

Getting Things Ready

Luke 1:17, Sunday AM, December 18, 2022

Prelude – Scripture: Luke 1:5–17 In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zacharias, of the division of Abijah; and he had a wife from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. ⁶ They were both righteous in the sight of God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and requirements of the Lord. ⁷ But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and they were both advanced in years. ⁸ Now it happened *that* while he was performing his priestly service before God in the *appointed* order of his division, ⁹ according to the custom of the priestly office, he was chosen by lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense. ¹⁰ And the whole multitude of the people were in prayer outside at the hour of the incense offering. ¹¹ And an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing to the right of the altar of incense. ¹² Zacharias was troubled when he saw *the angel*, and fear gripped him. ¹³ But the angel said to him, “Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your petition has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will give him the name John. ¹⁴ “You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth. ¹⁵ “For he will be great in the sight of the Lord; and he will drink no wine or liquor, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit while yet in his mother’s womb. ¹⁶ “And he will turn many of the sons of Israel back to the Lord their God. ¹⁷ “It is he who will go *as a forerunner* before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, **TO TURN THE HEARTS OF THE FATHERS BACK TO THE CHILDREN**, and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous, so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”

We are HERE—right in the season—season of what? Peace, rest, goodwill toward all—hence the time to put walls that divide us and fears that torment us on hold and give to others—yes, gifts, but also time, care, compassion. The world talks of these things, but healthy Christians do not look inside themselves to do all this, they look to God as the giver of all life and godliness and worship and rejoice in hope because of His goodness to us. Where ARE you today with this peace and goodwill AND with worshipping God as the source of all He calls us to do and be for others? This morning, the portion of God’s Word we hold high focuses on preparation for advent. Preparation speaks of a goal. It speaks of structure—boundaries, materials needed, and the work/energy to get there. In our world, goals ALWAYS involve relationships—there are people involved, roles to follow, and people affected. You say, NOT ALL GOALS involve people. Perhaps in your most isolated situation on a deserted island with all your relatives and acquaintances gone, you could say that. But even then, you have the most important relationship that is always there—that of your very relational Creator. How is He affected by your goals, or lack of goals? So today, there are people involved in and affected by the preparation—There is King Herod, then the priest—the go-between God and man—his name was Zacharias—the one Abijah line one, this priest is complemented by a wife from Aaron’s descent—Elizabeth, and we zoom in on a moment of normal life. Honey, I just got chosen for jury duty. NO, something else. I was chosen by lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense! BIG deal—**And the whole multitude of the people were in prayer outside at the hour of the incense offering.** And then it happens—an angel appeared and spoke to Zacharias! This IS a big deal, and there would be a couple of angel encounters, culminating in a heavenly host of angels. Take notice of this heavenly preparation and worship God!

*Hymn #132: Angels We Have Heard On High

Assets and liabilities—King Herod? From Jewish perspective, probably a scary wild card. Zacharias and wife? good pedigree, great holy job, but this pedigree is heading to stop with them—no children. An angel comes. What do you focus on? Today is my lucky day—can we have a child for Christmas? NO, **Zacharias was troubled when he saw the angel, and fear gripped him.** Why? Because there was something/someone greater than any joys, fears, or sadness, and understanding the sacredness of the holy, his first thoughts were of unworthiness and not belonging. This was not a time to ask for or to look for understanding, it was a time to be humble and listen. And when he does, what does he hear? Consolation and graciousness from heaven. Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your petition has been heard! Yes, a baby—they were to get their number one item on their Christmas list, but that was only the beginning of what the angel said, because while what we receive IS good and IS for us, it always reflects the Giver and His good intent which includes us, but is wider than us. Sing this slightly less familiar carol. There’s a SONG in the air!

*Hymn #97 (Red): There’s a Song in the Air *Pastoral Prayer: Pastor Jahn Choir: I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day

Scripture: Malachi 3:13–4:6 “Your words have been arrogant against Me,” says the LORD. “Yet you say, ‘What have we spoken against You?’” ¹⁴ “You have said, ‘It is vain to serve God; and what profit is it that we have kept His charge, and that we have walked in mourning before the LORD of hosts?’” ¹⁵ “So now we call the arrogant blessed; not only are the doers of wickedness built up but they also test God and escape.” ¹⁶ Then those who feared the LORD spoke to one another, and the LORD gave attention and heard *it*, and a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear the LORD and who esteem His name. ¹⁷ “They will be Mine,” says the LORD of hosts, “on the day that I prepare *My* own possession, and I will spare them as a man spares his own son who serves him.” ¹⁸ So you will again distinguish between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve Him. ¹⁹ “For behold, the day is coming, burning like a furnace; and all the arrogant and every evildoer will be chaff; and the day that is coming will set them ablaze,” says the LORD of hosts, “so that it will leave them neither root nor branch.” ²⁰ “But for you who fear My name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings; and you will go forth and skip about like calves from the stall. ²¹ “You will tread down the wicked, for they will be as chaff on the day of the wind.” ²² “Remember the law of Moses My servant, *even* the statutes and ordinances which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel. ²³ “Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD. ²⁴ “He will restore the hearts of the fathers to *their* children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, so that I will not come and smite the land with a curse.”

Offering: *Doxology:

When you get over your fear of your encounter with the angel and hear BABY, then where do you focus? Do you hear the rest of what He says? To whom would it be relevant? To those who have already been prepared to be attentive to God’s Word—to those who have a godly fear of the Lord and are sensitive to His good will being accomplished. So we zero in on our passage for this morning. ¹⁶ “**And [your baby] will turn many of the sons of Israel back to the Lord their God.**” ¹⁷ “**It is he who will go as a forerunner before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, TO TURN THE HEARTS OF THE FATHERS BACK TO THE CHILDREN, and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous, so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.**” THOSE who knew the words of Scripture heard the final words of Malachi here where hope was promised to the people of God EVEN IN A TIME OF DISOBEDIENCE. Hope given to disobedient people draws our focus to the majesty of the merciful One who would do this. This truly is light in the darkness.

*Hymn #129: Break Forth, O Beauteous Heavenly Light

Do you like those who stop you from where you are looking and from what you are doing—who call out your disobedience? Because those who would yield to this are those prepared for the Lord. Children of God, yield to not only the disobedience and rebellion revealed in your heart by His Word, but also to the hope found in God’s eternal promises!

*Hymn (Powerpoint): The Promise

Message: Getting Things Ready Luke 1:17 *Hymn #127: Thou Didst Leave Thy Throne

Prayer