



[Missing Christmas- Zacharias “Shut your mouth”]

Today we put the finishing touches on an Advent series we called Missing Christmas. One of my greatest prayers is that I, my family, this local gathering of saints would never miss out on what Christ is doing or desires to do in our lives. For the last three weeks, we have looked at obstacles and distractions to knowing and living out the will of God. Now, we will look at Zechariah (Zacharias) and a message I have affectionately entitled “Shut Your Mouth.”

Read [Matt. Luke 1:5-25]

Zechariah

What do we know about Zechariah? We know that he lived during the brutal reign of Herod the Great, he was a priest, married to Elizabeth, righteous in the sight of God, and had no children. As he had done numerous times before, he goes to the Temple to serve the Lord but **this day was different.**

On this day he was chosen by **lot**. It happened, but not by fate or chance. God was clearly in control of this day. An estimated 18,000 men served in the temple complex. So many people served that entering the holy place to clean the altar in incense usually occurred **once in a lifetime**. So here is Zechariah, doing something that he thought he might never could do.

The altar priest and his assistants went first to the altar of burnt-offering (**Show Temple Graphic**) and place coals from the altar in a golden bowl. As they passed into the Holy Place they would strike a large rake like instrument called a Magrephah, which summoned the priest to their places. Then they would put the incense on the altar of incense and the priest would be left alone, most likely the moment that the Angel appeared.

The hours of prayer were in the morning and evening. Most people praying would be local townspeople unable to enter the Holy Place and would congregate in their respected courtyard waiting for the priest. **And in this moment, the angel of the Lord appeared to him standing to the right of the altar of incense. Can you imagine with all the smoke and noise, that Zechariah assumed he was all alone directly in front of the Holy of Holies!**

Prayer | prer | a solemn request for help or expression of thanks addressed to God or an object of worship:

Over and over again the incense from the altar represents the prayers of the righteous. In Revelation 5:6 John has a glorious vision of the throne of God and **around the throne were 4 living creatures, 24 elders holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.** And as the people were praying outside, and the incense was burning inside the Lord showed up. It is a Lukan characteristic to point out that **major events are associate with prayer.**

Here is what the angel says: Do not be afraid, Zechariah, because your prayer has been heard. What prayer? The tense of the verb (aorist) literally was heard. The reference is to the prayer for offspring, which, owing to extreme years, Zechariah had probably ceased to offer. Most likely not a public prayer. *Do you feel like Zechariah? Have you prayed a prayer and the only response you received was silence?*

An estimated 500,000 tons of water rush over Niagara Falls every minute. On March 29, 1948, the falls suddenly stopped. People living within the sound of the falls were awakened by the overwhelming silence. They believed it was a sign that the world was coming to an end. It was thirty hours before the rush of water resumed. What happened? Heavy winds had set the ice fields of Lake Erie in motion. Tons of ice jammed the Niagara River entrance near Buffalo and stopped the flow of the river until the ice shifted again.

And in the midst of the unbroken silence comes this message: your prayer has been heard. I believe in that moment Zechariah new what prayer. To be childless was economically and socially disastrous. **Economically** because parents had no one to support them. **Socially** because bareness was thought of as a judgment for sin. Some Jewish teachers insisted that a man divorce a childless wife.

How often had had Zechariah prayed privately when the priest offered incense. How often had he prayed for Yahweh to take the social and economic stigmas and limitations away? And he heard nothing. But this day: your prayer has been heard. **Don't ever stop praying. The Lord hears! Don't let your prayers limit the power of Christ in your life.** *What would my family, community, and world look like if my prayers were answered? How many people would be saved? Do not be afraid _____ your prayer has been heard.*

Fear | 'fir | an unpleasant emotion caused by the belief that someone or something is dangerous, likely to cause pain, or a threat

When Zechariah saw the angel, he was terrified and overcome with fear. Fear- **Phobos- a state of severe distress.** *In many languages there is no noun-like word for fear.* This emphasizes the immediate and present nature of fear. Fear is not something you have (like a watch) it is a present nature. **Is distress gripping your life today?** Fear can paralyze us. I believe often that paralyzing fear is one of the greatest barriers we have to the power of Christ in our lives. **The glorious truth of the Gospel is this: the fear of the Lord drives out all other fears.**

Fear is the standard reaction for the righteous when experiencing the presence of God. Zechariah was overcome with fear, the crowd when Zechariah speaks again, when Jesus heals the centurion's servant and to the shepherds in the field. **The fear of the Lord is different. It is an awe, a wonder, a trembling, at the glorious presence of the King.** We need to a holy and healthy fear of Yahweh.

