Our message comes from Luke 1:5-25.

Luke 1:5-25 **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. **6**And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. **7**But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and they were both well advanced in years. **8**So it was, that while he was serving as priest before God in the order of his division, **9**according to the custom of the priesthood, his lot fell to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord. **10**And the whole multitude of the people was praying outside at the hour of incense. **11**Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing on the right side of the altar of incense. **12**And when Zacharias saw *him,* he was troubled, and fear fell upon him. **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. **14**And 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 shall drink neither wine nor strong drink. He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother’s womb. **16**And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. **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.”**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.” **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. **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.” **21**And the people waited for Zacharias, and marveled that he lingered so long in the temple. **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. **23**So it was, as soon as the days of his service were completed, that he departed to his own house. **24**Now after those days his wife Elizabeth conceived; and she hid herself five months, saying, **25**“Thus the Lord has dealt with me, in the days when He looked on *me,* to take away my reproach among people.”

 We find ourselves in the period at the end of what is known as the 400 years of God’s silence. We find ourselves with Zacharias. He’s one of those Bible figures that’s easy to criticize. We read his story, see that the angel shut his mouth and think – how faithless. Some are tempted to say, “Well, if that had been me….”

I want to highlight five characteristics about Zacharias (which means the Lord remembers) and Elizabeth (which means the oath of God). Zacharias and Elizabeth are humble, they’re blameless, they’re devoted, they’re blessed, and they’re faithful.

 First, Zacharias and Elizabeth are humble. The priests had risen into a haughty position, living wealthy lives, in the best places of Jerusalem. Zacharias and Elizabeth remained humble. They lived in the hill country. The Bible says that they were righteous before God. We can’t be righteous before God if we aren’t humble before God. These two lived a Matthew 6:33 But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.

Second, they’re blameless. This doesn’t mean they’re sinless. We know that only one Man was sinless. Zacharias and Elizabeth focus on the commandments and ordinances of God. They don’t take advantage of their position. They build on humility. The Greek word used for blameless has the idea of being above reproach – they give the people no reason to stumble. They’re living a 1 Corinthians 8:9 life - But beware lest somehow this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak. When we behave in ways that make others stumble, have doubts, or think sin is OK, we’re not behaving blamelessly… nor humbly.

Third, they’re devoted. They’re not just devoted to God, but to one another, and to the people they serve. In these times, people whispered when a woman was barren – what’s the secret sin? In fact, Zacharias could’ve divorced Elizabeth for being barren – the rules allowed that! But, instead of taking the worldly way, he prayed, she prayed, and they stayed devoted to one another. They prayed that God would give them a child, even after child bearing years had passed.

Fourth, they’re blessed. Zacharias is one of about 20,000 priests serving at that time. There were 24 divisions of priests, each division served for two eight day periods each year. They were chosen at random to burn incense. Burning incense was likely a “once in a lifetime honor”! It was a beautiful ceremony. Two men prepared the coals on the altar. Then Zacharias went in alone. He sprinkled the incense on coals, while the people stood outside and prayed as the scent rose to God. The belief was that the prayers rose with the incense. He was blessed with this opportunity. God blessed his life, Elizabeth’s life, and honored them with this opportunity. Proverbs 16:33 The lot is cast into the lap, But its every decision is from the LORD.

Gabriel delivers God’s good news. Here’s a humble man, blameless before God, devoted to his wife and his God, blessed to be chosen to serve God in this incredible way and, when he receives this Angelic message, his mouth goes into gear before his brain. Have you ever had that problem? You spoke before you thought? I have. It all happened so fast! Zacharias doesn’t have days to think. He has seconds. Even the most devout believer has a worldly side.

Finally, Zacharias and Elizabeth are faithful. Even in the face of barrenness and old age, they’ve continued to pray. Look at verse 13 - But the angel said to him, “Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your prayer **is** heard. It doesn’t say was heard. It says IS heard. They have prayed, even when things look bleak. This is faith. Then, look at verse 23, So it was, as soon as the days of his service were completed, that he departed to his own house. This man has been visited by an angel. He is mute. Verse 62 suggests that he’s deaf as well! But look what he does… he completes his service to the Lord then departs to his own house. As excuses go to miss work, being struck deaf and mute by an angel is pretty good. But he’s faithful to his commitment before God. Do we have that faithful commitment before God?

Let’s finish it. What Zacharias said didn’t surprise God. God graciously gives a sign to help him remember the promise of his not yet conceived son. Verse 24 - Now after those days his wife Elizabeth conceived. The name John means God has been gracious. Closing Zacharias’s mouth humbled him. God sometimes uses sickness and affliction to humble us. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 12:9 And He said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Do we boast in our infirmities? Or do we gripe? It’s our choice.

Humble, blameless, devoted, blessed, and faithful – five characteristics of Zacharias and Elizabeth for us to carry into the Christmas season. Next week, we’ll talk about being God’s vessel. This couple, who had real challenges, had a heart for God and He used them. How might God be using the challenges in our life to draw us closer to Him and prepare us to be a vessel for His message? Consider this as we celebrate the birth of His Son this wonderful season.