

Sermon Title: **Series Characters of Christmas 1 – Zacharias and Elizabeth**

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Vessel: Russ LaFlamme

Scripture Reference: **Luke 1:5-23**

Thesis: **Zacharias and Elizabeth found new Hope in the power of God;**

Purpose: **Today, we will learn how to experience new Hope in the power of God in our lives.**

Key Word: **“Hope”**

Key Points: **#1 The Hope of Zach and Liz**
 #2 Where Hope is From
 #3 Jesus, Where Our Hope is Found

I) Introduction:

Scripture Reading is: **Luke 1:5-23**

A) The Setting:

1) **As we begin with the first Sunday of Advent we will start a series on the Characters of Christmas.**

- (a) Our first two Characters are Zacharias or Zachariah in some translations and his wife Elizabeth.
- (b) We will also tie each of our characters with one of the Advent candles and this week we have the candle of Hope.

2) **What is Hope?**

- (a) Why do we need it?
- (b) And how do we find it?

3) **Hope is defined in Webster's Dictionary¹ as:**

- (a) a feeling that what is wanted will happen;
- (b) a desire accompanied by expectation.

4) **Sometimes the best way to understand something is to understand its opposite.**

- (a) The opposite of Hope is Despair.
- (b) **Psalm 42:5** explains Hope:
- (c) **“Why, my soul, are you downcast?
Why so disturbed within me?
Put your hope in God,
for I will yet praise him,
my Savior and my God.”**

5) **There is an old Arab parable that says:**

- (a) **“All sunshine and no rain makes a desert.”**
- (b) If you never have any down times, dark times, gloomy times in your life you'll be dried up.
- (c) You'll have no depth to yourself, no maturity. It takes good times and bad times to make a mature person.
- (d) Life is a mixture of pain and pleasure, of victory and defeat, of success and failure, of mountain tops and valleys.

6) **Yet, without HOPE there is only despair.**

- (a) There is nothing to look forward to except the daily disappointments of life.
- (b) Bills to pay with too little paycheck.
- (c) Furnace in need of repair.
- (d) A doctor's terminal diagnosis.
- (e) Divorce or job loss
- (f) There is no end to situations we must face.

7) **But we will see that Zach and Liz were people of hope.**

- (a) OR were they . . . let's see as . . .
- (b) **We pick up our story here with our scripture reading for today in Luke 1:5-23.**

B) *Sermon Prayer*

C) (The Hook)

1) **Illustration: Hope motivates²**

- (a) Hope motivates us to keep going and not give up.
- (b) Without hope we don't want to do anything.
- (c) **There was a Peanut's cartoon once:**
 - (i) Lucy and Linus were sitting in front of the television set when Lucy said to Linus, "Go get me a glass of water."
 - (ii) Linus looked surprised, "Why should I do anything for you? You never do anything for me."
 - (iii) "On your 75th birthday," Lucy promised, "I'll bake you a cake."
 - (iv) Linus got up, headed to the kitchen and said, "Life is more pleasant when you have something to look forward to."

2) **Hope motivates us and inspires us to keep going when life gets tough.**

- (a) When life has got you down we have to have hope that there are better days coming.
- (b) This gives us the strength to go on and know that there is a light at the end of the tunnel.

3) **Illustration: CAN YOU SEE THE LAND?³**

- (a) It was a fog-shrouded morning, July 4, 1952, when a young woman named Florence Chadwick waded into the water off Catalina Island.
- (b) She intended to swim the channel from the island to the California coast.
- (c) Long-distance swimming was not new to her; she had been the first woman to swim the English Channel in both directions.
- (d) **The water was numbingly cold that day.**
 - (i) The fog was so thick she could hardly see the boats in her party.
 - (ii) Several times sharks had to be driven away with rifle fire.
 - (iii) She swam more than 15 hours before she asked to be taken out of the water.
 - (iv) Her trainer tried to encourage her to swim on since they were so close to land, but when Florence looked, all she saw was fog; so she quit. . . **only one-mile from her goal.**
- (e) **Later she said, "I'm not excusing myself, but if I could have seen the land I might have made it."**
 - (i) It wasn't the cold or fear or exhaustion that caused Florence Chadwick to fail.
 - (ii) It was the fog.
- (f) **Many times we too fail, not because we're afraid or because of the peer pressure or because of anything other than the fact that we lose sight of the goal.**
 - (i) Maybe that's why Paul said, "**I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus**" (Philippians 3:14).
 - (ii) Two months after her failure, Florence Chadwick walked off the same beach into the same channel and swam the distance, setting a new speed record, because she could see the land.

