

First Midweek of Advent

Luke 1: 21 – 25

Pastor Arndt

²¹ Meanwhile, the people were waiting for Zechariah and wondering why he stayed so long in the temple. ²² When he came out, he could not speak to them. They realized he had seen a vision in the temple, for he kept making signs to them but remained unable to speak.

²³ When his time of service was completed, he returned home. ²⁴ After this his wife Elizabeth became pregnant and for five months remained in seclusion. ²⁵ "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."

Brothers and sisters in Christ

Advent is a time when we begin to do things that are odd. For example, trees live *outside*. But about this time of year it has become normal to cut down a tree and drag it into the middle of your living room. In my house growing up, my dad was always telling our family to turn lights *off*. But during Advent my father did the opposite. He added lights to our house. He put lights on our Christmas tree. He put lights in our windows. He put lights in our front lawn.

I think I know the source of this odd behavior. Our church life was oozing its way into our home. As it turns out, this has always been a part of God's plan for us. The same Lord who commanded the Children of Israel to build a temple also instructed them to take lambs home with them. Each Passover they were to slaughter those lambs and smear the blood over the door frames of their houses. Each year the Israelites set up tents in their back yards and lived in them for a week, commemorating the years that they lived in tents in the wilderness. A large portion of Israel's worship life extended beyond the gates of the temple and oozed its way into their homes.

God makes it clear that he wants the same thing to happen with us. The connection between *worship in church* and *worship at home* is the focus for our Advent worship, as well as a theme we will be following throughout the year.

Our lesson for tonight is an excellent example. This is a two-act play. It begins in the temple but concludes in the home. **Notice that most of the action takes place in the temple, but most of the time and apprehension of the truth takes place in the home.**

Zechariah is serving amongst the vaulted walls and gilded objects of the temple. In a relatively small space, he is all alone. Everything is dark except for the dim glow of candles. All his priestly senses would have been heightened. The ark of the covenant with its golden lid covered with cherubs (angels) was long gone, but no matter. Out of the darkness, (piercing

the darkness) a *real* angel appears. Not any angel... This is Gabriel who brings Zechariah a direct message from God.

Every detail of that temple was created to lift our eyes to God and lead us to faith. With Gabriel standing before Zechariah, the thin line separating heaven and earth must have been almost indiscernible. For all of this, what do Zechariah's lips produce? ... He says to God's Angel, "*How can I be sure?*"

"This is how I will make you sure", God announces through Gabriel. *"I am sending you home. You will be silent. God will speak."*

It is oddly appropriate that Zechariah, a priest who speaks for a living, will now be unable to talk. Before he speaks another word, for more than nine months, he will do nothing but listen. God had scolded him (*and rightfully so*), but along with that scolding there was something else.

Zechariah, listen! God is going to bless you. Zechariah, listen! You are going to have a son. Zechariah, listen! *"He [your son] will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah... — to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."*

Zechariah's ministry had been defined by sacrifices. When people came to him with sin, guilt and sadness, the blood of lambs and the promise of God was the best he had to offer. Now, everything was going to change. Jesus, the lamb of God, was near. Zechariah's own son would see him and proclaim, *"Look the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."*

Zechariah heard this message in the temple, but he learned to trust and believe it in the silence of his home.

That, members of St John's, is the beautiful task that lies before us. Throughout the year we will be highlighting the odd things we do at church and how they overflow into our homes. As a first step, I encourage you to take what you have seen and heard here and let it ooze and seep into the quiet and comfortable sanctuary of your home. Look around you at the odd things we do during Advent and Christmas. Take time each day to be silent. Listen! God is preparing *your* heart for a Savior as well.

- Amen