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Advent Devotional "Zacharias"

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Advent Devotional
December 14, 1997
Zacharias
Luke 1:8-23

Zacharias is a priest, chosen by lot to serve in the temple (8-9) and burn incense. Nothing seems remarkable--he's "performing his priestly service before God in the order of his division, according to the custom of the priestly office." Zacharias is going about his business as if nothing were unusual, as if this were just another day.

Suddenly an angel appears! In the course of everyday life, in the midst of the mundane, everything changes. What was just another day is suddenly something different. Zacharias is afraid. This is the Temple, this is God's house; nothing strange is supposed to happen here!

The childless Zacharias and his wife have prayed for an heir. They are righteous and have lived blamelessly, but God has not given them a child. They have prayed diligently for a long time, this couple now "advanced in years." Surely they still prayed daily for a child, but just as surely those prayers had come to be rote petitions made more from habit than conviction. Zacharias had doubtlessly sent a prayer heavenward that very day. But when he fearfully hears the angel say that their petition had been heard and that a son would in due time arrive, Zacharias falteringly and disbelievingly asks "How shall I know this?"

Zacharias is in the temple by chance. It just happens to be his turn. Then something happens to him. He doesn't expect, and hardly believes, the scene. He is overwhelmed into speechlessness by chance.

Zacharias must have been comfortable with his life. It would have been predictable and safe. He had probably reconciled himself to childlessness and made his peace with the condition. When his turn came to serve in the temple, he would have seen it all as so safe and so predictable. His prayers notwithstanding, nothing would really change. He saw nothing chancy about his life.

It all sounds so familiar. I don't like chance, much less leaving things to it. Everything should be orderly; gambling in any form is a sin. My orderly angel whispers for planning ahead; he almost always over-rules my spontaneous angel, who likes to revel in the moment, to seize the day. What can I learn from Zacharias's experience? Should I become a gambler?

Zacharias wasn't a gambler, but he served a God who seems to be one. God seems to delight in drawing straight with crooked lines. We think we have life all planned out, that we've minimized the contingencies and avoided all the surprises. Then, in what we consider the safest places, God surprises us in what we deem a chance encounter. We just don't realize what a chance God took with us when He gave us free will, and His even greater one when He sent a baby to live among us and call us to Himself. Zacharias turns to me from the angel and asks, "Are you willing to take the same kind of chance, to abandon your contentment and commit yourself to His chancy plan?"

Ray Granada