

DECEMBER WEEK TWO: ZECHARIAH

Monday

Luke 1:5–25

During the time when Herod was king of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah who served in the temple in Jerusalem. Zechariah and his wife Elizabeth were quite old. They loved God, but they were sad because they had no children.

One day, Zechariah went to the temple to burn incense and pray. Suddenly, an angel appeared, standing on the right side of the incense altar.

God sent the angel to Zechariah in order to give him a message. The angel told Zechariah that he and Elizabeth were going to have a baby boy, and that they were to name him John. He would bring joy to his parents and to many other people – and he would be great before the Lord. He would be filled with the Holy Spirit even before he was born. And when John was grown up, God would use John in a powerful way – to call people to repent of their sins and to prepare the way for the Lord Jesus.

But to Zechariah this seemed too good to be true. “How can I believe this,” Zechariah asked the angel, “since I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years as well?” People their age were too old to have babies!

Then the angel told Zechariah an amazing thing: “I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God.” Gabriel had been sent directly from God to tell Zechariah the good news about John. But because Zechariah didn’t believe, Gabriel said to him: “You will be silent and unable to speak until the day that these things take place.” Immediately Zechariah couldn’t speak. He could only use his hands to show people what the angel said.

After the angel went away, Zechariah met with the people who were waiting for him to come out of the temple. When Zechariah was unable to speak, the people realized that he had seen a vision in the temple.

Many days later, after Zechariah’s time of serving in the temple was finished, Zechariah went home. Soon after that, Elizabeth found out she was going to have a baby. She and Zechariah were so happy! When the time came for the baby to be named, people expected that he would be named Zechariah after his father. But Zechariah wrote down that the child’s name was John. And then after that, Zechariah was able to speak again.

God sent his angel to give Zechariah good news. God gives us good news too. He tells us in the Bible that he sent his Son, Jesus, to be our Savior. He gives us parents and pastors to tell us this good news and to teach us about God’s love for us.

- What was the message of good news that the angel Gabriel brought to Zechariah?
- What happened to Zechariah when he didn't believe Gabriel?
- How does God bring good news to us?

Close with prayer

DECEMBER WEEK TWO: MARY AND ELIZABETH

Tuesday

Luke 1:39–56

Some time after the angel Gabriel came to Zechariah to tell him that he would have a son, the angel Gabriel also came to a young woman named Mary. Gabriel told Mary that she was also going to have a son. Her son's name would be Jesus. Gabriel also told Mary that Zechariah's wife, Elizabeth, was expecting her child, John. Elizabeth was Mary's older cousin. After the angel Gabriel gave Mary all this good news, Mary went to visit her cousin Elizabeth. Elizabeth and Zechariah lived in a town out in the country.

When Mary entered Elizabeth's house and greeted her, Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, and her baby (John the Baptist) jumped for joy, even while he was still a baby inside his mother Elizabeth!

Elizabeth told Mary how amazed and thankful she was: "Blessed are you among women," Elizabeth said, because Mary was the mother of the Lord Jesus.

Mary responded to Elizabeth with some of the most beautiful words in the Bible. She sang a song. This song of Mary is called "The Magnificat." Part of what Mary said was: "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior. For he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name. And his mercy is for those who fear him, from every generation."

Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months. During this time, Mary and Elizabeth rejoiced that God was sending Jesus to be their Savior. We rejoice too that God sent Jesus to be our Savior!

- **Who did Mary go visit?**
- **Who was Elizabeth's baby?**
- **Why did Mary and Elizabeth rejoice?**
- **Why do we rejoice?**

Close with prayer

DECEMBER WEEK TWO: THE BIRTH OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

Wednesday

Luke 1:57–80

Zechariah and Elizabeth were very old when their baby John was born. They were very happy to have a child. God had kept his promise to give them a baby even in their old age.

On the eighth day after John was born, their family and neighbors came to see the new baby. They thought the baby would be named Zechariah after his father, but his mother Elizabeth said, "No; he shall be called John."

The friends were surprised. No one in their family was named John. They looked at Zechariah to see what he wanted to name the baby. Zechariah was not able to speak, so he wrote down, "His name is John" – the name the angel Gabriel had told Zechariah to give the baby.

Right away after that, Zechariah could speak again. Then Zechariah sang a song to praise God. He said that God sent John to do something greatly important. When John grew up, he would be a prophet, and he would prepare the way for the Savior Jesus to come. John would tell people to repent of their sins, so that God through his grace and mercy would forgive them.

