

The Christmas Story: Expectation
November 27, 2016
Lynn Haven UMC

Introduction

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. Zechariah and Elizabeth were righteous in God's eyes, careful to obey all of the Lord's commandments and regulations. They had no children because Elizabeth was unable to conceive, and they were both very old. One day Zechariah was serving God in the Temple, for his order was on duty that week. As was the custom of the priests, he was chosen by lot to enter the sanctuary of the Lord and burn incense. While the incense was being burned, a great crowd stood outside, praying. While Zechariah was in the sanctuary, an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing to the right of the incense altar. Zechariah was shaken and overwhelmed with fear when he saw him. 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. You will have great joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, 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. And he will turn many Israelites to the Lord their God. 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." (Luke 1:5-17 NLT)

Imagine the conflicting thoughts of joy and doubt that must have plagued Zechariah and Elizabeth when the angel told them they would finally become parents after decades of seemingly unanswered prayers. The waiting is always the hardest part. Much like Ralphie Parker's unwavering desire to own an official Red Ryder, carbine action, 200 shot, range model air rifle, the build up to highly anticipated events that don't come in what, in our estimation, is the perfect time can lead to anxiousness, doubt and sadness. The word expectation comes from the Latin word *expectationem*, meaning "an awaiting." We await the Lord with hearts filled with joyful expectation. This week we address how being bold and persistent with our prayers and trusting in God's perfect timing, can help calm our uneasy human expectations.

Digging Deeper

Expectation is expressed through...

Petition

- What are you asking for this Christmas? How different would your list be if the things you requested weren't things at all? Discuss ways in which you and your family/friends might make an impact for God's people this year by participating in the Advent Conspiracy. Give big, love bigger.
- Matthew 7:7 (NIV) says "ask and it will be given to you." Why is it necessary (and important for our faith walk) to petition God when He knows our every thought before we speak it?
- Read Philippians 4:6-7 (NLT). Do you pray (or talk) to God about everything? Or just the big things? He desires a continual relationship with us which requires an open dialogue. Talk about what these verses tell us we need to do in order to achieve the peace that can only come from a relationship with God.

Persistence

- We often tell our children to stop asking us for things when they have already been given an answer. God is different in that He wants us to “never stop praying” (or asking). (1 Thessalonians 5:17 NLT) Why do you think He advises us to be persistent in our prayers?
- Our expectations will be fulfilled only to the extent that we exercise persistence in our petitions. Think about a long term goal that you met as a result of placing a continuous focus on achieving it. How did determination and prayer play a part in your success?

And so I tell you, keep on asking, and you will receive what you ask for. Keep on seeking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened to you. (Luke 11:9 NLT)

Perspective

- Read Psalm 145:8-9 (NIV). What do these verses tell you about the character of God that helps you find perspective in times of doubt or impatience?
- When we pray for people or things, we do so from our vantage point. Imagine seeing things as God does. Have you ever prayed and prayed for something only to realize later that you were much better off without it? Did it help you to realize that just maybe our Heavenly Father really does know best?

Conclusion

What do you want for Christmas? How high are your expectations? Present your request to the Lord through a petition, practice persistence until an answer comes, and have the perspective that the God you are asking loves you and wants what is best for you...and He will deliver at the proper time.