

"How can I know this?" Luke chapter 1 verse 18

These are the words of Zechariah, a priest in Judea and the father of John the baptist. John was an unexpected child. Zechariah and his wife Elizabeth were getting on a bit and were unable to have children. Then an angel appeared to Zechariah to announce the birth of John.

"How can I know this?" says Zechariah. Or, in other words, "Prove it."

When one is a priest, "righteous in God's sight", who presumably believes in angels, faced with a supernatural heavenly being who foretells something that seems impossible, "How can I know this?" is possibly not the best response. You can understand Zechariah, of course. He and Elizabeth had doubtless tried for a child for many years without success and had finally come to the conclusion that it was not to be, and found other ways to make their lives fruitful. And although they had lived godly and productive lives, they probably always lived with the sadness of not having conceived.

But people having children in their old age after being infertile all their lives seems to be something of a recurring theme in the bible. Zechariah would certainly know of a few Old Testament examples. So we can forgive Gabriel for concluding that perhaps the old man should have simply taken him at his word. Gabriel must have looked pretty impressive, because when he saw him Zechariah was "terrified and overcome with fear", so Gabriel had a point in simply pointing out that, apart from anything else, his own presence should be proof enough.

Sometimes we have to come to the point when we stop demanding proof. The journey we are on with God is one we walk by faith and not by sight. It's true that there are certain external and internal evidences that are presented to us that help us to choose faith, but nevertheless, we are expected to take God at his word. If we don't, we have nothing to say.

There are times when God gives us prior notice about something that may come about in the future, something, perhaps, that seems impossible to us. We may be thrilled, but do we have the courage to tell other people about it? If we don't then we will be silent until it comes about. Then we might look a bit pathetic having to say "Well, I knew about this all along."

It was unbelief that silenced Zechariah. We cannot speak about something that we do not believe in, and if we continually demand proof after we have been given enough evidence to believe then we will neither come to faith in the first place nor go far in it if we do.

Prayer.

Father, you don't just work in the past and in the present, but in the future, too. You have plans for my own future and the future of the world, and you are not silent about these things. Please let me have the courage to speak about the things you reveal to me about what you are going to do, even if they seem impossible. Thank you that your marvelous plans always come to be. In Jesus' name, amen.

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