



The First Sunday of Advent  
Make Ready a People: #MoreHope

**Prelude**

*Lo, How a Rose*

**Gathering**— The angels that appear in the story of Jesus’ birth would have been very comfortable in our world of tweets and hashtags. Their messages were often short and to the point—their favorite line being #DoNotBeAfraid. As we look at the stories of these winged messengers to Zechariah, Mary, Joseph and the Shepherds, we will 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.

**We Light Our Advent Wreath**

*The Miller Bennett Family*

**Reader 1:** There are angels among us that may not meet the eye. There are messages of hope coming from a choir on high, but don’t just look up; for the way God works is to plant more hope right here on earth just like it was with Jesus’ birth.

**Reader 2:** Today, as we light this candle of hope, we commit our lives this Advent to bring more hope to this hurting world. With this light we proclaim the message of the angels, “Do Not Be Afraid.”

**Advent Wreath Prayer**— Holy Living God, Blessed Jesus, Guiding Spirit, alight within us your flame of hope this day. Grant us openness to hear your message. Grant us courage to be your messengers in the world, creating more hope in the midst of fear. Amen.

**A Time of Prayer**—Holy God, in this moment we give thanks for all the ways we experience your presence among us, including in our worship. We give thanks that you offer words and actions that bring hope in the midst of despair. Today we pray

for all those who are longing for signs of hope, and we pray that you might guide us to opportunities where we can be messengers of your hope...

**The Lord's Prayer** (unison)—Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

**We Hear God's Word** *Luke 1:5-25, 57-80 (adapted from The Voice Translation)*

**Narrator:** To understand the life of Jesus, I must first give you some background history, events that occurred when Herod ruled Judea for the Roman Empire. Zachariah was serving as a priest in the temple in Jerusalem those days as his fathers had before him. He was a member of the priestly division of Abijah (a grandson of Aaron who innovated temple practices), and his wife, Elizabeth, was of the priestly lineage of Aaron, Moses' brother. They were good and just people in God's sight, walking with integrity in the Lord's ways and laws. Yet they had this sadness. Due to Elizabeth's infertility, they were childless, and at this time, they were both quite old—well past normal childbearing years.

One day Zachariah was chosen to perform his priestly duties in God's presence, according to the temple's normal schedule and routine. [*Zachariah goes to the altar and Elizabeth stays at the front some distance away*] He had been selected from all the priests by the customary procedure of casting lots for a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to enter the sacred precincts of the temple. There he burned sweet incense, while outside a large crowd of people prayed.

Suddenly Zachariah realized he was not alone: a messenger of the Lord was there with him. The messenger stood just to the right of the altar of incense.

[*Zachariah suddenly notices the messenger and makes a scared face*] Zachariah was shocked and afraid, but the messenger reassured him.

**Messenger:** Zachariah, calm down! Don't be afraid! Zachariah, your prayers have been heard. Your wife is going to have a son, and you will name him John. He will bring you great joy and happiness—and many will share your joy at John's birth.

This son of yours will be a great man in God's sight. He will not drink alcohol in any form; instead of alcoholic spirits, he will be filled with the Holy Spirit from the time he is in his mother's womb. Here is his mission: he will turn many of the children of Israel around to follow the path to the Lord their God. Do you remember

the prophecy about someone to come in the spirit and power of the prophet Elijah; someone who will turn the hearts of the parents back to their children; someone who will turn the hearts of the disobedient to the mind-set of the just and good? Your son is the one who will fulfill this prophecy: he will be the Lord's forerunner, the one who will prepare the people and make them ready for God.

**Zachariah:** How can I be sure of what you're telling me? I am an old man, and my wife is far past the normal age for women to bear children. This is hard to believe!

**Messenger** *[sternly]*: I am Gabriel, the messenger who inhabits God's presence. I was sent here to talk with you and bring you this good news. Because you didn't believe my message, you will not be able to talk—not another word—until you experience the fulfillment of my words.

**Narrator:** Meanwhile the crowd at the temple wondered why Zachariah hadn't come out of the sanctuary yet. It wasn't normal for the priest to be delayed so long. *[Zachariah makes his way down to Elizabeth.]* When at last he came out, he was making signs with his hands to give the blessing, but he couldn't speak *[Zachariah makes erratic hand-waving signals, trying to tell them what happened]*. They realized he had seen some sort of vision. When his time on duty at the temple came to an end, he went back home to his wife. Shortly after his return, Elizabeth became pregnant. She avoided public contact for the next five months.

**Elizabeth:** I have lived with the disgrace of being barren for all these years. Now God has looked on me with favor. When I go out in public with my baby, I will not be disgraced any longer.

**Narrator:** When the time was right, Elizabeth gave birth to a son. News about the Lord's special kindness to her had spread through her extended family and the community. Everyone shared her joy, for after all these years of infertility, she had a son! As was customary, eight days after the baby's birth the time came for his circumcision and naming. Everyone assumed he would be named Zachariah, like his father.

**Elizabeth** *[disagreeing]*: No. We will name him John.

**Narrator:** But the people protested that the name John was nowhere to be found in their family. So they asked Zachariah what he wanted the baby to be named. He motioned for a tablet, and he wrote, "His name is John."

Everyone was shocked by this breach of family custom. They were even more surprised when, at that moment, Zachariah was able to talk again, and he shouted out praises to God. A sense of reverence spread through the whole community.

In fact, this story was spread throughout the hilly countryside of Judea. People were certain that God's hand was on this child, and they wondered what sort of person John would turn out to be when he became a man.

When Zachariah's voice was restored to him, he sang from the fullness of the Spirit a prophetic blessing.

**Scripture Song**

*Surely the Presence, #131*

*Surely the presence of the Lord is in this place  
I can feel God's mighty power and God's grace.  
I can hear the brush of angel's wings,  
I see glory on each face;  
Surely the presence of the Lord is in this place.*

**Meditation**

*#MoreHope*

**Hymn**

*Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus, #153*

**We Respond to God's Word with Our Giving**

**Invitation**—The hope we know in Christ Jesus can drive away our despair. May the gives we bring this day carry a message of hope to all those our ministry touches. We thanksgiving let us bring our gifts to God.

**November Benevolence**—Horizon House

**Doxology**

**We Give Thanks**—God of peace and possibility, we offer these gifts so that they may be transformed into your good news for the sake of the world.  
Amen.

**Hymn**

*Hark! The Herald Angels Sing, #185*

**Benediction**—As you go forth into the world this week, find ways to carry the message of hope to those you meet. Carry in your hearts the message the angels proclaimed: Do not be afraid! Do not be afraid! Do not be afraid! Amen.

**Postlude**

*Postlude in C*