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~ **The Vision in the Temple** ~

You can learn much more about this story by doing these three things:

1. Read Luke 1:5-25.
2. Discover key cultural and historical insights.
3. Answer the reflective questions.

1. Read the text of the story.

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Luke 1:5-25 NASB	Luke 1:5-25 NLT
<p>⁵ In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zacharias, of the division of Abijah; and he had a wife from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. ⁶ They were both righteous in the sight of God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and requirements of the Lord. ⁷ But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and they were both advanced in years.</p> <p>⁸ Now it happened <i>that</i> while he was performing his priestly service before God in the <i>appointed</i> order of his division, ⁹ according to the custom of the priestly office, he was chosen by lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense. ¹⁰ And the whole multitude of the people were in prayer outside at the hour of the incense offering. ¹¹ And an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing to the right of the altar of incense. ¹² Zacharias was troubled when he saw <i>the angel</i>, and fear gripped him. ¹³ But the angel said to him, “Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your petition has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will give him the name John. ¹⁴ You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth. ¹⁵ For he will be great in the sight of the Lord; and he will drink no wine or liquor, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit while yet in his mother’s womb. ¹⁶ And he will turn many of the sons of Israel back to the Lord their God. ¹⁷ It is he who will go <i>as a forerunner</i> before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, TO TURN THE HEARTS OF THE FATHERS BACK TO THE CHILDREN, and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous, so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”</p> <p>¹⁸ Zacharias said to the angel, “How will I know this <i>for certain</i>? For I am an old man and my wife is advanced in years.” ¹⁹ The angel answered and said to him, “I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news. ²⁰ And behold, you shall be silent and unable to speak until the day when these things take place, because you did not believe my</p>	<p>⁵ When Herod was king of Judea, there was a Jewish priest named Zechariah. He was a member of the priestly order of Abijah, and his wife, Elizabeth, was also from the priestly line of Aaron. ⁶ Zechariah and Elizabeth were righteous in God’s eyes, careful to obey all of the Lord’s commandments and regulations. ⁷ They had no children because Elizabeth was unable to conceive, and they were both very old.</p> <p>⁸ One day Zechariah was serving God in the Temple, for his order was on duty that week. ⁹ As was the custom of the priests, he was chosen by lot to enter the sanctuary of the Lord and burn incense. ¹⁰ While the incense was being burned, a great crowd stood outside, praying. ¹¹ While Zechariah was in the sanctuary, an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing to the right of the incense altar. ¹² Zechariah was shaken and overwhelmed with fear when he saw him. ¹³ But the angel said, “Don’t be afraid, Zechariah! God has heard your prayer. Your wife, Elizabeth, will give you a son, and you are to name him John. ¹⁴ You will have great joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, ¹⁵ for he will be great in the eyes of the Lord. He must never touch wine or other alcoholic drinks. He will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even before his birth. ¹⁶ And he will turn many Israelites to the Lord their God. ¹⁷ He will be a man with the spirit and power of Elijah. He will prepare the people for the coming of the Lord. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and he will cause those who are rebellious to accept the wisdom of the godly.”</p> <p>¹⁸ Zechariah said to the angel, “How can I be sure this will happen? I’m an old man now, and my wife is also well along in years.”</p> <p>¹⁹ Then the angel said, “I am Gabriel! I stand in the very presence of God. It was he who sent me to bring you this good news! ²⁰ But now, since you didn’t believe what I said, you will be silent and unable to speak until the child is born. For my words will certainly be fulfilled at the proper time.”</p> <p>²¹ Meanwhile, the people were waiting for Zechariah to come out of the sanctuary, wondering why he was taking so long. ²² When he finally did come out, he couldn’t speak to them. Then they realized from his gestures and his silence that he must have seen a vision in the sanctuary.</p> <p>²³ When Zechariah’s week of service in the Temple was over, he returned home. ²⁴ Soon afterward his wife, Elizabeth, became pregnant and went into seclusion for five months. ²⁵ “How kind the Lord is!” she exclaimed. “He has taken away my disgrace of having no</p>

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words, which will be fulfilled in their proper time.”	children.”
<p>²¹ The people were waiting for Zacharias, and were wondering at his delay in the temple. ²² But when he came out, he was unable to speak to them; and they realized that he had seen a vision in the temple; and he kept making signs to them, and remained mute. ²³ When the days of his priestly service were ended, he went back home.</p> <p>²⁴ After these days Elizabeth his wife became pregnant, and she kept herself in seclusion for five months, saying, ²⁵ “This is the way the Lord has dealt with me in the days when He looked <i>with favor</i> upon <i>me</i>, to take away my disgrace among men.”</p>	

2. Discover key cultural and historical insights.

- Priests who served in the Temple were divided into 24 groups and served in the Temple for a few weeks at a time.
- To enter into the Temple Holy Place and offer the incense on the altar was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity and privilege. There were 800 priests in the division of Abijah!
- There was an expected amount of time for the priest to perform his duty and once he finished he was expected to return and bless the people. This is why the people wondered why he was taking so long and put Zacharias in a tough position as he could not bless the people when he exited the Holy Place. Also, in a male dominated society he would be expected to speak for his family, but this took that honor away from him.
- The restrictions upon the baby for no alcoholic beverages pointed to him being a Nazirite.

Answer these reflective questions.

Zacharias and Elizabeth were both righteous people who loved God, yet there was something missing in their life that brought them sadness. What can we learn from their example of continuing to follow God even though they were always disappointed they never had a child?

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Do you think Zacharias and Elizabeth prayed for years for a baby? What do you think their response was as year by year went by and still no baby came?

Zacharias questioned the angel. Why did the angel bring discipline upon Zacharias for questioning his promise?

The angel said many important things about the child. Look at this list and describe which one stands out to you as most remarkable and explain why.

- You will have joy and gladness and many will rejoice at his birth.
- He will be great in the sight of the Lord.
- He will drink nothing alcoholic.
- He will be filled with the Holy Spirit while in his mother's womb.
- He will turn many of the sons of Israel back to the Lord.
- He will minister in the power and spirit of Elijah.
- He will go as the forerunner of the Lord and prepare the people for the Lord.
