

Martyn Payne

*The
Christmas
Story*

for families to share

readings, questions,
activities and prayers



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Zechariah receives a promise

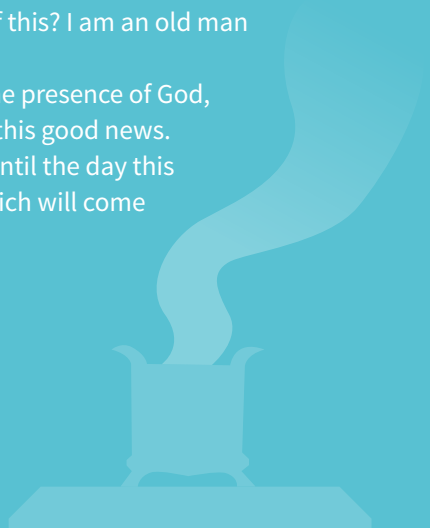
¹¹ Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. ¹² When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear. ¹³ But the angel said to him: ‘Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to call him John. ¹⁴ He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, ¹⁵ 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. ¹⁶ He will bring back many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. ¹⁷ 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.’

¹⁸ Zechariah asked the angel, ‘How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well on in years.’

¹⁹ 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.

²⁰ 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.’

LUKE 1:11-20





Commentary

The dramatic story of how God stepped into the world in the person of Jesus Christ begins here in the innermost part of the temple, with an elderly priest called Zechariah. He shouldn't really have been surprised that an angel appeared to him. It was part of what he believed in and taught to others, but sometimes we can end up going through the routine of prayer and no longer expecting God to answer us, and certainly Zechariah didn't really seem to believe the tremendous message given to him. He and his wife were elderly and the idea of having a son seemed beyond belief, never

mind the fact that this son would have a special job to do to bring people back to God and prepare the way for someone even more important. The angel's visit literally leaves him speechless until the child is born. Zechariah couldn't believe what he was being told, despite his own faith in God, but God still used him to father John – later known as 'the Baptist' – who would point the way to Jesus as God's way of speaking to the whole world.

?? Questions

- ▶ Do we just go through the motions of prayer sometimes, so that we aren't really ready to hear God speaking to us?
- ▶ What was Zechariah's son going to do, according to what the angel said?
- ▶ Why did Zechariah doubt the angel? Is it always wrong to have doubts?
- ▶ What do you think the angel looked like?



Old Testament story link

An angel appears to a husband and wife and promises them the gift of a special son.

JUDGES 13:1-20

Key verse

'He will make ready a people prepared for the Lord.'

LUKE 1:17



Visual aid

It was behind the curtain in the Holy of Holies that Zechariah had the surprise of his life. If you can draw the curtains near to where you are reading this, take turns to hide a surprise item behind them. Can the others guess what is hidden each time?



Activity idea

Zechariah wasn't able to speak after this encounter until John was born. He would have had to use sign language. Use the internet to learn some proper sign language for key words in the story, such as temple, curtain, worship, God, surprise, baby, family and parents. You could also play a game of charades, using a form of sign language to try to describe something that happened to you recently.



Prayer idea

God interrupted Zechariah's prayer with a visit from an angel. How ready are we to let our prayer be broken into by God? Pray a familiar prayer together, such as the Lord's Prayer, pausing for a while after each line to give space for God to 'intervene'. Be ready to hear his voice in your head or perhaps 'see' a special picture with your imagination.





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The Christmas Story

is written for parents, grandparents and carers to share with their children through an interactive family Bible and prayer time.

Each section provides a brief comment on the passage, questions to discuss, a visual aid to encourage engagement with the story, an activity idea, a prayer idea, a key verse and an Old Testament story link.



Formerly part of BRF's Messy Church team, **Martyn Payne** is a gifted storyteller whose previous books *The Big Story* (2011) and *Creative Ways to Tell a Bible Story* (2012) demonstrate the variety of approaches he uses to bring the Bible alive for children and adults alike. He is passionate about the blessing that comes when generations explore faith together.

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