

# GABRIEL VISITS ZECHARIAH

## SCRIPTURE REFERENCE

Luke 1:1–22

## OPENING PRAYER

*Book of Common Prayer, page 596*

ALMIGHTY God, heavenly Father, who hast blessed us with the joy and care of children; Give us light and strength so to train them, that they may love whatsoever things are true and pure and lovely and of good report, following the example of their Saviour Jesus Christ. *Amen.*

## LESSON

Zechariah and his wife Elizabeth were righteous and holy Jews who lived in Israel in the time of the early Roman Empire. They were old and had never been given the gift of children. “But with God all things are possible.” Zechariah was a priest in the temple and his job was to burn incense. One day as he was doing his job, an angel appeared unto him in the temple. The Jews believed that angels were always present in the temple but that few men were blessed to see or hear them. But Zechariah did see and hear one! The angel told him that he and his wife, who had wanted children their whole lives, would be granted a son. He would be a great man—holy and pure. He would be called to follow in the steps of the great prophet Elijah, “turning the hearts of the fathers to the children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to

make ready a people prepared for the Lord.” But Zechariah is confused and he questions the angel. The angel tells him that he is Gabriel who has come from the presence of God but that Zechariah will be mute or unable to speak until the baby is born because he doubted the angel’s message. Therefore, Zechariah was struck dumb, and when he emerged from the temple, the people wondered what had happened to him.



## QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES

### FOR YOUNGER CHILDREN

What was Zechariah's job? He was a priest in the temple and burned incense.

Who was Zechariah's wife? Elizabeth

Who appeared to Zechariah in the temple? the angel Gabriel

What did Zechariah wish for with his whole heart that God had not yet granted him? a baby—a son.

What was the angel's promise to Zechariah? Elizabeth would have a baby.

Why did this surprise Zechariah? He and his wife were very old.

What did the angel do to Zechariah for his disbelief? He made him speechless.

### FOR OLDER CHILDREN

The scripture reading for today tells us that Zechariah and Elizabeth followed all the commandments. Since they were both people just like us, they were sinful; so what does the Bible mean when it says they were "righteous" and "blameless"? Were they really sinless? No, of course they weren't sinless! In fact, Zechariah proves this almost immediately when he does not believe Gabriel's report! To be "righteous" and "blameless" in this passage does not mean that they had never sinned; it means that they were walking with God, confessing their sins and allowing him to work in their hearts like they were told to do in Joel 2:13 "...rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the LORD your God: for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness...."

Why is Zechariah afraid of the angel Gabriel? Angels are lovely and happy beings that bring joy . . . right? They are lovely, in fact, they are more

than lovely; they are holy. Being holy means that they are unlike us in that they have absolutely no sin in them and in the case of Gabriel, he stands in the presence of God Himself. Remember all the way back to the Old Testament in the book of Exodus 34 when Moses went up to get the Ten Commandments? He was allowed only a glimpse of God, and it was enough to make his face shine so much that it frightened the Israelites. Since Gabriel's job is to stand before God all the time, imagine what he must have looked like! Angels elsewhere in the Bible are described as shining like lightning. It would be natural for Zechariah to be frightened of creatures like this! Fear is natural and even proper in this case, that is why Gabriel does not rebuke Zechariah. He merely tells him not to be afraid.

Why does the angel, Gabriel, strike Zechariah dumb (unable to speak)? Because Zechariah, an old man full of experience and wisdom, has already seen the miracle or the extraordinary vision of an angel—indeed one that stands before God Himself—and doubts what he has heard. Losing his own ability to speak is a gentle rebuke for not believing what was spoken to him by God's messenger—that is, his spokesman.

What did Gabriel say that the baby would grow up to do? What will be John's job? He is to be the herald for Jesus Christ. A herald is one who goes before someone of great importance and announces that he is coming. The herald lets people know they need to get ready for an important visit! John did so "in the spirit and power of Elias." "Elias" means "Elijah" who was, perhaps, the greatest Old Testament prophet. John will herald the coming of Jesus by urging people to repent. It seems that God has made a good choice in Zechariah and Elizabeth to be his herald's parents!

## REVIEW CARDS

Show the class the *Review Card* for this lesson and then display on a classroom wall. Each week throughout the year, a new card will be added to build the narrative of the life of Christ. The review cards are found in the *Appendix*. Beginning in the next lesson, this time will also be used to review previous lessons.

## ACTIVITY

### FOR YOUNGER AND OLDER CHILDREN

#### *Gabriel Visits Zechariah Coloring Page*

Supplies: Photocopy of the *Gabriel Visits Zechariah Coloring Page* and colored pencils or other

Directions: Color with colored pencils or other. Older students may wish to watercolor the page. If so, coloring page should be photocopied onto card stock.



Luke stresses the theme of sacrifice. Indeed, the story begins with Zechariah in the temple offering sacrifices. The ox, a sacrificial animal, is used as the symbol for the Gospel of Luke.

# GABRIEL VISITS ZECHARIAH



But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John." Luke 1:13 (ESV)