DAY 3

LUKE 1:5–10

In 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. Both of them were righteous in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's commands and decrees blamelessly. But they were childless because Elizabeth was not able to conceive, and they were both very old. Once when Zechariah's division was on duty and he was serving as priest before God, he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to go into the temple of the Lord and burn incense. And when the time for the burning of incense came, all the assembled worshipers were praying outside.

How does the story of Jesus—the story of Advent—begin with an older, childless couple named Zechariah and Elizabeth? It's tempting to want to rush past this part of the narrative. We want to get to the angel's announcement, the connection to Mary and to Joseph and the manger, even to John the Baptist in the wilderness, but that has to wait.

These verses remind us that we are reading the beginning of one story and the end of another. It was time: Israel's wait for the work of God to intervene into their story had come. Could it be that the plight of Israel can be seen like mirror image in the story of these two righteous but childless people?

Israel is tired of waiting and so are Elizabeth and Zechariah. Their prayers seem futile, until God shows up with an announcement that will change the trajectory for them all! While we may read hopelessness and despair into these verses, note what the assembled people are doing. Verse 10 says that when Zechariah went in to serve as the priest at his appointed time, "all the assembled worshipers were praying outside."

John Wesley, once said: "God does nothing but by prayer, and everything with it." Imagine for a moment if prayer is what defined our Advent season this year. What kind of conspiracy would it be if the "all the assembled worshipers devoted themselves to prayer? What could God do in our lives in the coming weeks if we committed to prayer in this way?

REFLECT

Consider your own prayer life, that of your family or congregation. How might you use this Advent season to intentionally focus on prayer? What prayers have you been waiting on or have you given up on praying for? In the coming days, try different kinds, styles or types of prayers to pray in a new way. See how God will meet you. Let that be your Advent gift this season.

PRAY

God of all time and space, we join with Elizabeth and Zechariah, Mary and Joseph, as we await the arrival of Jesus during this Advent season of preparation. May my preparations be like those of the assembly gathered with Zechariah, one of prayer and intentionality as I wait, patiently, for you to arrive. Give me courage to come to you honestly and humbly with my authentic prayers, knowing that you are a God who shows up in miraculous ways. Amen.