



# The Meaning of Christmas

## Hope... When Hope Seems Lost

### Icebreaker

Do you open Christmas presents on Christmas Eve, or Christmas morning? Why?

### Context

It is easy to take for granted the important theological truths found in the Christmas stories found in the Gospels. We hear most of them year after year, that our familiarity “tricks” us into thinking we’ve heard it all before.

In this week’s sermon, Pastor Jim is going to do a “big picture” overview of the Christmas story. In our lesson, we are going to look at Zechariah and Elizabeth and the picture of God breaking through to his people when it appeared that there was no hope. While we may not see God at work, or perhaps we think heaven has been shut and God has forgotten us, the story of Zechariah and Elizabeth reminds us that our current circumstances are not the final story of God’s work.

Read Luke 2:5-17.

### Discuss

1. Malachi was written about 460 BC, while the account we see in our passage today occurred at approximately 1 BC. **What is the significance of God “not speaking” to Israel for 400 years? Do you think most people had given up hope after not hearing God speak for 400 years?**
2. Verse 6 is an assessment of the spiritual condition of Zechariah and Elizabeth. **What are some Bible verses that tell us God knows our hearts? Read 1 Samuel 16:7. Why is it important that our conduct (the way we live) starts from the inside out?**
3. **How is Zechariah and Elizabeth’s being childless like Israel’s situation of not hearing from God for 400 years?**
4. Read verse 13. **What prayer of John do you think the angel is referring to that is being answered?**
5. **Why was Zechariah afraid?**
6. The name “John” means “God is gracious.” **According to verses 15-17, how does John fulfill that description of God being gracious?**



7. Read Matthew 3:1-12. **What kind of preaching do you think John did according to verse 2? Why is it important that people hear a clear call to repentance from sin?**
8. In the Matthew passage cited above, **how did John prepare the way for Jesus' ministry?**

## Next Steps

Read Psalm 139:23. Let this verse become a regular part of your time with the Lord. Be sensitive to God searching your heart and allowing him to reveal who you really are. While our actions may represent the "fruit" of our lives, we all know of examples who can play a role and do actions that appear very godly, but behind the scenes their heart is far from God. Regularly allowing the Holy Spirit to shine the light of truth as to who we really are will help us keep a right view of who we are based on our actions, motives, and character.

John the Baptist's purpose was to prepare the way for the first coming of the Lord. As followers of Christ, we should be about the task of preparing people for the second coming of Christ. Just like John, we must invite people to repentance. We must remember that there is a judgment for those who die in their sins. This truth should spur us on to tell others about what Jesus did on the cross for sin.

