

Elizabeth—Peace
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Luke 1:5-25; Luke 1:39-45; Luke 1:56-80

My name is Elizabeth. I lived in the Judean town in the hill country. My ancestor, Aaron, was Moses' older brother and Israel's first high priest. My husband, Zechariah, also was descended from this priestly line.

Through all the years of our long marriage, I was unable to bear Zechariah a son. Because of this, I felt judgment from my community. You see, in our culture, in that time in history, a woman's honor and greatest duty was the bearing of children. I was barren, and it made me feel useless and ashamed.

One day, when my husband was serving his term during the incense offering inside the private chamber reserved for God and the priests—the Holy of Holies—he was visited by an angel named Gabriel. Gabriel told him, “Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will name him John. You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He must never drink wine or strong drink; even before his birth he will be filled with the Holy Spirit. He will turn many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God.”

But Zechariah questioned how this could happen, as Zechariah already was an old man and I was getting old myself. So the angel said, “I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news. But now, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time, you will become mute, unable to speak, until the day these things occur.”

So when Zechariah left the temple interior to return to the people waiting outside, he could not speak to them. That was how the people knew he'd had a vision from God.

Shortly after that day, a miracle of miracles happened: Zechariah and I conceived a baby! I praised God by saying, “This is what the Lord has done for me when he looked favorably on me and took away the disgrace I have endured among my people.”

After five months in seclusion, I was visited by my young relative, Mary. When she greeted me, the baby inside me suddenly leapt. I knew instantly that she, too, was with child—another miracle baby! I could only respond, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the

fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.”

Mary stayed with me for three months. After she returned to her home, I bore my son. As is our custom, on the eighth day of his life, our community came to circumcise and name the child. They wanted to call him Zechariah, after his father, but I insisted on fulfilling the commandment issued by God’s messenger, Gabriel. I told them, “No; he is to be called John.” They argued, saying, “None of your relatives has this name.” So they began motioning to my husband to find out what name he wanted to give him. Zechariah asked for a writing tablet and wrote, “His name is John.” Immediately Zechariah became able to speak, and he praised God. But fear overtook our neighbors, and the gossiped about these events all through Judea. They said, “What then will this child become?” For, indeed, the hand of the Lord was with him.

Then Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke this prophecy: “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has looked favorably on his people and redeemed them. He has raised up a mighty savior for us in the house of his servant David, as he spoke through the mouth of his holy prophets from of old, that we would be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us. Thus he has shown the mercy promised to our ancestors, and has remembered his holy covenant, the oath that he swore to our ancestor Abraham, to grant us that we, being rescued from the hands of our enemies, might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.”

To our baby, he said, “And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people by the forgiveness of their sins. By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.”

Did you hear that? “...to guide our feet into the way of peace.” The child brought me peace in my role as a wife and as a woman in my community—for becoming a mother was something that was expected of me in those days.

Zechariah and I found peace, too, when our obedience to God's instructions to name the child as commanded gave Zechariah the renewed gift of speech. For who could *not* be at peace to see God's power and promises fulfilled? For it is one thing to have faith; it is another thing entirely to see God's work in action!

That same promise of peace was later continued through Mary's miracle baby...but that is a story for another day. For now, I will end my own story by wishing you peace—the kind of peace that rests in your heart when you know you are listening to God, and following God's will; the kind of peace that moves you to trust in God's power over whatever situation you might find yourself; the kind of peace that is certain of miracles, even when facts and circumstances seem to predict otherwise.

Today, we light the candle of peace...

(light original blue or purple candle, and a second blue or purple candle)