

Family Preparations for Christmas

Prayer Is Answered: son & SON

A Sermon on Luke 1:5-17

Year A - Advent 1
27 - December - 2016

JJ¹

How do you as a family begin to prepare for Christmas? Does it start with Black-Friday shopping? Does it start when you put up the Christmas tree, get out the Christmas albums, or watch Christmas movies like *The Muppets Christmas*, *Charlie Brown Christmas*, or *Christmas Vacation*? Every family has traditions they keep as they prepare for Christmas.

During the Sundays in Advent this year we are taking the time to focus on the most important **FAMILY PREPARATIONS FOR CHRISTMAS** we can make. We do this as we look at the family preparations Zechariah and Elizabeth made for that first Christmas. Today we make preparation by seeing that **Prayer Is Answered—a son & The SON.**

Zechariah was a priest, and, therefore, an ancestor of Aaron, the first high priest of God's people. Elizabeth was also an ancestor of Aaron. How fitting that the one who would prepare the way for the Lord would come out of the holy priesthood and that the Lord would come from the line of royalty! Luke tells us that "Both of them were upright in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's commandments and regulations blamelessly." Zechariah and Elizabeth were the type of couple that everyone looked up to and everyone

would go to for advice and encouragement in their own daily walk with the Lord.

But while their devotion to the Lord was complete, there was something missing from their lives. Luke tells us, "they had no children, because Elizabeth was barren; and they were both well along in years." It is important for us to remember that in their culture if a woman was barren they were considered to have fallen out of God's favor, or even worse, cursed by God. But despite the shame their culture placed on them, they continued in their devotion to the Lord.

Their devotion to the Lord was really all about preparing for Christmas, for the coming of the Savior. Part of their devotion to the Lord would have also been a healthy prayer life. No doubt Zechariah had daily devotions and prayers with his wife, Elizabeth. For their spiritual lives they would have daily prayed for the LORD to send his Son, the Messiah, the long-promised Savior. They would have done this just as you and I daily pray that God's Son would quickly come again. They also certainly prayed for many years that the LORD would bless them with children of their own. But by this point you can be sure that prayer and been replaced by other prayers.

¹ JJ is the acronym for *Jesus Juve*, which is Latin for "Jesus Help". It is a short prayer used by many ministers and sacred musicians at the beginning of their work.

This was the life God in love had given to his servants Zechariah and Elizabeth. Although their family was smaller than what they had hoped, their family was exactly the size God wanted it to be. They were able to carry this burden because of the more important family they belonged to—the family of God. And it was in this family particularly that they made preparations for Christmas, looking forward to **The SON** who would certainly come.

The time came for Zechariah's division of priests to serve at the temple. This was something that would happen twice a year. For the first, and last time, Zechariah was chosen by lot to be the one who would go into the Holy Place of the Temple to burn the incense. This was a once in a lifetime thing simply because of the great number of priests. Low estimates put them at 20,000! One of the prayers offered by the priest as the incense was burning was the prayer that the LORD would send the Messiah. I like to think that it was just as Zechariah concluded this prayer that Gabriel appeared.

Now can you imagine the fright that came over Zechariah when the angel appeared?! Remember, there wasn't supposed to be anyone else in there with him. First just to see someone in there would have been enough to startle him, but this wasn't just another priest who

misread the schedule! It is one of God's holy angels! He's terrified because it's an angel and probably because thought he had done something wrong or was in some way unclean and the angel was about to strike him dead!

As we'll hear next week, the angel will reveal himself as Gabriel. The same angel who would come to Mary in a few months and possibly the one who also appeared to Joseph. Immediately Gabriel puts Zechariah's heart at ease, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah." He's not there to

strike him down but to deliver an amazing message from the Lord. "Your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to give him the name John." And not only was this great news to hear that they would have a child, but this child was going to play *the* role in preparing the way for the

promised Messiah!

Gabriel's message continues: "He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, 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. Many of the people of Israel will he bring back to the Lord their God. 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.”

After nearly a lifetime of prayers, both for children of their own and most especially for the Savior, their prayers were answered! And both in the same breath! **A son and The SON** were coming to them!

After 400 years of silence the Lord would send his last and greatest Old Testament prophet, John the Baptist, who would prepare the way for the promised Savior! John was the Lord’s instrument to prepare the people’s hearts for Christ to come. At last God had answered the prayers of his faithful people and for Zechariah and Elizabeth, doubly so. This prayer which God answered helps us make FAMILY PREPARATIONS FOR CHRISTMAS.

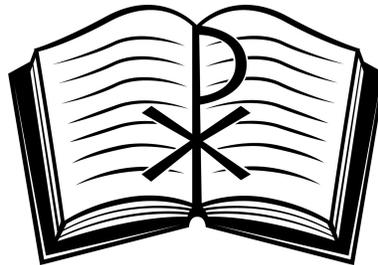
It is the message of the son of Zechariah and Elizabeth that prepares us to celebrate the first coming of **The SON** and prepares us for him to come again: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near!” (Mt. 3:2)

In love John still cries out to us today, “Repent!” Friends, recognize what you deserve because of your sin—realize that you don’t deserve to see the love of **The SON**, but only his wrath! Realize you are by nature slaves to sin! But then, also turn to **The SON** who came “when the time had fully come...born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under

law, that we might receive the full rights of sons” (Gal. 4:4-5).

Through faith-worked repentance, we are made sons and daughters of our heavenly Father. It is in this way that our hearts are prepared to celebrate the first coming of **The SON** and to receive him when he comes again.

Dear friends, this is how we make FAMILY PREPARATIONS FOR CHRISTMAS. It’s by knowing and believing that **Prayer Is Answered—for a son and The SON**. As we prepare ourselves for the celebration of Christmas may we marvel at God’s amazing love for us that despite our wickedness he would still send his Son to us. His Son who has forgiven our wickedness and has covered over all our sins!



Friends, as you make your family preparations for Christmas, don’t forget the most important preparation you can make. Yes, all those other things we mentioned before have their place and are fun to do, but let’s remember why we celebrate Christmas. It’s because of Christ, **The SON**, our Savior. Let’s take our time each day, as Zechariah and Elizabeth did, and prepare ourselves through devotion and prayer, knowing that he answered the prayer of his saints once before in sending his Son, and he will answer the prayers of this saints today to send his Son again! Amen.

SDG²

² SDG is an acronym for *Soli Deo Gloria*, which is Latin for “To God Alone Be The Glory”. This is a statement of humility used by many ministers and sacred musicians at the end of their work to let themselves and others know that it isn’t about getting glory for themselves, but about giving all glory to God.

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