

# Surprised by Hope

## Յոյսի Անակնկալը

### Advent 1

#### Luke 1:5-24

Do you like surprises? I usually don't!

Usually people like surprises. I pray that it is a good surprise and not something negative...

People who lost hope, all they see darkness. No light.

How about this point: **The hopeless is surprised by hope.**

Let me elaborate: What are you hoping for in this season?

Did you realize how the streets have become busy lately. People are rushing; we move quickly from Thanksgiving to Christmas. Sevan and I decorated the lights outside of our home. We enjoyed it. I love the Christmas season. Although the “world” made it commercial, yet I want to enjoy this season, which is also called **Advent.**

According to the dictionary, **Advent** means:

1. The coming or arrival, especially of something extremely important
2. a. The liturgical period preceding Christmas.  
b. *Christianity* The coming of Jesus at the Incarnation.<sup>1</sup>

Also it means we are waiting for his second coming.

I pray that in this crazy rush, we can slow down, relax, and enjoy this season. Did you have time to be filled with Spirit of God (see my last week sermon).

**Advent... we are waiting...We are waiting with anticipation and joy the Lord Jesus Christ's coming.**

- In the OT the Israelites were waiting for the birth of the Messiah.

Their lives **were not** in synch with Yahweh.

Thus, today we look at Scripture about another birth which was a surprise. It is the hand of God, preparing for the birth of His Son Jesus.

**-We are talking the birth of John the Baptist.** I wanted to read the entire story to you so you identify the characters and realize how they received the good news of the birth of a child.

**In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, of the division of Abijah. And he had a wife from the daughters of Aaron, and her**

name was Elizabeth. <sup>6</sup> And they were both righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord. <sup>7</sup> But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were advanced in years.

<sup>8</sup> Now while he was serving as priest before God when his division was on duty, <sup>9</sup> according to the custom of the priesthood, he was chosen by lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense. <sup>10</sup> And the whole multitude of the people were praying outside at the hour of incense. <sup>11</sup> And there appeared to him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. <sup>12</sup> And Zechariah was troubled when he saw him, and fear fell upon him. <sup>13</sup> But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. <sup>14</sup> And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, <sup>15</sup> for he will be great before the Lord. And he must not drink wine or strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. <sup>16</sup> And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, <sup>17</sup> and he will go before him 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."

<sup>18</sup> And Zechariah said to the angel, "How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years." <sup>19</sup> And the angel answered him, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I was sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news. <sup>20</sup> And behold, you will be silent and unable to speak until the day that these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time." <sup>21</sup> And the people were waiting for Zechariah, and they were wondering at his delay in the temple. <sup>22</sup> And 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. <sup>23</sup> And when his time of service was ended, he went to his home.

<sup>24</sup> After these days his wife Elizabeth conceived, and for five months she kept herself hidden, saying, <sup>25</sup> "Thus the Lord has done for me in the days when he looked on me, to take away my reproach among people." (Luke 1:5-24 ESV)

### **1. Zechariah received a visit from the Angel**

- Zechariah was married to Elizabeth who was the cousin of Mary the mother of Jesus.

- Zechariah was a priest. His turn arrived when he would enter the Temple to burn the incense in the morning and evening prayers.
  - This was something that did not happen every day. It was an honor that he would do this service to the Lord and for His nation Israel.
  - We read that Zechariah and his wife did not have children for a long time. In fact, they had passed the childbearing age.
  - In that culture, a childless woman was mocked. There was shame and guilt associated with being barren. We read that **“they were both righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord.”** (Luke 1:6 ESV)
  - Zechariah entered the Temple to perform his priestly duties. There he encountered the angel Gabriel who gave him the good news. His wife would bear a child who would be **called John**.
  - The appearance of angels was not a normal occurrence in any respect. You can see how Zechariah felt. **“And Zechariah was troubled when he saw him, and fear fell upon him”** (Luke 1:12 ESV).
- The Angel told him **not to be afraid**, and told him about John the Baptist’s role in bringing **new hope** for the nation of Israel.

### **Surprised by Hope?**

Of course Zechariah is not only surprised, he is terrified. What was the message?

**“for he will be great before the Lord. ... he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, and he will go before him 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 1:15-17 ESV)

After this message, the angel gave **Zechariah a sign**.

**-He could not speak after this event.** (How do you feel about this sign?)

-He and his wife would become instruments of God by having this newborn child. The son to be born **would fulfill the biblical promises** God had given about sending someone to prepare the coming of the Messiah.

**-Surprised by God’s message? Surprised how God works in our lives?** And surprised that you cannot even talk.

I am sure Zechariah and Elizabeth were surprised as well as confused.