In November of 1950, during the Korean conflict, the North Koreans were being pushed north, and they were taking with them the Americans and Europeans they had captured as prisoners of war. It was a terrible march. They were forced to go sometimes twenty miles a day though they were emaciated, hungry, suffering. Soldiers who couldn't keep up would fall back, and shots rang out. They had been executed.

Philip Crosby and his friends, as they passed close to those GI's who were having a hard time keeping up, would say slowly in a whisper, so as not to be heard, "God is near us in this dark hour. His love is real. His mercy is real. His forgiveness is real. His reward is waiting for us."

You can let fear paralyze you or lead you into the presence of Jesus Christ. When you realize that Jesus is near, you can hear the words: do not be afraid, his reward is waiting for us.

Knowledge | 'näləj | facts, information, and skills acquired by a person through experience or education;

And the priest's response? **How can I know this?** The word is the same root of the English knowledge= facts or information. Zechariah was asking, "how can I trust the promise and word of the angel" because my mind cannot comprehend us having a child. It hasn't happened yet and now we are old!

Zechariah is asking a question that any of us would ask. Our **post enlightenment culture elevates knowledge, empirical evidence above all. The enlightenment in the 17th-18th century established new values: we naturally elevate reason and individualism.** We use language "our thinking has evolved." We believe mental ascent, the process of gaining information/instruction, is the answer to all.

How could Zechariah empirically verify the word of the Lord? What would he do with this information? **He couldn't. He had to trust.** Not blind trust. God doesn't ask you to turn off but tune in your mind. **How many of us empirically verified the trustworthiness of the seat before you sat down?** No you trusted it based on its history of trustworthiness.

Often we miss out on Christ working because we are looking for knowledge and information. Never forget that Yahweh has proved himself faithful over and over again. For Zechariah he didn't have a **head problem, he had a heart problem.** Zechariah wanted to know, the angel rebuked him because he didn't believe.

Belief| bæ'lēf | trust, faith, or confidence in someone or something

Because he did not believe (1:20) Zechariah was rendered silent. According to traditional literature, priests coming out of the holy place were expected to pronounce a blessing (possibly Numbers 6:24-26). Even more, **Luke 1:62 So they motioned to his father to find out what he wanted him to be called.** Implies he could not hear. A very real and present reminder that he would not listen to the Lord.

And then we have Zechariah's wife. **Read Luke 1:39-45.** Elizabeth's husband did not believe and when she saw Mary she exclaimed blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill that what he has spoken.

He blessedness of Mary's faith stand in contrast to Zechariah's lack of faith. What has the difference?

Do you trust - for that is the cream of the word "believe" - do you trust in Jesus? Do you lean your whole weight on Him? This is the faith that saves - faith that falls back into the arms of Jesus, a faith that drops from its own hanging-place into those mighty arms. –Spurgeon

Do you trust Him? Are you leaning your full weight on Jesus Christ? Does your belief make a radical difference in the way you live, worship, serve, give, love, sacrifice? Faith and belief that makes no difference is little faith indeed.

Oh that we would have a faith that is palpable when we enter a house.

Conclusion

Luke 1:61 Then they said to her, “None of your relatives has that name.” **62** So they motioned to his father to find out what he wanted him to be called. **63** He asked for a writing tablet and wrote: “His name is John.” And they were all amazed. **64** Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue set free, and he began to speak, praising God.

What if every time you prayed you knew God was listening?

What if the fear and awe of the Lord drove away every fear in your life?

What if your mind was filled with the trust of the Savior?

What if you had a belief in Jesus that radically changed your world?

Invitation to surrender and follow Jesus Christ. Hear the words of one who could not speak: **Luke 1:68**
Blessed is the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has visited and provided redemption for his people.
69 He has raised up a horn of salvation for us

Notes

Mary's story is told in the Gospel of Luke, Joseph's in Matthew.

Luke 1:5 In the days of King Herod of Judea, there was a priest of Abijah's division named Zechariah. His wife was from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. **6** Both were righteous in God's sight, living without blame according to all the commands and requirements of the Lord. **7** But they had no children because Elizabeth could not conceive, and both of them were well along in years.

