



#### Luke 1:5-25

In the time of Herod king of Judea there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly division of Abijah; his wife Elizabeth was also a descendant of Aaron. Both of them were righteous in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's commands and decrees blamelessly. But they were childless because Elizabeth was not able to conceive, and they were both very old.

Once when Zechariah's division was on duty and he was serving as priest before God, he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to go into the temple of the Lord and burn incense. And when the time for the burning of incense came, all the assembled worshipers were praying outside.

Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear. But the angel said to him: "Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to call him John. He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even before he is born. He will bring back many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the parents to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

Zechariah asked the angel, "How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years."

The angel said to him, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to tell you this good news. And now you will be silent and not able to speak until the day this happens, because you did not believe my words, which will come true at their appointed time."

Meanwhile, the people were waiting for Zechariah and wondering why he stayed so long in the temple. 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.

When his time of service was completed, he 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."

Thought:

I often hear people talking about 'life before' this, that or the other. Sometimes they are describing a development or an invention which has changed the way that the world is experienced. You know the kind of things - the internal combustion engine, the internet, mobile phones and spreadable butter! If you were to ask me, Apple air tags would be high on my list. For the people reading this who lead lives less sad than my own, they are tiny little discs which you can attach to pretty much anything and everything you value. By picking up your mobile phone, you can locate them on a map, make them bleep and even get step by step directions.

They have changed my life because I tend to forget to here I have left things! When I say 'tend', I am being charitable to myself.

Luke's gospel opens with an angel telling Zechariah that he and his wife have not been forgotten. Zechariah's name means 'God remembers' but he has the feeling that he has been misplaced or his situation overlooked or neglected. The years and the opportunities seem to have passed Elizabeth and him by.

We all remember that feeling don't we? Even if it was just that time that you were the last child standing in the playground when the team captain chose their teams for the lunch time football or you were hurst that for the second year running you were chosen to play the rear end of the donkey in the school Nativity.

In truth it is Zechariah who has forgotten. An Apple Air tag anywhere in the Hebrew scriptures he would have been so well versed in would have reminded him that God always remembers his people and his promises. Noah (Gen 8:1), Abraham (Gen 19:29) Israel in Egypt (Ex 2 & 6) to name just a few.

But not even the angel offering an extended assurance to Zechariah that he had not been forgotten was enough for him. "How can I be sure of this?" is the question which will result in Zechariah being forced into a period of silence. As Elizabeth's bump grew his circumstances changed and no doubt his hope but by then he had missed the point. Biblical hope (the kind of hope we think about in this season of Advent) is not based around outcomes and circumstances. Instead, it is based around the person, character and purposes of the faithful God of Israel who doesn't need Apple Air Tags. God remembers. His people and His promises.

As children count the number of sleeps till Santa, we watch and we wait and hope for and in a God who never forgets. At the end of Luke's first chapter (v62-80), when Zachariah is passed something to scribble his son's name on, his memory improves and he gains not just a speaking voice but a fine singing one. But that may be someone else's text and I have just forgotten myself!