

Zechariah Sings  
 Advent 2  
 Advent Clergy Quiet Day Nov 30 2021  
 Luke 1:68-79  
 The Rt. Rev. Dr. Bonnie A. Perry

May the God who creates

*Blessed be the Lord God, the God of Israel; God has come to the people to set them free. God has raised up for us a mighty savior...(Luke 1:68)*

Sound comes out of Zechariah's mouth. After more than nine months of silence, they hear his voice. Zechariah's wife has given birth, who would have thought, who would have known. It's been 8 days since she gave birth, she looks weary, she looks worn, but the town gossips are suddenly comparing her to the likes of Abraham's wife, Sarah and the prophet Samuel's mother, Hannah. There she is—Elizabeth, and her strangely silent, muted now some nine months, husband Zechariah. Muted he is, but given the very vocal infant that they now hold, Zechariah may be old, but he is not lacking in some key areas of ability and virility. The crowd is impressed. At the naming ceremony, they all say, "You will name this miraculous son Zechariah."

"No," she says, "His name is John."

"Oh—the crowd replies—you can't do that."

Zechariah grabs a tablet and writes for all to see, "His name is John."

Because of course, there is a story. Nine months ago—when Zechariah, a priest, is taking his turn in the inner sanctum, the Holy of Holies, in the Temple, an angel appears and scares the bejesus out of him. The angel says, your prayers have been answered, your wife will give birth to a son, and you must name him John.

The angels speaks and goes on and says, "He will be an amazing one, he will bring Israelites back to God, he will go before God, filled with Elijah's spirit, he will turn fathers' hearts back to their children, the disobedient back to righteous, he will make the people prepare for the Lord." Luke 1:15-17

And after this rather exhaustive litany from the angel Gabriel, of all that his son-to-be will do—all that Zechariah can say is—"Well—ah—are you sure? My wife and I, well we are REALLY old." Luke 1:18

Friends, let this next bit be a lesson for us all, sometimes when offered a gift, a blessing, particularly from a messenger of God, sometimes the very best response is, "Thank You. Thank you very much."

Because it turns out some messengers of God, are kind of prickly. And you know the conversation is not going well when Gabriel responds with his celestial resume. Beginning with the line, "I stand in God's presence and God sent me to bring this good news to you, but you know what—I've got some latitude and some sway, and you have gotten on the last ray of all that is glinting off of my halo—and so I will say to you, as God said to me, that this is all going to happen, but you are not going to utter a sound, not a stutter, stammer, sentence or word until it all comes true." (An approximation of Luke 1:19-20). And that's been the case. Zechariah emerged from the temple that divine day, unable to speak, no sounds coming from his mouth for more than 270 days.

But now with, little baby John in Elizabeth's arms and Zechariah hastily writing the boy's name on the tablet—"His name is John"—A sound comes. And Zachariah's first words are not spoken, his

first sounds not just said, rather he does more than that, singing songs of praise, offering a song, making clear, "*Blessed be the Lord God of Israel...*

Nine months waiting, Zechariah doesn't speak, he heard Mary's *Magnificat*, then he, when he can, he too sings his praise for God and all that God is about to do. Biblical Scholar Amy-Jill Levine says that, "The nativity accounts are not just prose, they are poetry and song." (*Light of the World: A Beginner's Guide to Advent* p. 46.)

Maybe friends, this why the carols start so early and are nestled so deeply in our bones? What we prepare for, what is all about to begin, again, once more for the very first time, is not an event that can be ponderously doled out in pedantic prose. But rather, offered in song, and poem, so that everything about this time is deeply two and three dimensional: completely incarnational.

This is a time for poetry not prose, a time to be experienced and not explained, to be contemplated and not comprehended, a time for sacrament and mystery rather than intellect and mastery.

Let us be, let us long for what we do not know and hunger for what we do not understand, let us wait with anxious anticipation for the one who is coming into our world again, let us be the ones preparing a way, creating a place for our God to be born in this world once more.

Let us say with Zechariah, *Blessed be the Lord God...God has come to the people so set them free.*

Amen.