

## CHRISTMAS PRESENCE | Zech and Liz: Present to Yearning People | Week 1 | December 2, 2018

**Luke 1:5-25, Rom 12:15, Eph 3:20, Matt 1:23**

**Opening:** We begin a new series in this holiday season, “Christmas Presence”. This Presence, Immanuel—God with us, is as present and perhaps as important as the air we breathe. Join us as we explore the mystery of entering that presence, the presence of Immanuel.

**Context:** Holidays can frazzle us or they can bless us. You probably agreed with that statement without thinking. In fact, the holidays cannot do anything to us. What we choose to think and do around the holidays is what frazzles or blesses. Let’s learn to be a blessing and be blessed.

**Zechariah and Elizabeth:** Read vs. 5-7. This is an introduction of “Zech and Liz”. *What character is revealed?*

Pastor Meyer describes a “big hole” in their lives of not having children. *Given the cultural setting can you imagine their feelings? What might they be feeling at this point of their life?*

**Bereft of God’s Blessing:** Part of the cultural setting was the importance of children. Children were regarded as God’s blessing in the Hebrew culture and not having children was, by implication, an indication that God saw something wrong with you. *What does our culture use as an implication of not being “blessed”; not being fully “OK”?*

**Our “Zech and Liz” Experience:** Pastor Meyer said “.....but it’s hard not to feel envious, bitter, or sad in the face of what seems like others’ blessedness.” *Do you identify with this statement? How do you escape the pull of “not enough, do more” this holiday season and replace it with HOPE and thankfulness?*

**A Metaphor for the Coming Redemption:** Zech and Liz, good people, faithful to God, chosen to do His work and yet there is a yearning that is unfulfilled in their life. It seems undeserved. At their age they have probably lost hope and are saying “that ship has sailed”. But out of this situation comes a repeating theme of the Bible, God is able. There is hope because God is able. ***Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us,*** Eph 3:20

*What do you hope for, a lament to God for unprovided blessing, a yearning in your life that you feel is unfulfilled? Can you speak of it here, now?*

**God Redeems:** Read vs. 8-17. Just as Zech and Liz were chosen to do God’s work, their son will “go on before the Lord in the spirit and power of Elijah”. Zech asks “How can I be sure?” (vs 18). *Can you identify with Zechariah? Consider the circumstances and discuss “What was he thinking”?*

**From the PRESENCE of God:** Gabriel, from the presence of God, brings good news to Zechariah despite Zech's doubting logic (vs. 19). The news is "*immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine*", the son will not only come but he will be John the Baptist, the foreteller of the Savior. Pastor Meyer says this good news: "God is as PRESENT to your yearnings as He was to Liz and Zech's. He's not blind or deaf to what you feel."

*We've looked at three responses: Are you envious and bitter? Have you lost hope--"that ship has sailed"? Are you looking at an answer and asking "How can I be sure"? What's your response?*

**Church as Community:** One role of the church, perhaps the primary role, is to be a community of HOPE for each other. A place where one person's despair can meet another person's reason for hope. A place where sadness or anger or fear can be expressed without recrimination.

***By this all people will know you are my disciples, if you have love for one another. Jn 13:35***  
*How can we be aware of each other's yearnings and be in community around them?*

**God confidence:** As we enter this season we are aware of the HOPE it represents. We can have a confidence that may be unknown to our co-workers or classmates or family because we know a resource beyond ourselves is PRESENT. Pastor Meyer challenged us to be present to them. Tune in, lock on, ask questions and be prepared to pray for them (and with them if appropriate). *Imagine an event coming up on your calendar. Talk about how you might shine "presence" into this gathering. What is your HOPE for this? What is your fear?*

#### **Practice of the Week: Looking for the Presence**

Pastor Meyer encouraged us to "not allow the constant jingle-jangle of this season ahead to dominate your life". Find some places of silence in the next week to reflect on your life and look for the good that God is growing. Imagine sharing that. What keeps you from doing it?

#### **Family Formation: How Can I Be Sure?**

Revisit prayers..... Read the story of Gabriel and Zechariah. Take some time to describe the setting (all alone, honored to enter the holy place, an angel in white magnificence). And then talk about Zechariah's response. Ask if they have a story where they felt God's presence. What was it like? If they don't have a story ask them what they imagine it would be like.

#### **Additional Resources: 25 Quotes about Christmas**

<https://www.crosswalk.com/faith/spiritual-life/inspiring-quotes/25-quotes-about-christ-for-your-christmas.html>

We'd love to hear from you!

If you have thoughts questions, comments, ideas on how to make these study guides more meaningful for you and your group, please let us know.

We also enjoy hearing how God is using these scriptures and study guides in your lives.

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