

On the Edge of Christmas

Luke 1:5-20

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There are many people on the edge of the Christmas event.

We're going to look at a few of them today.

We've heard of John the Baptist. But you may not realize

- John & Jesus were cousins
- Luke 1:36 says that John's mother Elizabeth and Jesus' mother, Mary were cousins

Not only that ...

- John and Jesus were very close in age
- Their mothers were pregnant at the same time.

That being the case, how can John prepare the way for the Lord? Because

- John was a prophet, proclaiming the word of God
- Jesus was a rabbi/teacher/sage, teaching disciples and others

Luke 1:5-20

⁵In the time of Herod king of Judea there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly division of Abijah; his wife Elizabeth was also a descendant of Aaron. ⁶Both of them were righteous in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's commands and decrees blamelessly. ⁷But they were childless because Elizabeth was not able to conceive, and they were both very old.

⁸Once when Zechariah's division was on duty and he was serving as priest before God, ⁹he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to go into the temple of the Lord and burn incense. ¹⁰And when the time for the burning of incense came, all the assembled worshipers were praying outside.

¹¹Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. ¹²When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear. ¹³But 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. ¹⁴He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, ¹⁵for 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. ¹⁶He will bring back many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. ¹⁷And 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."

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

¹⁹The 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.²⁰And 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."

We don't really think of Zechariah, John's father, or Elizabeth, John's mother, as part of the Christmas story.

But they were.

Luke goes on to tell of when Gabriel came to Mary to reveal that she would give birth to Jesus.

One of the first people Mary visits is her cousin Elizabeth.

Luke 1:39-41

³⁹At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, ⁴⁰where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth.⁴¹When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.

So Zechariah & Elizabeth are really part of the Christmas story, even if we think of them as being on the edge of Christmas.

But we see something here we need to learn from ...

BE IN AWE, NOT DOUBT OR DISBELIEF

I am amazed at God.

I am in awe at God.

I see LOTS of wonderful things God has done.

Those are good things!

Grab onto that awe. Don't hold onto disbelief!

Zechariah

- Was a priest
- Served at God's temple
- He saw an angel and, by his reaction, believes it to be an angel from God!

Yet ...

He still didn't believe

The angel was not happy at that ... and I imagine God wasn't either

A couple weeks ago when we dropped off a LOT of food for Thanksgiving Baskets at 360 communities We had varied reactions

- Unbelief – a group of people that size did all this?? Really??

It wasn't just a group of people this size; it was a group of people this size PLUS GOD, which we quickly explained.

To which someone else said

- That's incredible!

We smiled and said, "That's God!"

BE IN AWE, NOT DISBELIEF

Being on the edge of the Christmas event is not a bad place to be, but don't use that as an excuse for disbelief.

But no matter who you are in the Christmas event, it's a reason to get excited!

Luke 1:42-45 we read from Elizabeth ...

⁴²In a loud voice she exclaimed: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! ⁴³But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? ⁴⁴As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. ⁴⁵Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!"

Elizabeth was thrilled. Hardly anyone thinks of her as part of the Christmas event, but she is thrilled to have any role at all!

We see that with another person on the edge of the Christmas event ... Anna.

8 days after Jesus' birth, they take him to the temple to be consecrated for God.

This was done for all Jewish males as commanded in Exodus 13.

While in the temple for the consecration, Mary & Joseph run into Anna.

Luke 2:36-38

³⁶There was also a prophet, Anna, the daughter of Penuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven

years after her marriage, ³⁷ and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. ³⁸ Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.

Anna believed in Jesus ... even though he was only 8 days old!

- That's insight from God
- That's faith!

AND Anna was excited.

She knew what Jesus was on earth for ... and she was thrilled!

Anna was on the edge of the Christmas event but embodied what everyone should behold.

You may ask why we're talking about people on the edge of the Christmas story on this first Sunday in Advent, this first Sunday in December.

You and I are also on the edge of the Christmas event.

Our names aren't in the scriptures ... but the gift of Jesus was given to us!

It was the most incredible gift given in all of history.

WE are recipients of the best Christmas gift!

You and I are on the edge of the Christmas event.

But when we think about people being on the edge of the Christmas event, we should remember at the edge of society today ... people that feel left-out of

- Christmas
- Life

Most people in the US today spend Christmas with family. Some of us spend it with friends – because family doesn't live nearby.

But there are people who spend Christmas alone.

NO ONE goes to the Waffle House for their Christmas dinner by choice.

People go there because they have nowhere else to go.

These people aren't just on the edge of Christmas; they are on the edge of society.

They are on the edge of life.

Imagine the people living in a shelter on Christmas.

No one likes living in a shelter ... it's even more depressing on Christmas – it's another reminder that you don't have a home.

The people there aren't just on the edge of Christmas; they are on the edge of society. They are on the edge of life.

Think about the time period when Jesus was born ...

- The Jews were an occupied people
- They were not in control of their own destiny

- They were conquered
- They wondered if the nation of Israel would ever be whole, would ever be a nation again

That's the setting God chose Jesus to be born into.

God could have chosen during the time of King David or Solomon, when the nation of Israel is mighty and in control.

But in choosing the time for Jesus to be born, God showed that Jesus is meant for the lowliest in society.

As Christians, it is our duty to let these people know

- That they are loved by God
- That Christmas is for them also!

We tend to focus Christmas on our feast and on the presents we get.

But let's remember, it's all about God, and the present he gave.

This Christmas season, we should do everything we can to let everyone know that the gift from God is for them!

We should do everything we can to let everyone know that Christmas is for them!