

**Advent 1: More Hope**  
**Angels Among Us: Do Not Be Afraid**

**Nov 27<sup>th</sup> Sermon – In the Temple with Zechariah**

**Threshold Moment**

Advent is a time of preparation. A time to slow down and prepare for the mystery that is Christmas day. Over the course of the four weeks, we will look at the stories of the winged messengers who visited Zechariah, Mary, Joseph and the Shepherds. We will hear their messages and contemplate what messages we can offer that will fly in the face of a culture of fear and bring more hope, more peace, more joy, and more love to the world.

We begin with an angelic visit to Zechariah. It was just another day at the temple for Zechariah. It was his priestly turn to make sure everything was done properly and in good order. But it turned into something quite different when an angel showed up at the altar.

**Scripture Reading**

*Luke 1: 5-25, 57-65*

**REFLECTION**

This angel visit is reminiscent of another angelic visit in the Hebrew Scriptures. Abraham and Sarah, have a lot in common with Zechariah and Elizabeth. Both couples have important positions in community, they are both getting on in years, and both couples are childless. When angels visit Abraham and Sarah and tell them of their blessing, the birth of a child Isaac, Abraham is stunned. And Sarah laughs at the absurdity of it all. Which feels like a very human reaction to me.

However, Zechariah is so stunned, he blurts out that he doesn't believe it. Elizabeth appears to take it all in stride but remains in quiet seclusion for the first few months of her pregnancy. Perhaps because she worries about the health of her baby and herself, given her age.

Zechariah, we read, is made silent because of his disbelief. He is made mute for the time of his wife's pregnancy, and I like to believe is therefore better able to listen to God and prepare himself for the mystery that is to come.

As December ramps up and the jingly jangly ads start playing on TV. As we're inundated with brighter and brighter lights, more and more glittery and glitzy decorations and the pressure to buy the perfect gifts and spend money to prove our love, We have before us a unique opportunity.

Here, in this space, in this holy place we will take time every week between now and Christmas to slow down, to find some quiet and peace of mind. So we are ready for the miracle to come and rested for the hectic bustle that waits beyond those doors.

Like Elizabeth, today we will have a moment of seclusion from the secular world and like Zechariah we will share this moment in companionable silence.

Instead of talking about how to begin preparing for the birth of the Christ Child, we are going to experience it. First I am going to give you some instructions about the spiritual prayer stations located around the sanctuary. Then, after the instructions I will invite you to move about the stations as you desire and engage with them in silence. If you need to communicate with another person, please do so quietly and with respect to those around you.

If getting up and moving about the sanctuary is not your cup of tea, you are welcome to remain seated. There will be an invitation to prayer and contemplative questions on the PP:

Hope is the thing with feather that perches in the soul  
– and sings the tunes without words – and never stops at all.  
~ Emily Dickinson

In this time of quiet, reflect on this quote and these questions:

*Where do you see More Hope in the World?  
Where do you need More Hope in your World?*

## **Prayer Stations:**

### **PRAY FOR OUR WORLD**

Look over these nativity scenes from around the world. Let them remind you of your connection to all humanity. Say a prayer for places where there is violence and unrest, poverty and injustice.

### **LIGHT A LIGHT**

Light a candle for someone you know who is going through a dark time.  
Light a candle for yourself and consider how you might be a light of hope, peace, joy or love for them this Christmas.

### **WHO ARE YOU IN THE STORY?**

Mary: Bringing a dream to birth  
Joseph: Offering hospitality to those others reject. Having courage to say yes.  
Shepherds: Searching for a great light in a dark sky  
Magi: Bearing gifts, following a star

Angels: Messengers of Good News, Singing Praise  
Animals: Discovering Love in Ordinary Places  
Christ Child: Love in Human Form  
The Stable: A welcoming house for the Holy

**GIFTS FROM THE ANGELS**

Take a paper feather, take some time to pray on what you need more of this season.

More Hope

More Peace

More Joy

More Love

Write your prayer on the feather and hang it on the tree.