

PREPARED FOR MESSIAH

Hearing from Advent Angels

November 30, 2025

In the time of Herod king of Judea there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly division of Abijah; his wife Elizabeth was also a descendant of Aaron Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense.

Luke 1:5-11

A tale of two Kings

1. This moment ends the “400 years” which began at the close of the Old Testament canon. Luke shows us to how God is going to introduce each one of us to Messiah!
2. Listen in the text for these answers:
 - 1) the place the Advent story holds in geopolitical and redemptive history
 - 2) the effect the appearance of the “angel of the Lord” has on even the most faithful
 - 3) how God prepares Zechariah for the answer to his question – and for Messiah!



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When the silence is broken: Luke 1:1-18

Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, ² just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. ³ Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, ⁴ so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.

⁵ In the time of Herod king of Judea there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly division of Abijah; his wife Elizabeth was also a descendant of Aaron. ⁶ Both of them were upright in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's commandments and regulations blamelessly. ⁷ But they had no children, because Elizabeth was barren; and they were both well along in years.

⁸ Once when Zechariah's division was on duty and he was serving as priest before God, ⁹ he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to go into the temple of the Lord and burn incense. ¹⁰ And when the time for the burning of incense came, all the assembled worshipers were praying outside.

¹¹ Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. ¹² When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear. ¹³ 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 give him the name John. ¹⁴ He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, ¹⁵ for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even from birth. ¹⁶ Many of the people of Israel will he bring back to the Lord their God. ¹⁷ And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

¹⁸ Zechariah asked the angel, "How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years."

1. Luke is writing an intentionally theological account, passed down by those who connected to "the word," that those who follow Jesus might "experience" the certainty of the gospel (John 20:30-31).
2. Luke places Zechariah in the priestly line, so he would have been waiting intently for Messiah.
3. The "angel of the Lord" has been God's messenger since Genesis 16 (see Genesis 22, Exodus 2, Numbers 22 and Balaam, Judges 2-13 and the Judges, 2 Kings 1:3 helping Elijah, Psalms 34 and 35, and Zechariah 2 where the "angel of the Lord" commissions the High Priest).
4. This son – later to be named John the Baptizer – would fill the roles of Nazarite aesthetic and the one to come in the "spirit of Elijah" (Malachi 4:5; John 1:21; Luke 1:17 and 9; Revelation 11) to announce the next step in God's redemption plan.
5. Zechariah's response echoes the stories of Abraham and Sarah (Genesis 18) and Elkanah and Hannah (1 Samuel 1). Was Zechariah's question more biological or theological?
6. Zechariah's song, nine months later, confirms that he was one of those who knew the story of Messiah. Here is the opening stanza in Luke 1:68,

*⁶⁸ "Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel,
because he has come and has redeemed his people.*

*⁶⁹ He has raised up a horn
of salvation for us in the house of his servant David*

Learning from a priest and a messenger

1. Faithfulness matters. Zechariah and Elizabeth are examples of God's Old Testament saints who were expecting Messiah. Their key practices: worship and prayer!

³⁶ *There was also a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, ³⁷ and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. ³⁸ Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.*

Luke 2

2. Zechariah is firmly grounded in the Old Testament promises of Messiah. This is our model for understanding and applying the Old Testament.

⁷⁶ *“And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High;
for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him,
⁷⁷ to give his people the knowledge of salvation
through the forgiveness of their sins,
⁷⁸ because of the tender mercy of our God,
by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven
⁷⁹ to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the path of peace.”*

Luke 1 (See also John 1:26.)

3. John's preparation will call the nations to repentance.

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar—when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and Traconitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene— ² during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the desert. ³ He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁴ As is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet:

*“A voice of one calling in the desert,
‘Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.*

⁵ *Every valley shall be filled in,
every mountain and hill made low.
The crooked roads shall become straight,
the rough ways smooth.*

⁶ *And all mankind will see God's salvation.’”*

Luke 3 (Quoting from Isaiah 40.)

4. Zechariah's question will be answered

¹⁸ *Zechariah asked the angel, “How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years.”*

¹⁹ *The angel answered, “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.*

Luke 1

Resources for listening to Advent angels

I found these commentaries helpful:

I Howard Marshall, *NIGTC: Epistle to the Philippians* (Eerdmans, 1978)

Walter Liefeld, *Expositor's Bible Commentary: Luke* (Baker, 1962)

William Hendricksen, *New Testament Commentary: Luke* (Baker Book House, 1978)

Darrell Bock, *Baker Exegetical Commentary: Luke* (Baker, 1994)

Spurgeon has several sermons on the Zecharia story: “[A People Prepared](#)” (included in my e-notes) and “[The Judgment Upon Zecharias](#)”

J. C. Ryle's comments are very good at <https://www.gracegems.org/Ryle/Luke.htm>

Bob Deffinbaugh has his series on Luke at <https://bible.org/series/luke-gospel-gentiles>

Ligon Duncan's sermon series on Luke can be found at <https://fpcjackson.org/resource-library/sermon-series/luke-2/>

For a concise summary of the biblical teaching on angels, I found Dr. Riddlebarger's article helpful at <https://tabletalkmagazine.com/article/2022/04/what-do-we-know-about-angels/>