

## DOCTRINE FOR THE YOUNG

# ZACHARIAS'S DUMBNESS

by the Rev. Lawson M. Smith

Zacharias was a good man. He and his wife Elizabeth were both righteous before God, “walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless” (Luke 1:6). But he couldn't quite believe the news that the angle Gabriel came to bring him. So the angel had to make him unable to speak, until the time when the wonderful news came true. It might seem as though the Lord was punishing Zacharias, but really the Lord does not punish. Zacharias needed to think about what the Lord had said to him, and about whether it could come true. By being unable to speak, Zacharias had more time to think quietly to himself about what the Lord was going to do.

It's easy to understand why Zacharias could not believe what the angel had said to him. Zacharias and Elizabeth had been praying to the Lord to give them a child all their lives, and now they were old. Zacharias certainly was not expecting the angel to come, when suddenly he appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. And then the angel told him the wonderful news, that he and Elizabeth were finally going to have a baby! And not only that, but this baby would be filled with the Holy Spirit, and would be sent to prepare the way for the Lord Himself to come! It was too good to be true. Zacharias could not believe it. It was as though he could not say to himself, or to the Lord, that it was really going to happen.

Can we think of something that might happen to us, that might seem too good to be true? Does it sometimes seem too good to be true that we might go to heaven some day? We can hardly believe it. And when we come into heaven, the Lord comes to us in a new way, just as in the story, the Lord was about to come into the world.

Why couldn't Zacharias believe the angel's glad tidings? It was because he thought he was too old. He was thinking about himself, and he thought he couldn't have a baby. He felt too tired, and too weak, and too old to have a baby. But what did the angel say? “I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, and who was sent [by the Lord] to...bring you these glad tidings” (Luke 1:19). “Gabriel” means “the Mighty God,” or “God is Mighty.” The Lord had sent him to tell Zacharias this good news. The Lord is not too old, or tired, or weak to do anything. Zacharias might be old, but the Lord was strong enough to enable Zacharias to have a baby.

We sometimes feel too weak, or too tired, or not good enough to go to heaven, or for the Lord to come to us. We certainly don't deserve to go to heaven. So if we think about ourselves, we can feel as though it is too good to be true that we could go there. But the Lord is strong enough to raise us up into heaven, and to enable us to do what is right and good, even though we are weak. The Lord can help us and come to us. As the angel said to Mary, “For with God, nothing shall be impossible” (Luke 1:37).

Now, let's think about Christmas. What might we hope for and pray for? We might think about the presents we hope to give, and the presents we hope to receive. We may hope that other

people will like the presents we give them, and that we will like the presents they give us. But even more than that, we may wish to be happy, happy with our family and with our friends, and to feel contented and peaceful at home. We might pray that we will be thoughtful of our mother and father, and of our brothers and sisters and friends, and that we might think about the Lord, and how wonderful it is that He came into the world.

But this can seem hard. We tend to rush around, trying to get lots of things done. We stay up late, and we don't have a schedule of what to do. We tend to feel tired, and maybe, like Zacharias, we can't believe that Christmas can really come for us, or that the Lord can really be with us as we are supposed to be celebrating His coming.

Then maybe it is good for us to be like Zacharias, and take time out to reflect. We can sit quietly, once a day, and think: "What does the Lord want me to do today, most of all?" We can think of our mother and father, and then of each of our brothers and sisters, and try to plan something to make them happy. If we think of the Lord, and of our family in this way, the Lord will be able to be with us. He will be able to make something marvelous happen, something too good to be true. The Lord will make us and our family happy at Christmas, and we will feel that the Lord has come.

**Texts: Luke 1:5-25, 37**