

“The Lord’s Word Will Come to Pass”

Luke 1:13-20

Sermon for the Second Sunday of Advent 2021; December 5, 2021

Emmanuel Lutheran Church, Rifle, Colorado

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With the coming of Christ at Bethlehem and Holy Week comes the promise of the forerunner of Christ. It is as Malachi said, “Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me” (Mal. 3:1 ESV). Malachi goes on to say: “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes” (Mal. 4:5 ESV). So today we hear the story of the promise of the coming of John the Baptist in fulfillment of these promises spoken by the Lord through Malachi.

The story of the coming of John the Baptist begins with his parents, Zechariah, his father, and Elizabeth, his mother. They were well-advanced in years, meaning, they weren’t young any more and not of the age of having children. On top of that, up to this point, they had not been able to have children.

Now Zechariah was a priest. It had come around for his turn to attend to the temple service for a period of time. He was in the temple at the hour of prayer attending to the altar of incense.

Suddenly, the archangel Gabriel appeared standing at the right side of the altar of the incense (Luke 1:11). He was sent by God to speak to Zechariah. Zechariah was quite startled when he saw Gabriel standing there. Fear, like terror, came over him.

Gabriel immediately said, “Don’t be afraid” (Luke 1:13). This is really cool. No angel in the service of God delights in striking fear in us. As servants of God, good angels, like Gabriel, are good, and they serve God’s people as servants of God. They are not haters and enslavers of humanity, as are the devil and the spirits that followed him in rebellion against God.

Gabriel has good news to announce to Zechariah. The news was that the Lord would enable Elizabeth to become pregnant with a son, even in her advanced age. This son was going to be special in God’s plan of salvation because he would be the forerunner of the Christ spoken of by Malachi. Gabriel shows this to Zechariah when he said that John would go before the Lord God “in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared” (Luke 1:17 ESV). These words echo the words from Malachi 4:5.

Since the angel was announcing to Zechariah what God promised through the prophet, Zechariah should have recognized what Gabriel was saying to him and believed him. But Zechariah didn’t believe Gabriel. His response to the angel was “How shall I know this?” (Luke 1:18 ESV). It is the question that never dies for human beings when it comes to God’s word and God’s actions: “How shall I know?”

How shall I know that you are not deceiving me, Gabriel? How shall I know you are telling me the truth? How shall I know that what you are telling me is actually *God’s* word? How shall I know that what you are telling me will actually happen? Why should I believe *you*?

And from what Zechariah says next, we see what Zechariah was looking at when it comes to being able to know. “I am an old man,” he says. “My wife is advanced in years,” he says. Older people like us don’t have children. He is looking at himself and his wife. He is looking at the ordinary course of things. He reasons that old people like him and his wife do not have children, as if it was some immovable law. It is obvious. Anyone with eyes and a brain in their head can see that. So how can I know?

What is Zechariah doing here? He is looking for some sort of verification of Gabriel's words of promise from some other source, other than from the words themselves. This is a perpetual, never ending trouble humans have. It is also part of the struggle for faith. God's word must have verification from some other source that is grounded in us human beings that confirms it, ratifies, verifies it as true, before it can be believed.

But here is the thing: God's word is its own verification, especially God's promises. God's word of promise cannot be verified by some other source. It can only be believed. This is also true of God's commands and the declarations God's makes: such as, "I forgive you all your sins," or "this is my body and blood, given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins."

Gabriel has a response. His response involves his credentials. "I am Gabriel," he says. "I stand in the presence of God," he says. "I was sent to speak to you and bring this good news" (Luke 1:19 ESV). "I was sent."

Jesus has His credentials too. "This is my beloved Son," came the voice from the Father.

Then Gabriel responds to Zechariah's search for verification of the promise with this. "My words will be fulfilled in their time" (Luke 1:20 ESV). Gabriel's words will be fulfilled because they are first of all God's words. He was sent by God to speak them. So they were God's words.

We learn from this that God uses creatures that are His servants to speak, like Gabriel and like the prophets, like the Apostles. He chooses and sends these servants to speak His word. But then, wonderfully, God the Son spoke God's words from His own mouth as Jesus, the account of which Jesus has given through the Apostles.

Nevertheless, people object to the Bible by saying, "Why should I believe the Bible since it was written by human beings?" But they are missing something vitally important about the way God speaks His word. Those particular human beings were chosen and sent by God to speak and write God's words, like the angel Gabriel.

And God's words will be fulfilled. Oh, what good news this is. Though Zechariah was not responding in faith on this occasion, the angel assured him that God's words will be fulfilled. And so the time came and Elizabeth his wife became pregnant and eventually gave birth to a son, John. This happened in the usual way.

By the way, it is also a good thing that God through Gabriel did not fail to address Zechariah's not believing in Gabriel's words. God treated Zechariah as His child. He gave Zechariah a little discipline and chastisement to elevate and deepen his faith in his promises. This discipline was in the form of not Zechariah not being able to speak until John was born. Then God gave Zechariah great joy in the end, and Zechariah grew in faith.

It is truly good news that in spite of Zechariah's response of unbelief to the angel on this occasion, that God's words will be fulfilled in their time. This is such good news for us who have the birth and beginning of faith, but often struggle. God's promises to you in Christ will be fulfilled.

Such promises include "I am with you everyday."

"I forgive you your sins."

"I will raise you on the last day."

"Today you will be with me in paradise," when that day comes

God's word is fulfilled for you and will be fulfilled always, no matter what you are going through, no matter how you feel, no matter what kind of verification reason seeks. God is faithful. The fulfillment of God's words depends only on God, who can do and does what He promises in Christ. He calls us only to believe it and so receive the goodness of the Lord. God's words in Christ will be filled in their time. This is joy and gladness and rejoicing. Amen.