

**SEASON OF HOPE, IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE**  
**Luke 1.5-25, 57-66**

How many of you have seen the show, "A Wonderful Life?"  
Remember the picture of a desperate George Bailey standing  
on the Bedford Falls Bridge in the blowing snow ready to end it all.

The Building and Loan was broke...his dream had been shattered...  
He had failed, there wasn't anything that could be done, he felt hopeless and helpless.

VIDEO CLIP...For you younger folks, don't worry there is nothing wrong with the  
projector. They made films in black and white.

Have you ever felt like George?  
Maybe you weren't ready to jump off of a bridge.  
But things haven't gone right...people are hollering at you and calling you names.

You're a gerbil on a tread mill, there is no progress,  
you keep going around in circles and there is no way out.  
You're winded and whipped, beaten and broken, cold and callous  
the situation, the circumstances, the people, it's all hopeless and helpless

Well an angel named Clarence appeared to George and gave him a look into the future.  
That look turned George around, it gave him hope.

Today we look back to find hope for the future. We look at the story of Zechariah.  
An angel named Gabriel appeared to Zechariah and gave him a look into the future.  
And like George, that look into the future gave Zechariah's life new meaning and hope.

The Scripture read today tells us Zechariah and Elizabeth had their hope fulfilled,  
They had a son, his name was John. John means "a gift from God"  
John was a gift from God to not only those parents and to his people  
He was the forerunner of his cousin Jesus.  
The Scripture's say, "God's hand was upon him." He would tell others of Jesus, he offered hope.

It seems right to look back and talk about Zachariah this first week of Advent.  
First because Zechariah personally needed hope, his people needed hope,  
and today we need hope.

We'll die without it...we'll literally die without it.  
But we don't need to worry about what tomorrow holds  
We simply need to have hope in the one who holds tomorrow.

Let's take a look at Zechariah's life and see what we can learn about hope.

FIRST, WE ACKNOWLEDGE THAT SOMETIMES LIFE SEEMS HOPELESS

**5-In the time of Herod, King of Judea there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly division of Abijah, his wife was also a descendant of Aaron.**

(That's good, Zechariah was a pk and according to the rules, a pk must marry a pk. What better family to marry into than Aaron's, who was Moses' brother)

**6-Both of them were upright in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's commandments and regulations blamelessly**  
(They are good people, very common but good)

**7-But** (and but is important, remember what is coming next is more important than before)

**But they had no children, because Elizabeth was barren, and they were both well along in years.**

(That is not good. Even though they were upright, good, and godly people, having reached this age and having no children was not a good thing.)

Remember if you had health, wealth, and babies you were blessed.  
If no health, wealth, and babies, you were cursed.

Children gave the family some social status as well as financial security.  
The children could take care of mom and dad in their old age.

Also some Jews did not believe in resurrection. The only way you were immortal was to be remembered by your children.

Verse 25 collaborates shame of these circumstances for Elizabeth eventually says,

**"The Lord has done this for me, in these days he has shown his favor and taken away my disgrace."**

## **SECOND, GOD MAKES AN APPEARANCE**

**8-"Once when Zechariah's division was on duty**

**and he was serving as a priest before God**

**9-He was chosen by lot according to the custom of the priesthood, to go to the temple of the Lord and burn incense.**

(20,000 priests were divided into divisions they served two weeks in the year. They cast lots to see who burned incense for the day. It was an honor to do so.)

**10-When time came for the burning of incense came, all the assembled worshipers were outside praying."**

(Incense represented their prayers rising to God)

(How many times would Zechariah have asked forgiveness?  
for Elizabeth and himself that they might have a child.)

How he must have beaten himself up and that wasn't the problem

Anyway he is leading the people in prayer and **THIRD, GOD GIVES AN ANSWER**  
Answers to our prayers might just be delayed, not denied.

**11-The angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense.**  
YIKES!!! 12-When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and gripped with (guess what?) fear.