1:7 No children ... both well along in years. The Greek term "no children" (*steira*) is used of Sarah (Gen 11:30), Rebekah (25:21), Rachel (29:31), and Samson's mother (Judg 13:2–3; cf. also 1 Sam 1:5). "Well advanced in years" is used in Gen 18:11 of Sarah. The mention of Zechariah and Elizabeth's childlessness and their being past childbearing age points to the human impossibility of the coming events and heightens the miraculous character of God's intervention in their son's birth. Luke assumed that his readers would recall similar situations in the OT in which God blessed the barren with a son who was uniquely called to fulfill a divine task.

1:7. To be childless was economically and socially disastrous: economically, because parents had no one to support them in old age (cf. comment on 1 Tim 5:4, 8); socially, because in the law barrenness was sometimes a judgment for sin, and many people assumed the worst possible cause of a problem. Most people assumed that barrenness was a defect of the wife, and Jewish teachers generally insisted that a man divorce a childless wife so he could procreate. "Aged" may suggest that they were over sixty (Mishnah *Abot* 5:21); age itself conferred some social status and was sometimes listed among qualifications or virtues.

Luke 1:8 When his division was on duty and he was serving as priest before God, **9** it happened that he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to enter the sanctuary of the Lord and burn incense. **10** At the hour of incense the whole assembly of the people was praying outside.

1:9 He was chosen by lot. This indicates that God's providential leading caused Zechariah to be chosen. For Luke this was not the result of "chance" or "fate." God was clearly in control of this event. See Introduction 8 (1).

Since so many priests served the temple (about eighteen thousand), entering the holy place to clean the altar of incense and to offer fresh incense usually occurred only once in the lifetime of a priest.

Incense offerings (Ex 30:7–8) had been standard in ancient Near Eastern temples, perhaps to quench the stench of burning flesh from the sacrifices in the closed buildings. This offering in the temple preceded the morning sacrifice and followed the evening sacrifice. It is said that the officer who ministered regularly in the temple signaled the time to begin the offering and then withdrew; the priest cast incense on this altar, prostrated himself and then withdrew himself—normally immediately (cf. 1:21).

Burn incense (θυμιᾶσαι). Only here in New Testament. The incensing priest and his assistants went first to the altar of burnt-offering, and filled a golden censer with incense, and placed burning coals from the altar in a golden bowl. As they passed into the court from the Holy Place they struck a large instrument called the *Magrephah*, which summoned all the ministers to their places. Ascending the steps to the holy place, the priests spread the coals on the golden altar, and arranged the incense, and the chief officiating priest was then left alone within the Holy Place to await the signal of the president to burn the incense. It was probably at this time that the angel appeared to Zacharias. When the signal was given, the whole multitude withdrew from the inner court, and fell down before the Lord. Silence pervaded the temple, while within, the clouds of incense rose up before Jehovah. (For a more detailed account see Edersheim, “The Temple, its Ministry,” etc.).

1:10. The hours of morning and evening sacrifices were also the major public hours of prayer in the temple (cf. Acts 3:1). Except during a feast, most of the people praying there would be Jerusalemites; unable to enter the priestly sanctuary, they were presumably men in the Court of Israel, and some women outside that in the Court of the Women.

Were praying. It is a Lukan characteristic to point out that major events are associated with prayer. See Introduction 8 (7). By his reference to worshipers being assembled outside for prayer, Luke prepared his readers for 1:21ff.

11 An angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing to the right of the altar of incense. **12** When Zechariah saw him, he was terrified and overcome with fear. **13** But the angel said to him: “Do not be afraid, Zechariah, because your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will name him John. **14** There will be joy and delight for you, and many will rejoice at his birth. **15** For he will be great in the sight of the Lord and will never drink wine or beer. He will be filled with the Holy Spirit while still in his mother’s womb. **16** He will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. **17** And he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of fathers to their children, and the disobedient to the understanding of the righteous, to make ready for the Lord a prepared people.”

1:12 Startled and was gripped with fear. This is a standard reaction even for the upright (see comments on 1:65; 23:40) when experiencing the presence of God.

Fear

φοβοῦσα, ου m: a state of severe distress, aroused by intense concern for impending pain, danger, evil, etc., or possibly by the illusion of such circumstances — ‘fear. In many languages there is no noun-like word for fear and emphasizes the immediate and present nature of fear.

