Sunday November 30, 1975

"ZECHARIAH AND HIS VISION" Luke 1:5-13, 18-24, 57-80

There are a number of persons connected with the advent and nativity of Jesus who are not well known but yet have something to say to us about the meaning of the Advent-Christmas event and about life itself.

One of these persons is Zechariah. He was a priest in the temple in Jerusalem. His wife's name was Elizabeth. Luke tells us that both of them were "righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless."

They had one big disappointment in life. They had no children. Luke tells us that they were now old and thus had no hope any more as far as a child is concerned.

But life is full of surprises! As Zechariah is going about his duty in the temple, he has a vision. He sees an angel who tells him that their prayers have been answered. He and Elizabeth will have a son and they are to name him--John. The messenger also indicates that their child is to have a special role in life. He will prepare the people for the Messiah.

Zechariah is skeptical. How can this happen? They are too old to have children. He wants proof. Zechariah gets a sign, but not the kind he expected. The messenger from God tells him that he will not be able to speak until the child is born.

Elizabeth became pregnant. When the child was born and eight days later they brought him to be named, the relatives advised that the baby should be named Zechariah after his father, but Elizabeth said no, he is to be named John. They asked Zechariah what his suggestion was and he wrote on a tablet, "The boy's name is to be John." At that point his speech returned.

The story in Luke ends by noting that the child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness till the day of his manifestation to Israel.

As we prepare to celebrate Holy Communion on this first Sunday in Advent. Note these things about Zechariah and his vision and what happened as a result.

1. First, visions, insights, come at unexpected times. We can even have them while in church. Zechariah was in the temple, and he was doing what he was supposed to do. Sometimes visions and insights come to us as we are going about our appointed duties. Visions can come at any time. The only pre-requisite is that we be open to them.

2. Note secondly, that when visions or insights do come to us, we like Zechariah may doubt the message. Some visions are hard to believe. Zechariah was so suprised by what he experienced that he became literally speechless. Sometimes we have to be speechless before we listen.

He and his wife Elizabeth had prayed for years to be able to have a child. By now he had given up and had not expected their prayers to be answered. Thus when he is told that his prayers are to be answered, he doesn't believe it. He demands a sign. Give me proof! He is given proof, but not the kind he expected. He is told that he will not be able to speak until the child is born. It's a punitive sign. So be careful when you demand proof. It may come in a way you didn't want or expect.

3. Thirdly, note that the purpose of a true vision is always beyond itself. Those visions or insights or grants of special knowledge are always that a larger purpose can be accomplished. Zechariah's and Elizabeth's child was not to just be any child. He was to have a unique mission in life. John was to become "John the Baptist." The fact that his parents gave him a new name signified this. Giving him a traditional family name would not be proper. This child was to break new ground.

During his nine months of not being able to talk, Zechariah came to a knowledge of what his child would be. So when the child is named and Zechariah is able to speak again--he tells those around him that John will be a special prophet for God.

This morning as we celebrate Holy Communion, let these materials of bread and wine speak to you as words cannot speak. They also tell us of a Messiah who came among us, and who even died for us that we might live. Amen.