

# THE FIRST 15

Monday, December 9, 2024

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Today is Monday, December 9 and this is the second week of the season of Advent. We will study the song of Zechariah recorded in the first chapter of the Gospel of Luke.

## OPENING PRAYER

*Blessed and Holy Lord, my heart is full of hope this Advent season as I anticipate the celebration of the birth of Your Son, my Savior, Jesus Christ. In the early morning of a dawning December day, I seek Your presence. I calm my thoughts, still my mind and reflect on the words of the priest Zechariah, whose journey of silence became a journey of faith. Let me hear the message you have for me today through the words of this ancient song. Amen.*

## SCRIPTURE

***Once when Zechariah's division was on duty and he was serving as priest before God, he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to go into the temple of the Lord and burn incense. Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear. But the angel said to him: "Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to call him John. He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth." Zechariah asked the angel, "How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years." The angel said to him, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to tell you this good news. And now you will be silent and not able to speak until the day this happens, because you did not believe my words, which will come true at their appointed time." Luke 1:8-9,11-14,18-20***

## REFLECTION

The first chapter of the Gospel of Luke is a tale of two babies. Baby John the Baptist and Baby Jesus the Messiah, two cousins born within months of one another. Both babies are the result of miraculous conceptions that still fill us with wonder, awe and amazement. These two unanticipated births fulfilled dozens of Old Testament prophecies. God was up to something and God was up to something good.

The angel Gabriel is busy in Luke's Gospel as God's messenger. Gabriel announces the two births and sets the events in motion. First Gabriel visits Zechariah and his wife Elizabeth. Zechariah is a priest. He is elderly and he and Elizabeth have no children. She is barren and unable to conceive. The angel Gabriel appears to Zechariah when he is alone in the Temple doing his priestly duties. Gabriel tells Zechariah that Elizabeth will conceive and bear a son who they will name John. Zechariah responds in disbelief. Luke 1:18 (The Message) Zechariah said to the angel, "Do you expect me to believe this? I'm an old man and my wife is an old woman."

The angel promises him amazing joy and the answer to prayer and he responds with, "Do you expect me to believe this?" Zechariah is skeptical and disbelieving. He challenges the angel's message and resists the promise. After all, it is impossible! They are old and Elizabeth has been barren all these years.

The season of Advent is a good time for us to look inside of ourselves and be aware of our own places of disbelief. What is it that you have trouble believing when it comes to God? What do you question or doubt? How are you skeptical, like Zechariah? What seems impossible to you? What promises do you question, asking like Zechariah, "Do you expect me to believe that?" Promises like God is with you. God is powerful. God is merciful. God loves you. God hears you. God forgives you. God can heal you. Jesus can save you. Jesus can bring you love, joy, hope and peace. There will be peace on earth. Good will toward men. "Do you expect me to believe that?"

In response to Zechariah's negativity, skepticism and disbelief, the angel renders him speechless. He is to begin a nine month journey of silence, unable to speak, but able to reflect on the power and promises of a God who loves him and who just answered his most earnest prayer.

**Ask:** Where do I lack faith and disbelieve God's power and promises for my life? How might God want to turn my negative skepticism into positive hope?

**Pause and Pray**

## **CLOSING PRAYER**

*Holy and loving Lord God, forgive me for my lack of faith and the times when I disbelieve Your Word, question Your power or doubt Your promises. Thank You for hearing my deepest and most earnest prayers and answering them. Give me a time of pregnant silence to ponder Your steadfast love and great goodness. You are always working for good in my life. I believe in Your power to perform miracles this Christmas season and always. Help me grow in faith wherever I am lacking. Amen.*