



“FEAR NOT!”
Advent/Christmas Bible Study
Our Savior Lutheran Church

Week One: Fear Not, Zechariah!
Luke 1:5-25

[Click here](#) to join Pr. Mark in a Live Zoom conversation each Wednesday at 10am. Meeting ID: 868 8793 0554, Password: 654321
Or dial in for audio only: 1-301-715-8592

Luke 1:5-25 (NRSV)

⁵ In the days of King Herod of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly order of Abijah. His wife was a descendant of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. ⁶ Both of them were righteous before God, living blamelessly according to all the commandments and regulations of the Lord. ⁷ But they had no children, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were getting on in years.

⁸ Once when he was serving as priest before God and his section was on duty, ⁹ he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to enter the sanctuary of the Lord and offer incense. ¹⁰ Now at the time of the incense offering, the whole assembly of the people was praying outside. ¹¹ Then there appeared to him an angel of the Lord, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. ¹² When Zechariah saw him, he was terrified; and fear overwhelmed him. ¹³ But the angel said to him, “Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will name him 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. He must never drink wine or strong drink; even before his birth he will be filled with the Holy Spirit. ¹⁶ He will turn many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. ¹⁷ With the spirit and power of Elijah he will go before him, to turn the hearts of parents to their children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.” ¹⁸ Zechariah said to the angel, “How will I know that this is so? For I am an old man, and my wife is getting on in years.” ¹⁹ The angel replied, “I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news. ²⁰ But now, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time, you will become mute, unable to speak, until the day these things occur.”

²¹ Meanwhile the people were waiting for Zechariah, and wondered at his delay in the sanctuary. ²² When he did come out, he could not speak to them, and they realized that he had seen a vision in the sanctuary. He kept motioning to them and remained unable to speak. ²³ When his time of service was ended, he went to his home.

²⁴ *After those days his wife Elizabeth conceived, and for five months she remained in seclusion. She said, ²⁵ “This is what the Lord has done for me when he looked favorably on me and took away the disgrace I have endured among my people.”*

Text Notes and Questions

What was life like for Jews “in the days of King Herod of Judea”?

Zechariah and Elizabeth (both from priestly families) are described as “righteous before God.” What does that phrase mean, and what doesn’t that phrase mean?

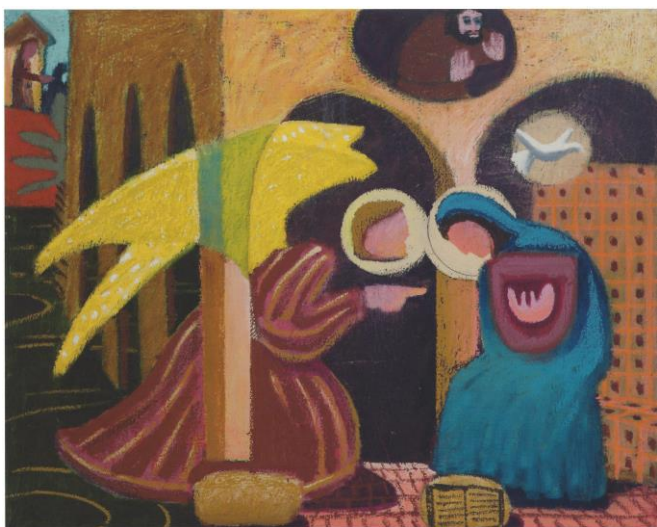
What did the Temple of the Lord represent to the people of Israel? What do our worship spaces represent to us today?

“Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been answered.”

Why do you think Zechariah was afraid?

What do you think Zechariah was praying for?

Was his prayer personal, or corporate, or both?



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Week Two: Fear Not, Mary!
Luke 1:26-38

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Luke 1:26-38 (NRSV)

²⁶ In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, ²⁷ to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. ²⁸ And he came to her and said, “Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.” ²⁹ But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰ The angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹ And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. ³² He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. ³³ He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.” ³⁴ Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I am a virgin?” ³⁵ The angel said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. ³⁶ And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. ³⁷ For nothing will be impossible with God.” ³⁸ Then Mary said, “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.” Then the angel departed from her.

