. All of the difficulties and adversity he faced put him in the right place, at the right time, for God's plans to be fulfilled.

Lazarus

Jesus got word that Lazarus was severely sick and needed a miracle. But Jesus waited. He had healed plenty of people. He had a bigger miracle in mind. So he waited until Lazarus died and then 2 more days to make sure he was good and dead, before he came into town and raised him back to life again.

Jesus

And then... at the right time in human history Jesus steps into our world.

Romans 5:6 "For while we were still helpless, at the right time, Christ died for the ungodly."

The advent of Jesus, which culminated in his death, resurrection and ascension, happened during the era of Pax Romana (Roman Peace) which was of course providential in more ways than I have time to speak to today. On one hand the times were incredibly dark, but on another hand, they were primed for the spreading of the gospel. People were growing disillusioned with polytheistic religions. The romans had taken over a large part of world and created roads and access to their empire. Koine Greek was the predominant language of the people over broad geographical areas.

All of this meant that the gospel was not only primed to be received by masses of people, but the infrastructure of language, transportation and culture was uniquely positioned to support explosive growth.

But of course, none of that was possible without the people of God acting on what they were learning. Jesus was only in ministry for 3 years. After that, the ball was handed to the disciples. Which speaks to the third truth of Advent.

3. God invites us to participate.

God is God and he can do whatever he wants. But from the beginning of time, he has always chosen to work in and through people. This is what we see in the life of Zachariah and Elisabeth. God used faithful people, to set the stage for the coming Messiah. Their son would be John the Baptist, who was the transitional prophet from the Old Covenant to the new. He prepared the way for Jesus and for the Kingdom of God to come to the earth.

But John wasn't the only one God would use to make way for the Kingdom.

- From the early pages of Genesis where he announces to all of heaven that his is going to create humans in his image to steward the earth on his behalf.
- To choosing the Jewish people be the line of people that would bring about Jesus the Messiah.
- To the expansion of the church and the advancement of the Kingdom of God in the earth, then and today.

As we prepare to close let me encourage you today to join in... to participate in the building of the kingdom. Because after all, that is why Jesus Came.

Four Ways to Participate in Building the Kingdom

1. By Faith

We have to remember it's the kingdom of God we are building, not our own. And his kingdom is built by people who live by faith.

Galatians 3:11

¹¹Now it is clear that no one is justified before God by the law, because the righteous will live by faith.

"LIVE" by faith... that means everything you do. That doesn't just mean pray in faith when you're desperate. It means live. Your **whole life. Every decision. Every dollar, every ounce of energy**. You make it, spend it and use it **by faith**.

And remember... it's not about what you see with your natural eyes, it's about what you see with your eyes of faith.

Hebrews 11:1

¹Now faith is the reality of what is hoped for, the proof of what is not seen.

Living by Faith also means you never quit! Jesus gave too much, and the saints who have gone before us gave too

much... and now cheer us on.

Hebrews 12:1–2a

¹Therefore, since we also have such a large cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us lay aside every hindrance and the sin that so easily ensnares us. Let us run with endurance the race that lies before us,
²keeping our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith...”

So run with that endurance and keep your eyes fixed on Jesus. If you see him in front of you... you're going in the right direction. So don't quit! You only lose if you quit!

So we participate by faith, but we also have to keep our connection strong.
Which means we have to participate:

2. Through Prayer

I have to go quickly here, but when we look to the life of Jesus he showed us the importance of building the kingdom through prayer.

- Jesus regularly withdrew to pray (**Matthew 14:23, Luke 5:16**)
- He prayed about big decisions. Like the day before choosing the disciples he spent the whole night in prayer. (**Luke 6:12-13**)
- He prayed and expressed his dependency on the Father (**John 5:30**)
- He prayed when he was suffering. (**Matthew 26:39**)
- He prayed for his disciples and for us. (**John 17**)
- And when he taught us to pray... he told us to pray for the kingdom of God to come!

Matthew 6:9–10

⁹Therefore, you should pray like this: Our Father in heaven, your name be honored as holy.

¹⁰Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in

heaven.

The only way to actually see things on earth done like they are in heaven is if we tap into heaven for the power and strength we need.

This means we have to participate by faith, through prayer, and:

3. In the Spirit

Acts 1:8

⁸But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

We've taught on this many times and we will again, but hear me when I say, you can't build the kingdom of God *without the power that comes from the spirit of God.*

I love the prophetic picture we get of the power that comes from the Spirit of God in:

Zechariah 4:6 (ESV)

⁶..."This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of hosts."

As we studied in our Ephesians series, it is the spirit of God that strengthens us and gives us power in our inner man. So, **pray daily for the spirit to fill you** and to give you the **wisdom, strength** and **courage** to do what he's calling you to do.

Which all connects to the fourth way we participate in building the Kingdom.

4. With Action

What does the bible teach?

Jesus says:

It's not the one who says Lord, Lord but **the one who does** the will of God. (Matthew 7:21)

No one who starts working and then stops and **turns back is fit** for the kingdom. (Luke 9:62)

You can't even see the Kingdom without repenting and being born again. (Mark 1:15, John 3:3)

And of course ultimately he says:

Matthew 28:19

"⁹Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

We have to be people of action and doing... not to earn our salvation but to demonstrate it.

It's like the apostle James would later say: "Faith without works is dead faith." (James 2:26)

04. CLOSING & PRAYER

Speaking of Action – as we prepare to close – there is something else that Luke telegraphs in his gospel that many people miss.

In Jewish tradition there is something called the "**Nesiat Kapayim**" which is Hebrew for "**The Lifting of the Hands**".

This action was part of the priestly blessing that every priest would give after having come and made offerings to the Lord on behalf of the people.

This tradition started with Aaron in:

Leviticus 9:22 "Aaron lifted up his hands toward the people and blessed them. He came down after sacrificing the sin offering, the burnt offering, and the fellowship offering."

From there *it continued every time* the priest would go and offer a sacrifice.

This blessing is conspicuously missing from the narrative when Zacharia came out of the sanctuary. He never gives the blessing.

In the final verses of Luke, we find this:

Luke 24:50–52 (CSB) ⁵⁰Then he led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, and **lifting up his hands he blessed them.** ⁵¹And while he was blessing them, he left them and was carried up into heaven. ⁵²After worshiping him, they returned to Jerusalem with great joy.

In this, Luke is showing us that the final priestly blessing is the Blessing from Christ himself. No further priestly blessing is needed.

From this blessing the **church was ignited**, soon they **received the Holy Spirit.**

In **1 Peter** and **Revelation**, we – you, me, the church – are now described as a kingdom of priests unto God.

Commissioned by Jesus, empowered by the Holy Spirit to go, and share the **good news** of the **greatest blessing** the world has ever know.

The *coming of a savior*, the hope of the world, the *resurrected Christ*.

In the same way the people of God anticipated the coming of the savior, we too anticipate the second coming.

But *while we wait and anticipate*, **we wait in action.**

Going – telling – sharing – preaching ... and **bringing the message of Jesus to a lost and dying world.**

And that is what Christmas... the coming of Christ is all about.

Let's Pray