

Calvary Hanford

The Three Wise... Women

A Christmas 2006 Series



*Elizabeth: It's Wise to **Wait** on the Lord*

*Mary: It's Wise to **Worship** the Lord*

*Anna: It's Wise to **Witness** the Lord*

Elizabeth

Text

Luke 1:5-45

Topic

*After waiting her whole life to bear a child,
Elizabeth waits another five months before showing herself*

Title

Wait Gain

Luke 1:5 There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the division of Abijah. His wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth.

Luke 1:6 And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.

Luke 1:7 But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and they were both well advanced in years.

Luke 1:8 So it was, that while he was serving as priest before God in the order of his division,

Luke 1:9 according to the custom of the priesthood, his lot fell to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord.

Luke 1:10 And the whole multitude of the people was praying outside at the hour of incense.

Luke 1:11 Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing on the right side of the altar of incense.



Luke 1:12 And when Zacharias saw *him*, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him.

Luke 1:13 But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your prayer is heard; and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John.

Luke 1:14 And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth.

Luke 1:15 For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink. He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb.

Luke 1:16 And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God.

Luke 1:17 He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, *'to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,'* and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

Luke 1:18 And Zacharias said to the angel, "How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is well advanced in years."

Luke 1:19 And the angel answered and said to him, "I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, and was sent to speak to you and bring you these glad tidings.

Luke 1:20 But behold, you will be mute and not able to speak until the day these things take place, because you did not believe my words which will be fulfilled in their own time."

Luke 1:21 And the people waited for Zacharias, and marveled that he lingered so long in the temple.

Luke 1:22 But when he came out, he could not speak to them; and they perceived that he had seen a vision in the temple, for he beckoned to them and remained speechless.

Luke 1:23 So it was, as soon as the days of his service were completed, that he departed to his own house.

Luke 1:24 Now after those days his wife Elizabeth conceived; and she hid herself five months, saying,

Luke 1:25 "Thus the Lord has dealt with me, in the days when He looked on *me*, to take away my reproach among people."

Luke 1:26 Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth,

Luke 1:27 to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name *was* Mary.

Luke 1:28 And having come in, the angel said to her, "Rejoice, highly favored *one*, the Lord *is* with you; blessed *are* you among women!"

Luke 1:29 But when she saw *him*, she was troubled at his saying, and considered what manner of greeting this was.

Luke 1:30 Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.

Luke 1:31 And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name JESUS.

Luke 1:32 He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David.

Luke 1:33 And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end.”

Luke 1:34 Then Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I do not know a man?”

Luke 1:35 And the angel answered and said to her, “*The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God.*

Luke 1:36 Now indeed, Elizabeth your relative has also conceived a son in her old age; and this is now the sixth month for her who was called barren.

Luke 1:37 For with God nothing will be impossible.”

Luke 1:38 Then Mary said, “Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word.” And the angel departed from her.

Luke 1:39 Now Mary arose in those days and went into the hill country with haste, to a city of Judah,

Luke 1:40 and entered the house of Zacharias and greeted Elizabeth.

Luke 1:41 And it happened, when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, that the babe leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.

Luke 1:42 Then she spoke out with a loud voice and said, “Blessed *are* you among women, and blessed *is* the fruit of your womb!

Luke 1:43 But why *is* this *granted* to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?

Luke 1:44 For indeed, as soon as the voice of your greeting sounded in my ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy.

Luke 1:45 Blessed *is* she who believed, for there will be a fulfillment of those things which were told her from the Lord.”

Introduction

The three wise men are fixed in our minds as a Christmas tradition. They are on our Christmas cards; there have been poems and stories written about them; we sing a song based upon them. Every manger scene features them prominently, *bearing their gifts from afar*.

Maybe you’ve heard this before. Do you know what would have happened if it had been Three Wise Women instead of Three Wise Men? They would have asked directions, arrived on time, helped deliver the baby, cleaned the stable, made a casserole, and brought practical gifts.

The truth be told, **three wise women did have more to do with the first Christmas than the famous three wise men.**

As far as the wise men are concerned:



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1. The Bible nowhere says there were only three wise men. We suppose there were three because they brought three gifts – gold, frankincense, and myrrh.
2. Further, it is clear from reading the Gospels that, however many of them there were, they certainly did *not* arrive at the birth of Jesus. They were led by the star to a house when Jesus was a young child anywhere from one to two years of age.

(In our family we've developed these biblical facts into a fun tradition. Each year we set-up a manger scene, but without the three wise men looking on the baby Jesus. Instead we put them and their camels in different parts of the house and move them every few days – to reenact their journey but also to remind us that the Bible is our only real authority about their journey).

