

ADVENT ADMISSIONS: ELIZABETH THE EXUBERANT

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When his time of service was completed, [Zechariah] returned home. After this his wife Elizabeth became pregnant and for five months remained in seclusion. “The Lord has done this for me,” she said. “In these days he has shown his favor and taken away my disgrace among the people.” –Luke 1:23-25

Our sermon series this Advent season is entitled “Advent Admissions.” **[Advent Admissions...]** This Advent season we’re focusing on three different persons connected with the birth of our Savior: Zechariah the priest (whom we heard about last week), Zechariah’s wife Elizabeth, and Joseph. Each of them has an admission to make.

You know what an admission is, don’t you? It’s when you come to realize that something is true—something that, maybe because you’ve been too proud or too stubborn, or maybe just because you never thought about it in a certain way before, you have not always been willing to recognize that it’s true...until you do. Admissions. We all have them.

Do you want to hear mine?

- I’ll admit this: I like snow. **[image of snowy night]** I know not everybody does, but I *love* that big, white fluffy stuff that comes down from the sky. I love a calm, quiet winter’s night with all that beautiful whiteness...and I’ll admit it. It’s fun to see; it’s fun to play in; it’s something to enjoy.
- But I have to admit this, too: I *hate* snow. **[snow shovel...]** I mean, sure, it might be fine at *this* time of year—there are so many things you can do in the snow. **[snow blower...]** But most of all you have to shovel it, or blow it away, or drive in it, or just plain try to avoid it. **[little girl lying in the snow]** So I have to admit that every year there comes a time—maybe around the middle of February or so—I get tired of it...and *I just can’t wait to see it go.* **[I hate snow]**
- Here’s another admission: I am a fair-weather fan. **[Packers game]** In our house we have a tradition: we always decorate our Christmas tree the Sunday after Thanksgiving. There’s a reason for that. And the reason is that sometimes I need something to keep my mind off the game in case things are not turning out the way I’d like. Maybe you know the feeling, too....

So those are some of my admissions. **[Advent Admissions...]**

Last week, we saw Zechariah’s “Advent admission.” When the angel Gabriel came to him to announce that in his old age he and his wife would have a son, he couldn’t believe it. But in time, Zechariah came to admit that he was wrong to doubt the promise and power of God.

This week, we hear another admission—this time from Zechariah’s wife Elizabeth, who would give birth to the son who would prepare the way for the Lord. Once she came to accept that this was for real, she had to admit that she had given up hope. She gushed, *“The Lord...has shown his favor and taken away my disgrace among the people.”* (Luke 1:25).

Today, with Mary, we’re privileged to visit the home of **ELIZABETH THE EXUBERANT**. And along with her, we will make our own advent admissions:

1) I need hope

2) I need help

Chapter 2 of Luke’s gospel contains the beautiful words of the Christmas story, but it is in Chapter 1 that we learn about Elizabeth. **[St. Luke]** Luke is writing to a man named Theophilus, and his purpose in writing is *“so that you may know the **certainty** of the things you have been taught”* (Luke 1:4). Luke conducted careful research, and as you look at what he writes by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, it’s not unreasonable to conclude that he interviewed Mary the mother of our Lord in her later years, and that she supplies so much of the detail in these early chapters.

Chapter 1 begins with the story of Mary's relatives Zechariah and Elizabeth. **[blank screen]** They're childless, and in that day, being without a child (as we heard last week) was considered to have been a curse. If you did not have children, you must have done something wrong, people thought, "because otherwise, why would God be punishing you in this way?" When we meet Elizabeth, she's well along in years...long past the childbearing age. She's without children...and without hope.

But the angel Gabriel appears to Zechariah and tells him, "Your wife Elizabeth is going to have a son. You are to give him the name John. He will be great in the eyes of the Lord and will prepare the way for the Savior to come." **Luke tells us**, "*After this his wife Elizabeth became pregnant and for five months remained in seclusion.*" *The Lord has done this for me,*" she said. *'In these days he has shown his favor and taken away my disgrace among the people'*" (Luke 1:24,25). "The Lord has taken away my disgrace," she said. For a woman who was once without a family and without a future, everything has changed!

