Small Group Notes for the Week of Nov. 28, 2021 (First Sunday of Advent)

# Luke 1:5-22

# New Revised Standard Version

### *The Birth of John the Baptist Foretold*

In the days of King Herod of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly order of Abijah. His wife was a descendant of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. Both of them were righteous before God, living blamelessly according to all the commandments and regulations of the Lord. But they had no children, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were getting on in years.

Once when he was serving as priest before God and his section was on duty, he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to enter the sanctuary of the Lord and offer incense. Now at the time of the incense offering, the whole assembly of the people was praying outside. Then there appeared to him an angel of the Lord, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. When Zechariah saw him, he was terrified; and fear overwhelmed him. But the angel said to 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. With the spirit and power of Elijah he will go before him, to turn the hearts of parents to their children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.” Zechariah said to the angel, “How will I know that this is so? For I am an old man, and my wife is getting on in years.” The angel replied, “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.”

Meanwhile the people were waiting for Zechariah, and wondered at his delay in the sanctuary. When he did come out, he could not speak to them, and they realized that he had seen a vision in the sanctuary. He kept motioning to them and remained unable to speak.

**General Questions:**

1. What stood out to you in the sermon?

2. What is something new you didn’t know before?

3. Is there a question that the sermon prompted for/in you?

4. How do you feel called to respond to the sermon?

**Discussion Questions:**

1. Read today’s scripture passage. What or who do you resonate with the most? Why?
2. Pastor Nate includes a quote from Tolstoy in his sermon: “For man to be able to live, he must have such an explanation of the meaning of life as will connect the finite with the infinite.” What does this mean to you? Discuss this quote. What helps you to connect to the infinite?
3. Pastor Nate asks this in his sermon:

*“This is what it is like to spend a life, like Zechariah did, inching, closer to love, and closer to God … every second is worth it. So, what are you spending your life on?*

*If ever there was a time to consider this question, it is now - in the time of Advent arrival that we’ve somehow turned into a time of Christmas chasing …*

 *So, may this season be a time when you really consider the things that you are spending your life on.”*

What are you spending your life on? What would you like to spend more of your life on?

1. Discuss this quote by Ann Ulanov, a theologian and therapist:

*“Aliveness comes down to one thing—consenting to rise, to be dented, impressed, pressed in upon, to rejoin, to open, to ponder, to be where we are in this moment and see what happens, allowing the breath of not knowing to be taken, wanting to see what is there and what is not there. Aliveness springs from our making something of what we experience and receiving what experience makes of us. This is the wonder of the child the New Testament always recommends us to return to, what the philosopher Paul Ricœur calls our “second naiveté”. . . . In such a space we allow ourselves to depend on something greater than ourselves, to take what it gives us and respond to it.”*

What is life-giving for you? What will you do this Advent that will help you to feel more alive as we wait for Baby Jesus to be born into the world?

1. Share your prayer requests and pray for each other and the church this week. Please pray for our veterans as well.