There may not have been three wise men at the birth of Jesus; but there were three wise women involved in the events of Jesus' birth:

1. Elizabeth was the wife of Zacharias. Barren into her old age, God granted her a child. She would give birth to John the Baptist, the forerunner of Jesus. In the sixth month of her pregnancy, Mary the mother of Jesus visited Elizabeth and was greatly encouraged by her relative in her own virgin pregnancy.
2. Mary, of course, is the woman at the heart of the story. It would be more accurate to say she was the young girl – probably no more than fifteen or sixteen years of age.
3. The third woman is Anna. A widow who had dedicated herself to fasting and praying in the Temple at Jerusalem, she gave witness to the baby Jesus when He was presented for circumcision eight days after His birth.

These three wise women can teach us many things. I want to look at just three of the things they can teach us, over the next three weeks:

1. Elizabeth will teach us that it is wise to **wait** upon the Lord.
2. Mary will teach us that it is wise to **worship** the Lord.
3. Anna will teach us that it is wise to **witness** the Lord.

Elizabeth waited:



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1. She waited and waited to bear a child, but remained barren, and was well advanced in years and past the usual child-bearing age.
2. After she conceived, she waited another five months before showing herself pregnant with child.

In her long, sad, barrenness, Elizabeth had learned to wait with the Lord. In her pregnancy, she learned to wait for the Lord.

Do you like to wait? *Probably not!* Not for trivial things; nor for more important things. Still, you often find yourself waiting.

God waited some five-thousand years before sending Jesus to be born. He's waited over two-thousand years since He was born. Waiting is part of His program.

The whole of God's creation is described as waiting somewhat impatiently:

Romans 8:19 For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God.

Romans 8:20 For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected *it* in hope;

Romans 8:21 because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

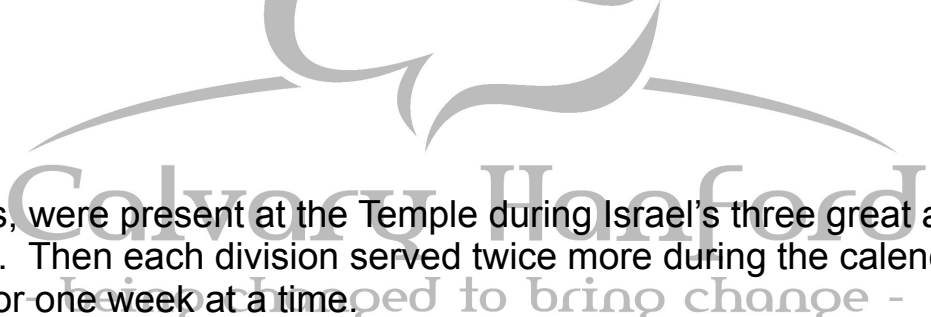
Romans 8:22 For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now.

Waiting can have a positive spiritual impact upon our lives. Let's talk about waiting as we review the circumstances surrounding Elizabeth's conception.

We'll organize our thoughts around two points: #1 You Gain From Waiting With The Lord, and #2 You Gain From Waiting For The Lord.

#1 You Gain From Waiting With The Lord

"Zacharias," served as a "priest." There were in those days about eighteen thousand priests. They were divided into groups, called "divisions," to serve on a rotating basis. All the divisions, all the



priests, were present at the Temple during Israel's three great annual feasts. Then each division served twice more during the calendar year for one week at a time.

“Elizabeth” was the daughter of a priest. It was an honor for her husband – a priest married to the daughter of a priest.

To “burn incense [in] the Temple of the Lord” meant going into the holy place, out of sight of the people and just before the veil of the holy of holies behind which God’s presence dwelt among His people. It was not just a great honor; it was a once-in-a-lifetime moment. Many priests never drew the lot to burn incense; and, once they did, they could never do it again in their lifetime.

What a tremendous, momentous opportunity this was for Zacharias! Elizabeth would be so proud of him. Think of what they both would have missed if they had let bitterness and self-pity at being childless overrule their serving God.

Inside the holy place, Zacharias encountered the angel Gabriel. Here is a reminder you might want to write in the margin of your Bible: When angels tell you what is going to happen, *don’t ask them any questions!*

Gabriel got a little testy. Zacharias was rendered “mute.” The word and subsequent story indicate he was deaf as well.

Zacharias finally emerged – *but couldn’t say anything!* Still, he finished-out his week of service before heading home to write-out the news for Elizabeth.