Luke tells us something intriguing about Elizabeth. For five months she lives in seclusion. She stays at home. But why? It seems that it's more than just morning sickness. Maybe she's caring for Zechariah. After all, he's unable to talk. I don't know. But I would imagine that Elizabeth is also spending her time in prayer... reading the scriptures... and thinking about the miracle growing inside. I would also imagine that she's reflecting... perhaps about the time (some 2000 years before) that three visitors arrived at the tent of Abraham and Sarah to announce that, in **their** old age, they would have a son. Like Zechariah, Sarah doubted; she laughed. "*After I am worn out and my master is old...will I now have this pleasure?*" (Genesis 18:12). But 90-year-old Sarah became pregnant and the promised child was born. For nothing is impossible with God!

As God had directed them, they named the boy Isaac—"He laughs." Sarah said, "*God has brought me laughter, and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me*" (Genesis 21:6). Baby Isaac laughed, Sarah laughed, and Abraham laughed. But **God laughed too**. Through that child, Isaac, God firmly established the line of the Savior to come. He **keeps** his promises. He has the **power** to do the impossible. He gives **hope**. He does the same for us. **[blank screen]**

Holidays can be hard. "It's the happiest time of the year," we're told... but we can feel deeply disappointed and empty inside. And there are times when feel as if we have lost all hope.

- Perhaps, like Elizabeth, it's the hope of ever having a child, or finding a spouse, or reviving a marriage turned cold...
- Or the hope of holding on to a job, or just finding one...
- Or the hope of regaining your health, overcoming addiction or alcohol abuse, or simply finding peace inside and being happy once more.

If you need hope, Elizabeth is proof: **God has the power to do what seems impossible**. If he kept his promise to aged Abraham and Sarah... If he gave a child to Zechariah and Elizabeth in their twilight years... And if he caused a young virgin named Mary to carry in her womb the Child who would one day become the Savior of the world... Then surely he has the power to bless you and give you hope again.

The child in Elizabeth's womb would be special. The angel said, "*He will go on before the Lord, in the spirit of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers...and to make ready a people prepared for the Lord*" (Luke 1:17).

He would be special. But his role was to help get people ready for Jesus. You see, Mary is carrying a special Child, too.

When Elizabeth is in her sixth month, Mary traveled to the hill country of Judea with a heavy heart. She's young, unmarried, and pregnant. No one understands. So she goes to visit the one woman who could. **We read**: "*When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with Holy Spirit. In a loud voice, she exclaimed, 'Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear!'*" (Luke 1:41,42). Wouldn't you love to have been there? The young mother of our Lord visits the aged mother of his forerunner. They're carrying **hope** and **help**. Our two great needs, soon to be met.

- Through Jesus, we have hope—the forgiveness of our sins.
- Through John, we have help—help in seeing our need, our sin...help in focusing our thoughts on our need to repent.

[Advent admissions...] I have another admission to make: *I like Christmas, but sometimes I fear it may be for all the wrong reasons.* And that threatens to make me a fair-weather Christian.

- I enjoy the lights, the trees, the holiday music...
- I like the presents, the gatherings, the time spent with family...
- I love to hear the children sing, and I love to see their faces as they share the precious news that Christ, the Savior, is born...

But it's not whether I like *what Christmas has become* that makes it what it is. I *need* Christmas. I *need* it because I am a *sinner*—a sinner in *need* of a Savior. And I *need* the season of Advent so that I can prepare—*truly* prepare—for the coming of my Lord.

John came with a message: “Repent,” he said. And he said, “Produce fruit in keeping with repentance” (Luke 3:8). I need that message. I need John’s help. I need to see *my sin*, and I need to see *my need for a Savior* for Christmas to make a difference in my life. **[blank screen]**

There is so much going on right now, during the Advent season. In so many ways, it seems to be all about the lights, the performances, the gatherings and the parties. But no. That’s not what it’s all about. The season of Advent is a time to *prepare*. It is a time to *get ready*. It is a time to spend in *quiet contemplation* and *prayer*. **[manger and cross]**

I need to slow down. I need to look inside. And I need to come to the realization that Jesus did not just come for a world out there...*he came for me*. When I can admit that, then I’m ready for Christmas!

AMEN.