

**LUKE 1:57-66,80**  
**ST JOHN'S, 24.6.18, 9.30 am**

**INTRODUCTION**

“They say Aslan is on the move – perhaps has already landed,” Mr Beaver says to Peter, Susan, Edmund and Lucy in C S Lewis' The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe<sup>1</sup>. Before long, they begin to see the evidence. In Narnia, it has been “always winter, but never Christmas”, because the White Witch has been in control. But things begin to change. Firstly, Father Christmas appears. Then the snow stops falling, the temperature rises, the sun comes out, the snow melts, flowers begin to bloom, trees come into leaf. Even the Witch's servants recognise the evidence: “This is no thaw. This is *Spring*. What are we to do? Your winter has been destroyed, I tell you! This is Aslan's doing.”<sup>2</sup>

At the beginning of the gospel story, God's people don't yet realise that they've come to the end of a 400-year period of silence from heaven. In our passage this morning, Elizabeth and Zechariah's neighbours and relatives are beginning to see for themselves the evidence that the Lord is on the move . . .

**NINE MONTHS EARLIER . . .**

Something just over nine months before all this, Zechariah was taking his turn as a priest serving in the Temple. We read, *there appeared to him an angel of the Lord . . . [who] said to him, “Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will*

*bear you a son, and you shall call his name John . . . he will be great before the Lord . . . he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb . . . he will go before [the Lord] in the spirit and power of Elijah . . . to make ready for the Lord a people prepared.”* (Luke 1:11-17). But Zechariah didn't believe the angel's message, and so he was told, *“you will be silent and unable to speak until the day that these things take place, because you did not believe my words.”* (Luke 1:20).

We don't know how long it took Zechariah to realise his mistake. Luke writes: *when his time of service was ended, he went to his home. After these days his wife Elizabeth conceived . . .* (Luke 1:23-24). But he still had to suffer the punishment for his failure to believe: Zechariah remained dumb until the events we heard about a few minutes ago.

**THE TIME CAME FOR ELIZABETH TO HAVE HER BABY . . .**

Just as the angel predicted, Elizabeth's baby was a boy. We know that Elizabeth and Zechariah were very devout (1:6); it seems that they were also well-known and popular in their district. Their *neighbours and relatives heard that the Lord had shown great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her* (v 58).

**WHEN THE BABY WAS A WEEK OLD . . .**

. . . it was time to circumcise him and name him. All the neighbours and relatives have gathered. They know how amazing it is that Elizabeth and Zechariah have had a child in their old age, and they've gathered to celebrate and to praise God for his goodness. We can be

fairly certain that over the previous months, Zechariah has put his writing tablet to good use. He must have told Elizabeth what had happened in the Temple. She knows that her son is to be named John. Presumably the neighbours and relatives have also heard at least some of the story. They've gathered to rejoice with the couple, but maybe they've also come because they want to know if Zechariah's story is true. If it is, if this baby is going to be the forerunner of the Messiah, the implications are earth-shaking. They mean that at long last, God is on the move.

The neighbours and relatives seem to want to take control of the circumcision and naming ceremony! Both Elizabeth and Zechariah have to intervene before their neighbours and relatives will accept that the baby's name is John, not Zechariah after his father. As soon as Zechariah writes, *His name is John*, proving that his unbelief has transformed into faith and acceptance, *his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed*, and he starts praising God.

## CONCLUSION

The neighbours and relatives rejoicing is replaced by *fear* – not fear as we might think; rather, they were awe-struck, overawed. The evidence is stacking up – a barren, elderly couple have miraculously produced a baby boy; the father has been struck dumb for nine months or more, and suddenly regains his power of speech; the parents insist on calling the child John, against all family tradition. It all points to Zechariah's story of what the angel told him about the baby's future being true. It's no wonder that *all these things were talked about through all the hill*

*country of Judea* (v 65). But people didn't just gossip about it; they thought about it and asked, “*What then will this child be?*” *For the hand of the Lord was with him* (v 66).

Like Zechariah and Elizabeth's neighbours and relatives, we too need to think about the things we see happening around us. We know that our Lord is active in our world, but we need to have eyes to see, and we need to think about what it might mean. Then, with Zechariah, we can say, *Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people* (Luke 1:68).

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<sup>1</sup> C S Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, (Folio edition, 1998), p 65

<sup>2</sup> *ibid*, p 114