Text Notes and Questions

Six months earlier the angel Gabriel visited Zechariah before now visiting Mary. How are Gabriel’s visits (and words) similar in these two accounts? How are they different?

What do we know about Nazareth?

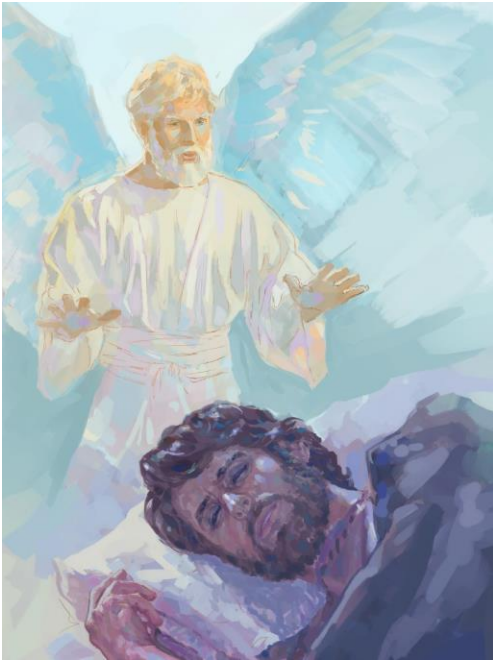
Reflect and pray over these words from the Gospel: favored, perplexed, pondered.

What is the significant of Mary being identified as a “virgin?”

“And you will name his Jesus.” What does the name “Jesus” mean? In addition to the name “Jesus,” what name was revealed to Joseph when he was visited by an angel? How do the names speak or complement each other?

What is the significance of Mary and Elizabeth’s relationship?

When in your life as you in essence said, “Let it be with me according to your word.”



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Week Three: Fear Not, Joseph!
Matthew 1:18-25

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Matthew 1:18-25 (NRSV)

¹⁸ Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. ²⁰ But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” ²² All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

*²³ “Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,
and they shall name him Emmanuel,”
which means, “God is with us.”*

²⁴ When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, ²⁵ but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son;^[b] and he named him Jesus.

Text Notes and Questions

Matthew’s gospel begins with the genealogy of Jesus. Why would this be important to Matthew’s audience?

Emmanuel mean’s “God is with us.” Where else is this promise spoken of in Matthew’s gospel (see 28:20).

What is the significance of the virgin birth?

Describe Joseph's predicament as a "righteous man" when he discovered Mary to be pregnant. Do you think the angel's visit to Joseph made him rethink his definition of righteousness?

Despite the ever-changing social norms of every generation, when might we be called to react beyond our worry "of what others might think?"



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Week Four: Fear Not, Shepherds!
Luke 2:8-20

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Luke 2:8-20 (NRSV)

⁸ In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹ Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰ But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: ¹¹ to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹² This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.” ¹³ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, ¹⁴ “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!”

¹⁵ When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.” ¹⁶ So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. ¹⁷ When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; ¹⁸ and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. ¹⁹ But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. ²⁰ The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

Text Notes and Questions

How were shepherds generally viewed in the day of Jesus’ birth? What does it say that the first outsiders to get news of Jesus’ birth were shepherds?

Psalm 23 begins “The Lord is my shepherd.” Jesus self identifies as “the good shepherd.” What does the imagery of a shepherd say to you?

“For unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior, who is Christ, the Lord.” Why does Luke use “city of David” instead of Bethlehem? What do the terms “Savior,” “Christ,” and “Lord” mean and how did the people of Jesus’ day hear and identify with those titles?

“Do not be afraid” are words we’ve grown to expect to hear from an angel. Why is fear the first natural response to those who receive an angel visit? How does faith calm fear?

Mary “pondered in her heart” all that the shepherds told her about what they had seen and heard. What does it mean to “ponder?” What do you ponder in your heart as you hear the Christmas story over and over again?