Your prayer is heard. Does this refer to a prayer Zechariah was currently praying, i.e., was Zechariah still hoping that God would bless them with a child? In light of 1:7 this seems doubtful. More likely this refers to the prayer for a son made previously. Another possibility is that this refers to Zechariah’s prayer for God to send the Messiah and deliver Israel. Verses 13b–17, however, speak more of John the Baptist as forerunner than to the Messiah’s coming. It appears in light of 1:7 and the latter part of this verse that Luke expected his

readers to assume the content of this prayer involves the birth of a child. This prayer will be answered but in a richer sense than Zechariah and Elizabeth ever dreamed. No doubt Zechariah and Elizabeth, as devout Israelites, also prayed for the coming of the redemption of Israel. Both these prayers were to be answered in the same event because their son would prepare the way for the Messiah.

13. **Is heard** (εἰσηκούσθη). If we render the aorist literally, *was heard*, we avoid the question as to what prayer is referred to. The reference is to the prayer *for offspring*, which, owing to his extreme years, Zacharias had probably ceased to offer, and which he certainly would not be preferring in that public and solemn service. Hence the aorist is appropriate, referring back to the past acts of prayer. “That prayer, which thou no longer offerest, *was heard*.”

Luke 1:18 “How can I **know** this?” Zechariah asked the angel. “For I am an old man, and my wife is well along in years.”

Luke 1:19 The angel answered him, “I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, and I was sent to speak to you and tell you this good news. **20** Now listen. You will become silent and **unable** to speak until the day these things take place, because you did not **believe** my words, which will be **fulfilled** in their proper time.”

Believe

πιστεῦσα: to believe something to be true and, hence, worthy of being trusted — ‘to believe, to think to be true, to regard as trustworthy.’

Luke 1:21 Meanwhile, the people were waiting for Zechariah, amazed that he stayed so long in the sanctuary. **22** When he did come out, he could not speak to them. Then they realized that he had seen a vision in the sanctuary. He was making signs to them and remained speechless. **23** When the days of his ministry were completed, he went back home.

1:20–21. Casting incense on the heated altar of incense normally took little time, after which the priest emerged immediately. The delay here may have troubled the crowds; perhaps they thought Zechariah had been disrespectful and struck dead, or that something else had gone wrong. If Zechariah’s offering had failed, their prayers were also in jeopardy.

1:22. The term here for “mute” can, but need not, include deafness.

1:22 He could not speak to them. According to *Tamid* 7.2 priests coming out of the holy place were expected to pronounce a customary blessing, such as Num 6:24–26, upon the people. Whether Luke’s readers would have known this is uncertain. Luke 1:62 implies that Zechariah also could not hear.

They realized he had seen a vision. Luke did not say how they came to this conclusion, but the implication is that they noted the delay and the muteness of Zechariah and assumed that something must have happened in the sanctuary where God dwelt.

Luke 1:24 After these days his wife Elizabeth conceived and kept herself in seclusion for five months. She said, **25** “The Lord has done this for me. He has looked with favor in these days to take away my disgrace among the people.”

Luke 1:39 In those days Mary set out and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judah **40** where she entered Zechariah’s house and greeted Elizabeth. **41** When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the baby leaped inside her, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. **42** Then she exclaimed with a loud cry: “Blessed are you among women, and your child will be blessed! **43** How could this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? **44** For you see, when the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby leaped for joy inside me. **45** Blessed is she who has **believed** that the Lord would fulfill what he has spoken to her!”

1:45 Blessed. Although the word used here is different (*makaria*) from that used in Luke 1:42 (*eulogēmenē/os*), no theological significance should be read into this since the words have essentially the same meaning.

Blessed is she who has believed. Elizabeth’s praise both begins and now ends with a reference to Mary’s blessedness. The blessedness of Mary’s faith stands in contrast to Zechariah’s lack of faith in 1:20. Her blessedness is a present state (cf. 6:20–22). Again Mary serves as an example for the believer. Indeed Luke sought to maximize Mary’s role as a model believer. For example, in 8:19 he omitted the “outside” (*heksō*) of Mark 3:31; in 4:24 Luke omitted “in his own house” (cf. Mark 6:4); and in Acts 1:14 he mentioned that Mary and her other children were among the inner core of disciples. Mary is “blessed” here for her faith but is “most blessed” in Luke 1:42 for the privilege of being the mother of God’s Son.