Today God gives us pastors and parents to tell us about Jesus. God gives us his Word, the Bible, so we will know that Jesus came to be our Savior. God wants us to be sorry for our sins and to trust Jesus, so that we can go to heaven and live with him forever.

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- **Why did Elizabeth and Zechariah want to name their baby John?**
- **Why did Zechariah have to write, "His name is John," instead of just saying his name?**

Close with prayer

DECEMBER WEEK TWO: JOHN THE BAPTIST

Thursday

Matthew 3:1–12

God chose a man named John to do a very important job. God wanted John to prepare the world for Jesus! God chose John to tell people that Jesus, the promised Savior, had come to earth. John prepared the way for Jesus by telling people they must repent – they must turn away from their sins and turn to God. When people repented, John baptized them in the Jordan River as a sign or picture of God's washing away their sins. This is why John was called "John the Baptizer" or "John the Baptist."

John the Baptist wore clothing made from camel's hair and a leather belt. He ate locusts and wild honey. He spent his time doing the work God called him to do. John told the people, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near." And he told them that those who truly turned to God and away from their sins would have lives that looked different than before.

Some people did not want to repent. They were proud of themselves and thought they were already good enough. They did not think they had any sins for which they needed to repent. But many people did listen to John and did repent. They confessed their sins and were baptized by John to show their repentance and prepare the way for Jesus' coming.

Today God uses his people to tell others about God's Word and to continue to prepare the way for Jesus in their lives, for them to know that Jesus came to save them. All of us are sinners who need to repent and trust in Jesus. Jesus loves us so much that he came from heaven to save us from our sins.

- **What was the important work that God chose John the Baptist to do?**
- **What does it mean to repent of our sins?**
- **What does Jesus do when we repent of our sin and trust in him?**

Close with prayer

DECEMBER WEEK TWO: THE DEATH OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

Friday

Matthew 14:1–12

Herod Antipas smiled and nodded with approval. His step-daughter Salome swayed and twirled in front of him and his birthday-party guests. Her performance done, Herod and the guests applauded. What a dance! Caught up in the mood of the moment, Herod cried, "Ask me for whatever you want--up to half my kingdom--and it is yours!" And he swore a great oath in front of his guests to confirm his promise.

As a Tetrarch (ruler of one quarter of a Roman province) Herod was more than able to provide a handsome gift even by first century standards. Would Salome ask for a jeweled necklace? A house? Herod and the guests waited to hear her request. The girl herself hesitated. Uncertain what to ask for, she whispered with her mother.

Down in the dungeons of Herod's fortress, John the Baptizer was under lock and key in one of Herod's gloomy holds. He was imprisoned because he had rebuked Herod for stealing another man's wife--Herodias. This woman had been married to Herod's quiet half-brother, Phillip. Herodias was furious, and convinced Herod to arrest John. Herod was only too willing.

However, once Herod got John in his lockup, he talked with him and found he liked the guy. He didn't understand what John was saying about holiness and salvation, but it seemed to be something he should hear. Instead of executing John, he gave him visitation privileges. Herod felt that execution would be a bad idea, because John was fairly popular with the people and had followers. Why make them mad and risk rebellion?

Salome approached Herod. Evidently she had made up her mind. The guests and the king turned to hear what she would ask. "Give me now on a platter the head of John the Baptizer!" said the girl.

Sharp breaths were drawn at the gruesome request from a little girl! How quickly the indulgent mood melted. Herod's face changed. Here was quite an awkward and unexpected demand! Looking around at his guests, he saw only one thing: witnesses of his promise. If he was to save face and reputation, he must fulfill his promise to the girl. He ordered the execution, and the head of John the Baptist was brought to Herod's young stepdaughter, who then delivered the platter to her mother.

John's disciples came and buried the body. When John's cousin Jesus heard the news, it hit him as hard as it would any of us. He tried to get away by himself for a time to mourn. John, who had preached Christ's coming and prepared for his messianic ministry was killed. Killing is not what God wants, and Jesus was sad.

John the Baptist was killed because he taught God's truth. Jesus was willing to be killed so that earthly death like John's would not be his fate, would not be his end. Because of Jesus, John the Baptist lives, and so will you!

- **Why was John in prison?**
- **What did Jesus do when he heard that John had been killed?**

Close with prayer