He must have really thought he was hopeless.

**13-But the angel said to him,** (guess what?)

(It is what the angel's always say to the good people-check it out in the scriptures)

**Do not be afraid Zechariah, your prayer has been heard.**

**Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son; you are to give him a name John**

(An answer to a prayer...John means gift of God.)

The answer might just be delayed, not denied.

It is in God's timing, God's will, and God's way.

Remember the Angel Clarence in "It's A Wonderful Life" gave George a peek of the future without him.  
Because George wasn't there lives were changed but not for the better, the community suffered.  
With George Bradford there many were blessed and lives were changed for the better.

Well Gabriel give Zechariah a peek of the future with his John in it. It is even better than he imagined.  
God's answer is better than we can imagine. Let's read about what John will do:

**14-"He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth.**

**15-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.**

**16-Many of the people of Israel he will he bring back to the Lord their God.**

(Isn't it great to have children that are a joy and delight, and others think so too.)

(When our children do well, we have a sense of confidence and hope.

You young people in junior high, in senior high, and in college, when you make the  
decision to come to church on your own, that does something for the rest of us, it gives us hope.

**17-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** (this is so important that  
father's spend time with their children. They help their sons grow as men and their  
little girls as women. It is good to be in a church and see that happening)

**and the disobedient to the wisdom of righteous-  
to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."**

That is awesome. John was to help prepare others for the Lord,  
help others get closer to God and to one another.

And isn't that part of our job too.

God has a plan in our lives, for this church, for the new addition...

a plan for us to offer opportunity and new ministry to help meet people's needs,  
to help reconcile people to God, and to one another in love.

God did use Zechariah in a new way, I'm not so sure Zechariah thought it was so wonderful.

#### **FOURTH, GOD HAS ANOTHER ASSIGNMENT IN MIND**

**18-Zechariah asked the angel, "How can I be sure of this?"**

**I am an old man and my wife is well along in years."** (BUZZZZZ. Wrong Answer)

All these years this is his prayer...he has asked and asked, begged and begged  
Pleaded and pleaded with God for a baby and now...it's doesn't seem possible.  
Maybe he just won't let himself hope again-it's just too painful. Can you blame him?  
That is why he gives the angel this cynical, crusty, crude reply.

Have you ever been there? Something you wanted?  
Just wanted so badly, you would have died for it?  
Then when it's there, it's just too unreal. It's too painful to hope again.

We read that when Mary was told she was going to have the baby Jesus she said,  
"How can this be?" And she didn't get reprimanded or stuck dumb.

Well there is a difference?

Zechariah's, "**How can I be sure,**" was a disbelieving, "Ya right, how are you going to pull this off.  
Whereas Mary's question, "**How will this be,**" was more a question of wonder.  
This is great, Lord, but how are you going to do this?

Zechariah's assurance will come at his own expense, he was given another assignment.

**19-The angel answered, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to tell you this good news.**

**20-And now you will be silent and not able to speak until the day happens, because you did not believe my words, which will come true at the proper time.**

**21-Meanwhile, the people were waiting for Zechariah and wondering why he stayed so long in the temple.**

**22-When he came out, he could not speak to them. They realized he had seen a vision in the temple for he kept making signs to them but remained unable to speak.**

(But he must have still continued to work the temple...)

**23-When his time of service was completed, he returned home.**

**24-After this, his wife Elizabeth became pregnant and for five months remain in seclusion.**

**25-She said, "The Lord has done this for me. In these days he has shown his favor and taken away my disgrace among the people."**

God answered their prayer, their hope was realized.

George Bailey experienced a season of hope for himself, his family, and the community of Bedford.

It was a season of hope for Elizabeth and Zechariah and became a season of hope for the people.

May this Advent Season be a season of hope for you and I personally, for us as a church, and for our world as we wait for his appearance, his answer to prayer, and our future assignment.

