

Sermon for Sunday December 4, 2022 – Advent 2  
Luke 1:5-26

Prayer: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you O God, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

In our Gospel story today, Zechariah – an old priest – is just going about his business in the temple when he is visited by an angel. Which sounds rather nice – we might all like an angel to visit us. But to be clear, we aren't talking about the little chubby baby angels of Hallmark cards... or the sweet faced angels you see in paintings, who all look like they just finished a satisfying bowl of spaghetti. No, this angel is different – angels in the bible seem to be terrifying. They scare the bejesus out of people. I mean, why else would the very first thing out of the mouths of every single angel in the Bible be “don't be scared!”, like their heavenly employee manual says; *never attempt to deliver your message from God until you have completely calmed the human down first.*

Anyway the story tells us the angel Gabriel visits the old priest Zachariah – and Gab tells him this totally bonkers thing: he says that Zachariah's wife Elizabeth would conceive a son named John – this would be John the Baptist – the fashion challenged, locus eating fellow who would tell folks Jesus was coming. Now remember Zechariah is very old, and his wife Elizabeth is very old and she has not been able to have a baby at any time in her life so the news that Gabriel brings is truly ridiculous.

The story tell us that instead of just keeping his mouth shut and nodding his head respectfully when the terrifying angel delivered the outlandish message from God, Zechariah did what I'm pretty sure I would do... Zechariah thinks he know better - and so he questions the angels authority. Zechariah questions “Are you sure Mr. Angel – perhaps you don't understand just how old my old wife is – we are talking old here.”

To which the angel says “human, please!” And don't miss this part because it is amazing – the angel then proceeds to make Zechariah completely mute until all these things had taken place like the angel said they would. It was like a nine month “time – out” for Zachariah – which is actually kind of awesome. Imagine if every time someone underestimated the ability of someone else their mouths were shut for nine months. Think of how much would get done and in such a quiet setting.

The question remains; why would Zechariah not believe an angel, who came to him saying that God was giving him and his wife a child -

the one thing they had prayed for so long to get. I wonder if Zechariah was reluctant to believe this good news that Elizabeth would bear a son **because he thought he already knew how his life was supposed to be.**

I wonder if Zechariah was reluctant to believe this good news, that Elizabeth would bear a son, not because he thought he knew more than both God and angels but because he had become so comfortable with the story he told himself and that others had told him about what his life looks like and what it will always look like - so he couldn't believe anything else was even possible. He was so use to the idea that he and Elizabeth were the "childless old couple" that even as he prayed for children, he actually didn't believe it could ever happen.

I wonder if maybe his enforced period of silence was actually what allowed him to see new possibilities for himself, and for Elizabeth. Allowed him to see how God can be active in places that seem absolutely absurd for a God to be.

I think this story is an invitation for us, as well, to think about what we believe about ourselves to be unchangeable and to consider fresh possibilities.

Perhaps that addiction that has you bound – is not as strong as you think.

Perhaps that relationship that has you trapped is not as binding as you think.

Maybe you are not the "perpetual screw up, sinner, or mess you think you are.

Maybe you're an older adult and think the best years are behind you like Zechariah did but

**Maybe there is more to your story that you haven't even imagined yet.** But God has. In fact God never seems to be done with us.

As his elderly wife's belly grew large with a miracle child – Zechariah couldn't say a word, he just had to receive it. As Elizabeth's dear relative Mary, visited and told of the child she herself carried and as the child that Zechariah and Elizabeth created, leapt in Elizabeth's womb - he could not say a word, he just had to receive it. As the **unimaginable creativity of God - that would change the entire world - grew in the unlikely wombs of an old lady and a virgin teenager - Zechariah could not say a word, he could only receive it.** It was as though God said "you want to see what I am about? Well then...SHHH up about your old story and receive this new one"

Maybe this is an invitation for us as well, that we too might take opportunities to just be quiet and listen for a new story.

Maybe that old story of who you are and what you've done and who has hurt you and what you deserve is simply not the final edition.

Maybe your old story is one destructive relationship after another and maybe the only reason that's your story is because that's what your mom or dad did and it's all you know.

Or maybe your old story, *that you think is fixed in stone*, is that you aren't someone who has real faith, or who has anything to give or that you are someone who is so strong you can't show any vulnerability.

Or maybe your old story is that you don't really deserve to be well-loved.

Maybe just maybe, when our opinions and pride and expectations about who we are and what we've done and who has hurt us and what we deserve die down...maybe when we just shhh up and sit in the quiet of waiting in this time of Advent waiting, we might begin to see where something else is possible. Something holy and waiting to be born in an unlikely time and place much like the birth of Jesus itself.

What *was* the birth of Jesus about if not God telling this fickle and heart-breaking world that a different story is possible. Telling us that God was, God is and God will continue to redeem all of creation through means that we would never come up with ...though means like pregnant old ladies, and messiahs born amongst sheep and straw and loving our enemy and forgiveness of sins and self-giving love and resurrection.

These are things we just can't imagine when we are too busy telling worn out old stories about ourselves and others and the world.

It was a gift really...this muteness of Zechariah's. Because in his silence he got to see a story unfold around him that he never could have come up with himself.

So maybe when we silence the old chatter about ourselves and others and the world itself, that runs on repeat in our heads, that we have believed were the truth for so long, we get to embrace the beauty of what's possible.

So may you, every single one of you, take some time to be silent. To imagine and see a different story – a better story, a more hopeful story, a subversively beautiful story, about what is possible in your life, and the world.

SHHH....

Amen