4) **Hope helps us to see the land.**

2 Text Illustration shared by D. Greg Ebie, sermoncentral.com, January 2004

3 Illustration from Joel Smith, sermoncentral.com May 2002

TS: **Let us begin our study this morning by looking at . . .**

II) Body: (Key Points)

A) Key Point #1: **The Hope of Zach and Liz**

- 1) **Zachariah was a priest and it was his groups turn to serve in the temple.**
 - (a) By casting lots, a sort of picking straws if you will,
 - (b) Zach was chosen to be the priest to enter the Holy of Holies to offer the prayers for his people.
- 2) **This was the Hope of every priest.**
 - (a) For it only happened once in a life time for some of the priests.
 - (b) You were not guaranteed that your name would be drawn.
 - (c) Thus it was a great honor for Zachariah to be granted this privilege.
- 3) **It was while he was performing his priestly duty that the angel Gabriel appeared to him.**
 - (a) Terrified that he must have done something wrong, Gabriel put his fears to rest.
 - (b) Then told him that his hope of having a son was still to come.
- 4) **This was the hope of every Jewish couple to have a male child to carry on your lineage.**
 - (a) For Zachariah and Elizabeth they were now in their senior years and beyond the age of child bearing.
 - (b) And yet, with God nothing is impossible and the angel Gabriel told them that God had not forgotten them.
- 5) **Their son was to be a prophet who would prepare people for the coming of the Messiah, the Savior of their people.**
 - (a) John would announce the coming of the one who could free them from the grave so that they could live eternally with God.
 - (b) Zach and Liz did not fully understand this; but John was announcing the Hope of Israel.
- 6) **But Zach did not believe the angel and thus to prove that it was true the angel Gabriel struck him mute; no voice to share the good news until it came to happen.**
- 7) **Imagine their surprise when Liz became pregnant . . .**
 - (a) It says she went into seclusion for the first 5 months.
 - (b) Maybe it was the morning sickness or maybe it was just being careful.
 - (c) Or just being tired from having a child late in life.

TS: **But this would lead to . . .**

B) Key Point #2: **The Hope of Israel**

- 1) **Israel was waiting for the one who would deliver them out of bondage.**
 - (a) The problem is that the Israelites took this to mean the Roman Empire.
 - (b) What they failed to realize is that there was a much more formidable enemy.
- 2) **That enemy was SIN which kept them from a real relationship with God.**
 - (a) Because of Adam and Eve we are all born sinners and in need of a Savior.
 - (b) But we are in need of one who could forgive our sins and set us free from its bondage and sentence of death.
- 3) **The Romans could only end this life;**
 - (a) But SIN was keeping them from the life eternal which is the life after this one.
 - (b) SIN separates us from our Holy God.
 - (c) The Mosaic covenant says that in order to be acceptable to God we had to be perfect without sin.
 - (d) God gave them the Ten Commandments, (only Ten) that they had to keep.
 - (e) Yet, this only served to show that they and we are incapable of keeping them perfectly.
- 4) **Therefore, there was a need for one who could rescue us from SIN.**

- (a) This was the Hope of Israel.
- (b) To be set free from that which is really the problem.
- 5) **The problem with the Israelites is that like us many, then did not understand the extent of their need.**
 - (a) They only thought that if God would set them free from their earthly oppressors,
 - (b) That they would be able to have the relationship with God as His people did before.
- 6) **They should have studied their history a little more as it only showed that time and again when they had peace in their land they went astray.**
 - (a) They needed more than rules to live by.
 - (b) They needed one who could come and dwell within them to help them do what is right.
 - (c) One who would transform them into the likeness of God.

