

wine or other alcoholic drinks. He will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even before his birth. 16 And he will turn many Israelites to the Lord their God. 17 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."

If you received a box from Amazon lately you may have noticed the packing tape says "Wow, now that's a gift!" Just look at the gift God promised Zechariah. Luke 1:13-Not only a child, but: a son.

See if you can find other "not only"/ "but" of this gift.

v. 14- not only a joy to you, but -----

v. 15 not only great in the Lord's eyes, but filled with -----

v.17 not only turning Israelites to God but in the power of -----

not only does he restore relationships of fathers & children, but he causes ----- to accept -----, and prepares them for coming of the Lord.

When He promises to turn hearts of fathers to children, Gabriel is quoting Malachi 4:5-6. God is keeping the promise from 400 years earlier. Wow, that's a promise of God!

WRAP-UP

God expresses His love to us when he hears and responds to us, He includes those on the outside in what He is doing in this world, He extends grace to us despite our doubts and inadequacies and He keeps His promises.

MEMORY VERSE

1 John 4:10 NLT - 10 This is real love--not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins.

PRAYER (20 MIN)

Ask your group to pray for you regarding one area where you can apply this study in your life

Challenge- Be aware of opportunities to show the love of God to your neighbors this week.

"The Promise of Love" Advent Promises #4

INTRODUCTION

In the final week of Advent, we light the candle of love. What is love? We may associate love with relationships, romance, or perhaps we view it as a reward for performance and success. But these are a poor substitute for the love God has for us. God's love emanates from his nature and character. And we find His love in places we may least expect it. In this study we will look at God's love expressed in the story of Zechariah and Elizabeth from the Gospel of Luke.

Ice Breaker

Have you had any difficulty finding a Christmas present this year? If so, what was it or what did you substitute?

Key Passage

1 John 4:10 NLT - 10 This is real love--not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. God's Love Hears

Luke 1:13 NLT - 13 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."

One of the common complaints heard in marriage counseling is "They just don't listen to me." In other words, if you love me, you will hear what I am saying to you. God hears us. It is one way we see His love demonstrated. In Luke 1:13 the Greek word for "heard" is *eisakouō* and means to give heed or to comply with a request. So, God not only hears, but he also responds.

Zechariah and Elizabeth had been faithful, righteous believers who prayed for many years and yet hadn't received a child in answer to their prayers. God heard them but chose just the right time to respond. Is there something you have been seeking from God for a long time? Is there something you have given up hoping for because you feel God hasn't heard you or just didn't respond? Don't give up seeking God because His timing may not be your timing, but God hears you.

2. God's Love Includes

Acts 10:34 NLT - 34 Then Peter replied, "I see very clearly that God shows no favoritism.

It feels as if cultural exclusion at an all-time high. Deep lines of division have sprung up over issues that didn't even exist 2 years ago. We find ourselves included or excluded by different groups of people and often that division is laced with hostility. When you are included, you feel loved, but those who are excluded feel unloved.

Zechariah and Elizabeth were judged by their culture to be rejected by God because they had no children. Fruitfulness was seen as a blessing among the Jews, and conversely people concluded that if you were barren, you were being punished by God. And so, Zechariah and Elizabeth lived under a cloud of disgrace and rejection. *Are there groups you feel excluded by? Who, in today's culture, may be generally viewed as rejected by God? Do you see certain groups excluded from the church?*

James 2:8-9 NLT - 8 Yes indeed, it is good when you obey the royal law as found in the Scriptures: "Love your neighbor as yourself." 9 But if you favor some people over others, you are committing a sin. You are guilty of breaking the law.

James says we are to love our neighbors as ourselves and if we favor some over others, we are committing a sin.

How does James' statement apply to the division we find in our current culture? What can be done to make our church a more inclusive environment?

3. God's Love Extends Grace

Luke 1:18-20 NLT - 18 Zechariah said to the angel, "How can I be sure this will happen? I'm an old man now, and my wife is also well along in years." 19 Then the angel said, "I am Gabriel! I stand in the very presence of God. It was he who sent me to bring you this good news! 20 But now, since you didn't believe what I said, you will be silent and unable to speak until the child is born. For my words will certainly be fulfilled at the proper time."

It is not surprising that Zechariah had his doubts about having a son when he and Elizabeth were beyond childbearing age. But let's remember what's happening here – God hasn't spoken for 400 years (not since the prophet Malachi) and this angel appeared in the temple and is declaring the impossible will happen when Elizabeth gives birth to a son.

Make a list of the reasons Zechariah should believe he would have a son and the reasons he had to doubt. When comparing these two lists, what should be the deciding factors, which do you feel caused Zechariah to doubt? Which tends to sway you more, your logic or God's power?

If God speaking directly through an angel didn't overcome Zechariah's doubts, then he needed to be reminded of God's power and sovereignty.

How do you feel about the consequences he suffered?

God could have disqualified Zechariah from receiving the promise of a son, but He extended grace along with consequences. He provided a way forward, even if it meant a harder path for Zechariah. God does that for us as well.

4. God's Love Keeps Promises

Luke 1:13-17 NLT - 13 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. 14 You will have great joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, 15 for he will be great in the eyes of the Lord. He must never touch