-Can you think how Zechariah came out of the Temple speechless? Can you imagine how he described the angel who told him about the birth of John the Baptist? (I can see him using his hands to explain this complex message... hmmm, there are funny stories in the Bible...)

**-Luke's gospel is about Jesus. Actually, all gospels are about Jesus.** Luke delays mentioning the name of Jesus for the first 30 verses. Jesus is not born until later. **The story of John the Baptist is not a coincidence.** Luke delays telling the story of the birth of Jesus. Luke will tell us about Mary's extraordinary pregnancy and Jesus' birth. But he prepares the minds of the readers with **another extraordinary story of the birth of John the Baptist.**

- Aren't all we surprised? Why in the world God delays the pregnancy of Elizabeth? She is old and not expecting any children anymore.

Does this remind you of any other surprise pregnancies?

**-Abraham and Sarah** having a child at an old age (Gen 21). They both received a promise from God and they lived with that promise all their years waiting with anticipation for its fulfillment.

-First when Sarah heard that she would become pregnant she **laughed**.

**It was laughter of doubt** and unbelief.

God kept His promise. She became pregnant and bore a child, **Isaac (meaning he laughs, laughter).**

**And Sarah said, "God has made laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh over me." And she said, "Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age."** (Genesis 21:6-7 ESV)

**Sarah laughs;** this time it is not laughter of doubt; **it is laughter of joy.**

**Surprised by HOPE? Surprised by God?**

When she had the child, her hope was fulfilled, the promise became a reality. She laughed again. Sarah's faithless laughter turned into laughter of grateful exaltation.

How are you doing this morning? What are you expecting from God in this season? What is a desire or dream you are waiting for? Does it make you laugh thinking God might actually fulfill it? Surprised?

**2. What was John the Baptist's role in bringing God's HOPE into this world?**

Zechariah, Elizabeth, Mary, Joseph, ordinary people. God will use ordinary people to do extraordinary things. Luke did not make Zechariah a hero. He was a righteous and God-fearing man. Zechariah was speechless. **He became a priest without a voice.**

It made me think. I am a badveli. **How about if God takes my voice?** How can I be an instrument of God without my voice?

**Let me ask you how God can use you without your voice? Just be silent a moment and ask yourself what does it mean to be speechless.**

Let me answer in two folds.

A. Last week from Ephesians we spoke about words, what kind of words and speech we use for communication. What are the words that come from your mouth? Who is the center of your words?

B. When my gift of speech is taken from me, God is reminding me who is in control. It is a good reminder to trust God in our weakness.

Trusting God...right....TRUSTING GOD.

**Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths. (Proverbs 3:5-6 ESV)**

I believe God manifests Himself in our silence. He showed to Zechariah how His promise would be fulfilled. **When God promises, He does.**

In the same chapter, we find God appearing again to Zechariah and this time Zechariah receives the message:

Please read entire the message. Here is the last part:

**“And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High;  
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,  
to give knowledge of salvation to his people  
in the forgiveness of their sins,  
because of the tender mercy of our God,  
whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high**

**to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,  
to guide our feet into the way of peace.” (Luke 1:76-79 ESV)**

John, the new prophet of the Most High, is coming to prepare the way for the coming of the Messiah. The Messiah, the real HOPE that brings salvation to humanity and to the universe. The real HOPE that is not temporary. A real hope that can bring new birth, a new creation in our lives.

### **Surprised by HOPE?**

Yes, surprised by God. Yes, surprised that his hope is with us by his birth, death, and resurrection. His hope is also not yet. One day He will return, and we will be all completely transformed to a new life.

### **Application: So what is the message this morning?**

1. When God promises something, He does it in His time. Trust him, HE WILL...
2. We are in the season of Advent. We are waiting for the hope of the world to come. Examine and see where your “hope” is leading you.
3. John the Baptist came to prepare the way for Jesus. How about us, how can we prepare the way for the birth of Jesus in our lives? Practically what does it mean? How much are you ready to receive Christ in your life?

Let me finish with NT Wright.

“The story is about much more than Zechariah’s joy at having a son at last, or Elisabeth’s exultation in being freed from the scorn of the mothers in the village. It is about the great fulfillment of God’s promises and purposes. But the needs, hopes and fears of ordinary people are not forgotten in this larger story, precisely because of who Israel’s God is – the God of lavish, self-giving love, as Luke will tell us in so many ways throughout his gospel. When this God acts on the large scale, he takes care of smaller human concerns as well. The drama which now takes centre stage is truly the story of God, the world, and every ordinary human being who has ever lived in it. That’s how Luke intends it to be.”<sup>2</sup>

Go and be surprised by God everyday...

Let us approach to the Table.

1. <http://www.thefreedictionary.com>

2. NT Wright. Luke for Everyone p 8