They had married well; they had a good career; they were believers serving God faithfully... **And** they had a severe, lifelong trial.

It’s hard for us to comprehend the reproach of being childless as a couple, and of being barren as a woman, in the Jewish culture of the first century. It was seen as a judgment from God. You could easily have excused any bitterness, or resentment, that either of them might have held against God.



Instead, they waited with God. Elizabeth was as spiritual in her barrenness as any woman with many children.

- being changed to bring change -

The quality of their long years of waiting is described concisely in verse six:

Luke 1:6 And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.

As a young couple, they waited... And waited... And waited to conceive; but never did. They waited so long that they thought they weren't waiting any longer – that it was too late in life to know the joy of childbirth.

What are you waiting for? What has been withheld from you... Or taken away from you? You can be spiritual in your barrenness or in your loss. **You** can wait with God.

Sure, there is a groaning. All creation groans, after all, waiting for God to be finished with His program. But you can wait with God. You can wait with His abundant, manifold, sufficient grace; you can wait with His mercies.

Let this Christmas be the one you learn the joy of waiting with God. Let your meditations on the birth of Jesus overcome bitterness and resentment that may have built in your heart.

And let it be the one you learn to wait **for** God.

#2 You Gain From Waiting For The Lord

As the story continues, Elizabeth conceives. What do you normally do when you conceive – especially after months or years of trying and trying? *You tell everyone!* You're excited and want to let everyone know.

Not Elizabeth. Look at verse twenty-four:

Luke 1:24 Now after those days his wife Elizabeth conceived; **and she hid herself five months...**

Why did she hide her pregnancy for **five months**? Elizabeth answers that in verse twenty-five:

- *being changed to bring change* -

Luke 1:25 “Thus the Lord has dealt with me, in the days when He looked on *me*, to take away my reproach among people.”

The Lord **dealt** with her. We normally use that phrase in a negative way, saying things like, *Your father will deal with you when he gets home!*

Elizabeth used it in an endearing way. All her long years, through the sorrow and in the pain, God had been dealing with her. They had been **days** in which **He** had **looked on** her. There was never a moment in which He averted His gaze, or weakened His care. He had brought her to this one amazing moment that would forever **take away** [her] **reproach among people**. Elizabeth realized God had His own perfect timing.

The entire Christmas story involves God’s perfect timing. The apostle Paul wrote,

Galatians 4:4 But when the **fulness of the time was come**, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law,

Fulness of the time means in the perfect moment in human history; it means at the very time set by God the Father. It means everything was unfolding just as God had planned.

Elizabeth realized God had a perfect timing; she embraced it. She didn’t know it yet, but God was going to use her and her pregnancy to serve Him. Some miles away, God would dispatch Gabriel to announce to Mary that she, though a virgin, would conceive a child and bring forth the Savior of the world. To encourage that young, teenaged girl in her own reproach, God would give her Elizabeth’s pregnancy as a sign that with God nothing was impossible.

The Father must have asked Elizabeth, then, to remain hidden for five months, for Mary’s sake. Elizabeth obeyed. It may have gone against every womanly instinct in her body to obey... It may have gone against every desire she had to exonerate their family



reproach... But she waited for God, and revealed herself at the perfect time in the greater story.

- being changed to bring change -

When Mary finally came to visit, Elizabeth uttered the first prophetic words of the New Testament. She realized that her own son, John, would play a vital role in the drama. She knew that her pregnancy, and John's birth, could not have come at any other moment.

It may not seem like it to you, but you are part of a greater story. God wants to use you to minister to others; He has a perfect timing in doing so. Your sphere of ministry may be somewhat small – only to a few people, like your own family and friends. It may be a greater sphere – to dozens or hundreds or thousands or more. Though we put the greater value on the greater numbers, God doesn't. The value is in our obedience. God takes our obedience and multiplies it as He sees fit in a grander scheme.

Jesus is Himself the perfect example. No birth could have been more obscure. There is a line in the awful rock opera, *Jesus Christ Superstar*, where Judas asks of Jesus, *Why did you come at such a backward time to such a strange land?* Jesus never traveled very far from home; He never held a public office; He left behind only a handful of confused and scared followers. Yet no life has ever had more impact on the entire human race than His.

This Christmas, learn to wait for God. Make it your heart's desire to walk in [His commandments and ordinances blamelessly](#), so that it might be said of you that you are [righteous](#) before Him. He will use you in His perfect way, in His perfect timing, to influence one or dozens or hundreds or thousands – however He sees fit in His great plan.

Wait... Worship... Witness. May those be your life's themes this Christmas.



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- being changed to bring change -