

# “Meditations”

Luke 1:5-20 & 57-80 & Philippians 1:3-11

Pastor James York

December 5, 2021

**Prayer for Understanding** God, who speaks a good news language—we admit, listening has never been our greatest gift. We are easily distracted, our minds run a million miles a minute. We doubt your faith in us and take the easy way out when it comes to hope. So today we bow our heads and ask for help. Settle our hearts. Quiet our minds. Steady our breathing. Help us to rest in you. Help us to listen for your good news. Gratefully we pray, amen.

Elizabeth and Zechariah were weary and skeptical. All their attempts to start a family failed. Year after year, Zechariah proclaimed the glory of God, the coming deliverance from suffering, the coming healing, the coming freedom from sin, the coming joy, love and peace, the coming kingdom of God. Zechariah still hoped God’s glory is coming, however it was being smothered by the mess, pain and struggle of life. Week after week he proclaimed God’s gracious redeeming love and the people continued to hurt, hunger and lament. Zechariah resigned to thinking the glory of God will not happen during his earthly life, it is far off, for some future generation. Zechariah’s worship became routine, going through the motions. His hope was almost gone. He lacked a confident expectancy in God’s transforming, purify, glorify grace.

**Luke 1:5-20 NRSV** “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 Zechariah 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 John 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.”

In the miraculous birth of John the Baptist, we see the foundation of what is to come. We see how interwoven his story is with Jesus’ story. When Zechariah regains his voice, his imagination is also restored. He offers deep praise for God’s tender mercy and casts a hopeful vision for his own child. He sings blessings into John’s being. This lays the foundation for John’s life. In turn, John will go on to prepare the way for Jesus who will guide us all in the way of peace. In this week, we focus on making space—in our lives and our imaginations—for God’s blessings to break through.

**Luke 1:57-80 NRSV** “Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son. Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown God’s great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her. On the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to name him Zechariah after his father. But his mother said, “No; he is to be called John.” They said to her, “None of your relatives has this name.” Then they began motioning to his father to find out what name he wanted to give him. Zechariah asked for a writing tablet and wrote, “His name is John.” And all of them were amazed. Immediately his mouth was opened, and his tongue freed, and he began to speak, praising God. Fear came over all their neighbors, and all these things were talked about throughout the entire hill country of Judea. All who heard them pondered them and said, “What then will this child become?” For, indeed, the hand of the Lord was with him. Then his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke this prophecy: “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for God has looked favorably on God’s people and redeemed them. God has raised up a mighty savior for us in the

house of God's servant David, as God spoke through the mouth of God's holy prophets from of old, that we would be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us. Thus God has shown the mercy promised to our ancestors and has remembered God's holy covenant, the oath that God swore to our ancestors Abraham and Sarah to grant us that we, being rescued from the hands of our enemies, might serve God without fear, in holiness and righteousness before God all our days. And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare God's ways, to give knowledge of salvation to God's people by the forgiveness of their sins. By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace." The child grew and became strong in spirit, and John was in the wilderness until the day he appeared publicly to Israel."

Inspired by Zechariah, let us bless everyone and set ablaze the hope of the world. Let us cast a vision of God's coming glory. May these words rejuvenate our collective spirits and guide us all home to abundant life.

Words for the Beginning  
*a poem by Pastor Sarah Are Speed*

If could give you words  
for the very beginning—  
for the stretches  
and the yawns,  
and the opening of eyes,  
for the first hiccups,  
and the first smiles,  
and the first purse of your lips,  
I would say,  
"Oh, dear child,  
how you are loved."  
But the thing about love  
is you can't stop there,  
so I would go on to say,  
"You are strong,  
stronger than you think.  
And you are not alone—  
look at these parents who adore you  
and these doctors and nurses fighting for you.  
And you are enough, already enough.  
You haven't done anything yet.  
You've just been here,  
breathing,  
sleeping,  
and already, you are enough.  
And then I might say,  
"This world is a mess,  
but it is your home,  
and you can make it better,  
so always try to make it better.  
And maybe most important of all:  
there is a love  
that is bigger than my understanding,  
that moves through this world,  
and I call that love God.  
And that love is here,  
here in this room,  
and that love knows

your name by heart.”  
Those are the words I would say to you  
as you stretch and yawn and open your eyes  
on the very first morning  
of your very first day.  
Let that be your foundation,  
like Zechariah did for John.  
Let love be your beginning.

There is tremendous power in the words we speak. In the beginning God created the cosmos and us with words. We are created in the image of God with the power to create goodness with our words. James tells us our tongue is like the rudder of a ship. Our words thought and spoken guide our life and guide the world. Zechariah spoke words of hope of the coming glory that will bless everyone.

What are the words, blessings and actions that have wrapped you in love and filled you with hope and peace?

What words, blessings and actions will you share to fill others with hope, peace and love?

The Apostle Paul shared words to bless and inspire everyone. Words filled with gratitude and tenderness. Words of prayer that our love will overflow, that our love will grow forever. For Paul, the foundation of truth and wisdom is love for God, love for self, and love for neighbor. Love is how will determine how to live, even in the midst of contentious and harrowing events—tensions, persecution, and chaos.

The Apostle Paul wrote: **Philippians 1:3-11** “Every time I think of you, I give thanks to my God. Whenever I pray, I make my requests for all of you with joy, for you have been my partners in spreading the Good News about Christ from the time you first heard it until now. And I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue God’s work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns. So it is right that I should feel as I do about all of you, for you have a special place in my heart. You share with me the special favor of God, both in my imprisonment and in defending and confirming the truth of the Good News. God knows how much I love you and long for you with the tender compassion of Christ Jesus. I pray that your love will overflow more and more, and that you will keep on growing in knowledge and understanding. For I want you to understand what really matters, so that you may live pure and blameless lives until the day of Christ’s return. May you always be filled with the fruit of your salvation—the righteous character produced in your life by Jesus Christ—for this will bring much glory and praise to God.”

May we speak words of love. May your love overflow into wisdom and right action.