



Christmas trees are a wonderful part of the season. I love the smell of a real tree, the sparkle from the lights, the glitter from the ornaments, the bows and garland, and let's not forget the angel on top. Yes, for me it has to be an angel.

I guess that's because so many of the stories of Christmas include angels in their cast of characters. Let's take a closer look at Zechariah and his wife Elizabeth today.

Performing his priestly duties Zechariah, found himself serving at the temple. His job was to keep the incense burning. Standing at the Altar of Incense in the Holy Place inside the temple, he was suddenly greeted by an angel.

I'm going to pause this story for a moment to tell you how amazing I personally think it was for Zechariah to be standing at the element in the Temple that was just in front of the veil. That veil separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place where the presence of Almighty God dwelled. Though Zechariah was separated from a glimpse into heaven's throne room by mere inches of cloth, God, Himself, allows a bit of heaven to seep through to Zechariah. And what does he see? The Angel Gabriel.

Gabriel speaks to a startled Zechariah, saying, "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" (Luke 1:13-14)

Earlier in the first chapter of Luke, it says that Zechariah and Elizabeth were both righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord. But they had no child ... In her book, *The Women of Christmas*, Liz Curtis Higgs said this:

"What an awesome statement about Zechariah and Elizabeth! They were righteous and blameless—good Christians—yet their lives were not without pain—they were childless and they desperately wanted a child. As believers we are righteous before God, yet we are not without pain either. We can rest in the fact that just as God had Zechariah and Elizabeth in His hand of care, we are in His loving care as well. Even in the uncertainties, the hard aches and difficulties, God has a plan and purpose for your good and His glory."



Verse 10 of Luke 1 struck a chord in my heart as well. It tells us that a multitude of people were praying outside the Temple at the hour of incense which was at that exact same time that Zechariah was in the temple performing his priestly duty of burning incense at the altar. And what happened? The angel made his appearance. The scriptures say he appeared at the right side of the altar of incense. Do you know what struck me about that? The people were outside praying and worshiping as Zechariah was inside praying, worshiping and performing his duties. God had been silent for 400 years and finally a word came from Heaven, and what a word that was. But that word that was finally spoken came as a multitude of God's people prayed.

These people, this multitude were men and women of prayer. And even though a word had not been uttered from Heaven in 400 years, they were still filled with wonder, hope, love, and expectation for their God. They were a people poised and ready to hear a word from the Lord. They were in a posture of prayer, seeking God.

Are you ready for a Word from the Lord during this season? I know I am. But we must be in a posture to hear Him—reading His Word and praying.

One final passage for today from this chapter. Luke 1:18-20 says,

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."

After Zechariah confesses his doubts to the angel, this Messenger of God declares who he is. He gives his name and his job description. He says, "I am Gabriel, which, by the way, means strength. I stand in the presence of God, and I was sent (by God) to speak to you to give you this good news."

Gabriel—the angel that stands in the presence of God. WOW! That would have completely filled me with awe! To be that close to an angel was amazing in and of itself, but Zechariah was greeted by *the angel* who stands in the presence of God. God didn't just send any old angel; He sent his main guy!!! May I just say when God wants to amaze us, He pulls out all the stops.



Has God done that for you lately? Have you been struck by the providence and provisions of God this season? Maybe He's tried to amaze you, but you haven't noticed. God may not send an angel to capture and captivate your attention, but He will amaze us at times.

Let's not miss verse 20. Because of Zechariah's doubt, the angel makes him unable to speak until the time of his son's birth. That was a little inconvenient don't you think? You know though, I think Zechariah's inability to speak was confirmation that this proclamation would be fulfilled. And it would be a constant reminder to him of the angel's appearing and the good news that he shared. Zechariah and Elizabeth—both walking righteously and blamelessly before the Lord. Can you even imagine Elizabeth's response to a growing belly, the movement of a baby in her tummy and the fact that she was well past the age of childbearing. I wish I had a copy of her diary to read!! It would be a page turner.

Today, ponder what God is doing in your life. What has He done recently to amaze you? Think about the birth of His Son, Jesus, and the many blessings you have in your life. Remember to rejoice. Remember to sing. Remember to pray and remember to focus your thoughts on the true meaning of Christmas. And use your words as Gabriel did to be a messenger of God who spreads the Good News of Jesus.