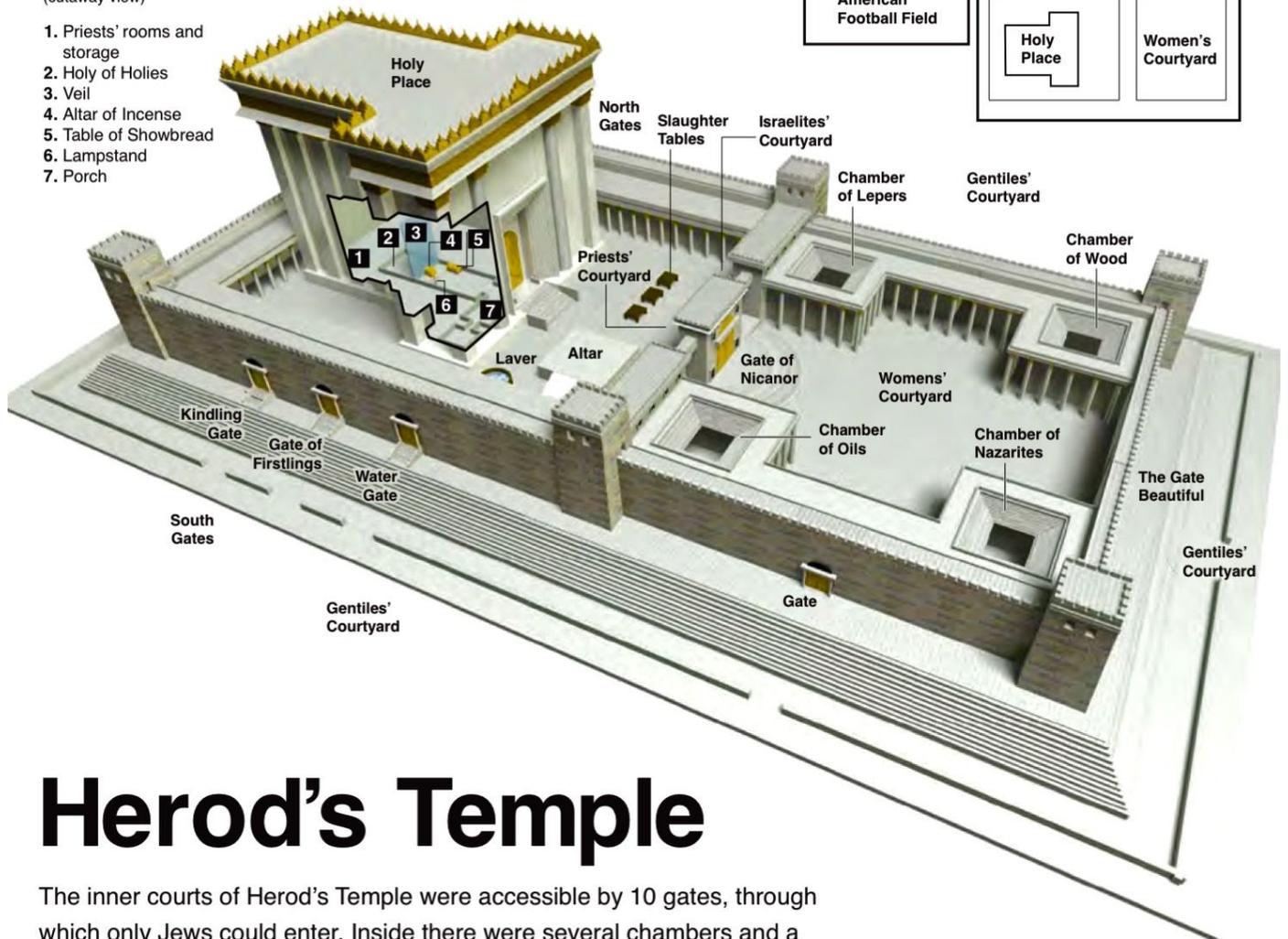
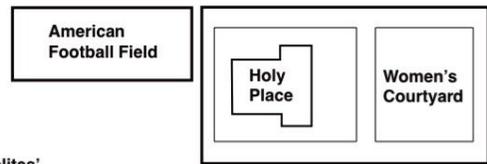
Application

The presence of Jesus Christ does not prevent His own from suffering. Even more, His presence prepares us

INSIDE THE HOLY PLACE
(cutaway view)

- 1. Priests' rooms and storage
- 2. Holy of Holies
- 3. Veil
- 4. Altar of Incense
- 5. Table of Showbread
- 6. Lampstand
- 7. Porch

Size comparison (approximate):



Herod's Temple

The inner courts of Herod's Temple were accessible by 10 gates, through which only Jews could enter. Inside there were several chambers and a courtyard where sacrifices were made. At one end was the holy place—a two-room sanctuary used by Jewish priests. The expansive building project of Herod's Second Temple and Temple Mount was completed in approximately AD 62–64, only to be destroyed by the Romans in AD 70.