TS: **And this leads us to . . .**

C) Key Point #3: **Jesus, Where Our Hope is Found**

- 1) **Most people understand hope as wishful thinking, as in "I hope something will happen;" this is not what the Bible means by hope.**
 - (a) The biblical definition of *hope* is "confident expectation."
 - (b) Hope is a firm assurance regarding things that are unclear and unknown ([Romans 8:24-25](#); [Hebrews 11:1,7](#)).
 - (c) Hope is a fundamental component of the life of the righteous ([Proverbs 23:18](#)).
 - (d) Without hope, life loses its meaning ([Lamentations 3:18](#); [Job 7:6](#)) and in death there is no hope ([Isaiah 38:18](#); [Job 17:15](#)).
 - (e) The righteous who trust or put their hope in God will be helped ([Psalm 28:7](#)), and they will not be confounded, put to shame, or disappointed ([Isaiah 49:23](#)).
 - (f) The righteous, who have this trustful hope in God, have a general confidence in God's protection and help ([Jeremiah 29:11](#)) and are free from fear and anxiety ([Psalm 46:2-3](#)).
- 2) **The New Testament idea of hope is the recognition that in Christ is found the fulfillment of the Old Testament promises** ([Matthew 12:21](#), [1 Peter 1:3](#)).
 - (a) Christian hope is rooted in faith in the divine salvation in Christ ([Galatians 5:5](#)).
 - (b) Hope of Christians is brought into being through the presence of the promised Holy Spirit ([Romans 8:24-25](#)).
 - (c) It is the future hope of the resurrection of the dead ([Acts 23:6](#)), the promises given to Israel ([Acts 26:6-7](#)), the redemption of the body and of the whole creation ([Romans 8:23-25](#)), eternal glory ([Colossians 1:27](#)), eternal life and the inheritance of the saints ([Titus 3:5-7](#)), the return of Christ ([Titus 2:11-14](#)), transformation into the likeness of Christ ([1 John 3:2-3](#)), the salvation of God ([1 Timothy 4:10](#)) or simply Christ Himself ([1 Timothy 1:1](#)).
- 3) **The certainty of this blessed future is guaranteed through the indwelling of the Spirit** ([Romans 8:23-25](#)), Christ in us ([Colossians 1:27](#)), and the resurrection of Christ ([Acts 2:26](#)).
 - (a) Hope is produced by endurance through suffering ([Romans 5:2-5](#)) and is the inspiration behind endurance ([1 Thessalonians 1:3](#) [Hebrews 6:11](#)).
 - (b) Those who hope in Christ will see Christ exalted in life and in death ([Philippians 1:20](#)).
 - (c) Trustworthy promises from God give us hope ([Hebrews 6:18-19](#)), and we may boast in this hope ([Hebrews 3:6](#)) and exhibit great boldness in our faith ([2 Corinthians 3:12](#)).
 - (d) **By contrast, those who do not place their trust in God are said to be without hope** ([Ephesians 2:12](#), [1 Thessalonians 4:13](#)).

- 4) **Along with faith and love, hope is an enduring virtue of the Christian life** (1 Corinthians 13:13), **and love springs from hope** (Colossians 1:4-5).
- (a) Hope produces joy and peace in believers through the power of the Spirit (Romans 12:12; 15:13).
- (b) Paul attributes his calling to be an apostle to the hope of eternal glory (Titus 1:1-2).
- (c) Hope in the return of Christ is the basis for believers to purify themselves in this life (Titus 2:11-14, 1 John 3:3).

TS: **So . . .**

III) Conclusion (Life Application)

- A) **I know I just went through a lot of stuff**
- 1) But if you want to learn more go to our Church Website and read this message again and look up all the scripture references.
 - 2) In fact, just doing a word study on the word "HOPE" will lead you to an eye opening understanding that Jesus is our ONLY Hope.
- B) **Do you have a steadfast unshakable hope in God?**
- 1) Hope not only opens the door to receive a touch from God, hope also moves you through the door.
 - 2) Like Linus, when you have hope you're willing to get up and do something.
- C) **Jesus is our Hope for He provided a way for us to have all our sins forgiven.**
- 1) But we have to ask Him to be the Lord, the BOSS of our life.
 - 2) We have to be willing to admit that we are sinners.
- D) **For God's word teaches us that "All have sinned and fall short of the Glory of God."** (Romans 3:23)
- 1) To get right with God is to put our HOPE in Him.
 - 2) Not "*I sure hope this happens.*" but with the promise of God that God will lead us home.
- E) **There is a popular Hymn by the name of "The Solid Rock"; the first and last verses say it all.**
- 1) **My Hope is built on nothing less than Jesus blood and righteousness.**
 - (a) I dare not trust the sweetest frame, but wholly lean on Jesus name.
 - (b) On Christ, the solid rock I stand, All other ground is sinking sand.
 - 2) **When He shall come with trumpet sound, O may I then in Him be found.**
 - (a) Dressed in His righteousness alone, faultless to stand before the throne.
 - (b) On Christ, the solid rock I stand, All other ground is sinking sand.
 - 3) **Have you placed your hope in Jesus?**
 - (a) Like the Psalmist says, "Put your Hope in God."
 - (b) Jesus will never fail you.