



Sermon-Based Study Guide
Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church

Luke 1.57-80

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I. Introduction to this Series and Study

This week we continue our Advent series The Greatest Gift, engaging the experience of Zechariah and Elizabeth.

II. Connecting With One Another

Have you ever been rendered speechless?

If so, why? If not, what do you think could prompt that in your life?

III. Study the Text

a. Read Luke 1.1-4.

There is a great deal of information given in just the first four verses of Luke's gospel account. Take note of and discuss...

- How many other people took time to record the information found in the gospels?
- What do you think Luke meant by "things that have been fulfilled among us"?
- How does Luke assure the credibility of his account?
- How did Luke come to his own certainty on the truth of the gospel?
- Who is Theophilus?
- What is the purpose of Luke's "orderly account"?

b. Read Luke 1.5-7.

While Luke seeks to communicate how God has fulfilled his promises to Israel, he begins by engaging the personal desires of one particular couple.

Why do you think he tells the story this way?

- c. It's been written that "Luke introduces the parents of John as pious, law-abiding saints. Thus from its very beginning the new movement of God is steeped in righteousness. Yet despite their righteousness, they have suffered the disappointment of barrenness, a condition Elizabeth will later refer to as a *disgrace*. Elizabeth's feelings are perfectly understandable, but to be barren is not an indication of the presence of sin or of condemnation..."

What do you make of this quote? Do you agree or disagree? Why?

- d. The idea that physical ailments are a result of spiritual disobedience was common in the first century (notice the disciples' question in John 9.2: "Rabbi, who sinned, this

man or his parents, that he was born blind?" We'll engage this question in detail on Sunday, February 28th).

How does this concept - that our difficulties are our own fault - continue in American culture today?

- e. The above quote - under c - continues (immediately after the word "condemnation"), "...it may be an opportunity for blessing, whether God grants a child late in life or allows a couple to pursue other opportunities of service. In Scripture, when God allows a woman to be barren, he often has something special in mind for her."

Time permitting, read Genesis 18.1-11, 25.19-21, 29.31-35, Judges 13.2-5, 1 Samuel 1.1-20.

What do you learn from these examples of God working through these women?

- f. Read Luke 1.8-23.

The angel's announcement to Zechariah comes at the highpoint of his ministry career: As one of around 18,000 priests, he served in the temple just twice a year, but in this instance - by lot - he was able to go into the holy place, offering incense as a picture of intercession rising before God (see Psalm 141.2, Revelation 5.8 and 8.3-4). This angel's announcement was rare, in that the father receives the message rather than the mother. Why do you think God did it differently in this instance?

- g. Notice that the angelic pronouncement includes the child's name (verse 13), his position and character (15), then his mission (16-17). What do you think is the significance of his doing so?

- h. It's been written that "God is tackling two requests at once, one national and the other personal, a prayer that had long since been abandoned and all but forgotten. Sometimes God's answers to prayer come in surprising ways after a long time."

Has God ever answered one of your prayers in a "surprising way after a long time"?

Has He ever answered one of your prayers by including an even larger agenda to be accomplished? If so, how?

- i. These verses contain a number of details about who John will become, as well as a number of references to other figures in Scripture.

What aspects of John's character and calling stand out to you most?

- j. Read Luke 1.57-66.

At the outset of these verses, we read that those closest to Elizabeth - neighbors and relatives - gathered around to celebrate. Those who had shared in her discouragement and pain now rejoice (see verse 58).

When have you been involved in similar celebrations?

Did you gather around others - or did they gather around you?

- k. Instead of following first century custom and naming their child after his father or grandfather, Elizabeth goes another way (see verse 60). While it may seem like she

had picked the name out of the air, recall that it was given to Zechariah by the angel in verse 13. "The choice of the surprising name indicates that a major lesson of obedience has been learned... when God names a child, that child is significant in his plan."

Do you agree that the naming of her child is a "major lesson of obedience"? Why or why not? What does it imply about the angel's other proclamations?

- l. Those in attendance motion to Zechariah (signaling he was not only mute, but also deaf). By writing "His name is John" on a wooden tablet covered in wax, John "echoes the instructions of the angel, not the crowd and custom. He goes the way of God and amazes his neighbors."

How is God calling you to "go the way of God" this Christmas season?

How could doing so "amaze *your* neighbors"?!

- m. Just as the angel promised in the interaction 9-months prior, Zechariah's tongue is immediately loosened: "...the temporary situation of silence ends with the fulfillment of God's word. The point of the lineage is not to be missed: believe and know that God fulfills his promises."

Immediately, Zechariah is filled with the Holy Spirit and launches into prophetic song.

How would *you* have responded if you were in Zechariah's sandals?

Would you rejoice in God's gift - or bemoan your nine months of silence?

- n. Read Luke 1.67-80.

What stands out to you in these verses? Why?

What would a Christmas that was truly inspired by these sentiments look like?

IV. Pray

- a. Ask God that we, too - like Zechariah - would boldly declare the good news of His salvation this Christmas season, being faithful to God - and amazing our neighbors!
- b. Lift up those for whom this Christmas season is a difficult one, asking God to surround them with relatives and neighbors, as well as his comfort and peace,
- c. Thank God that in fulfilling our desires, He can also fulfill His promises.