

New Revised Standard Version	The Message	Good News Translation
<p><sup>5</sup>In the days of King Herod of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly order of Abijah. His wife was a descendant of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. <sup>6</sup>Both of them were righteous before God, living blamelessly according to all the commandments and regulations of the Lord. <sup>7</sup>But they had no children, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were getting on in years.</p> <p><sup>8</sup>Once when he was serving as priest before God and his section was on duty, <sup>9</sup>he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to enter the sanctuary of the Lord and offer incense. <sup>10</sup>Now at the time of the incense offering, the whole assembly of the people was praying outside.</p> <p><sup>11</sup>Then there appeared to him an angel of the Lord, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. <sup>12</sup>When Zechariah saw him, he was terrified; and fear overwhelmed him. <sup>13</sup>But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will name him John. <sup>14</sup>You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth,</p> <p><sup>15</sup>for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He must never drink wine or strong drink; even before his birth he will be filled with the Holy Spirit. <sup>16</sup>He will turn many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. <sup>17</sup>With the spirit and</p>	<p><sup>5-7</sup>During the rule of Herod, King of Judea, there was a priest assigned service in the regiment of Abijah. His name was Zachariah. His wife was descended from the daughters of Aaron. Her name was Elizabeth. Together they lived honorably before God, careful in keeping to the ways of the commandments and enjoying a clear conscience before God. But they were childless because Elizabeth could never conceive, and now they were quite old.</p> <p><sup>8-10</sup>It so happened that as Zachariah was carrying out his priestly duties before God, working the shift assigned to his regiment, it came his one turn in life to enter the sanctuary of God and burn incense. The congregation was gathered and praying outside the Temple at the hour of the incense offering.</p> <p><sup>11-14</sup>Unannounced, an angel of God appeared just to the right of the altar of incense. Zachariah was paralyzed in fear. But the angel reassured him, "Don't fear, Zachariah. Your prayer has been heard. Elizabeth, your wife, will bear a son by you. You are to name him John. You're going to leap like a gazelle for joy, and not only you – many will delight in his birth.</p> <p><sup>15-17</sup>He'll achieve great stature with God. He'll drink neither wine nor beer. He'll be filled with the Holy Spirit from the moment he leaves his mother's womb. He will turn many sons and daughters of Israel back to their God. He will</p>	<p><sup>5</sup>During the time when Herod was king of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly order of Abijah. His wife's name was Elizabeth; she also belonged to a priestly family. <sup>6</sup>They both lived good lives in God's sight and obeyed fully all the Lord's laws and commands. <sup>7</sup>They had no children because Elizabeth could not have any, and she and Zechariah were both very old.</p> <p><sup>8</sup>One day Zechariah was doing his work as a priest in the Temple, taking his turn in the daily service. <sup>9</sup>According to the custom followed by the priests, he was chosen by lot to burn incense on the altar. So he went into the Temple of the Lord, <sup>10</sup>while the crowd of people outside prayed during the hour when the incense was burned.</p> <p><sup>11</sup>An angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar where the incense was burned. <sup>12</sup>When Zechariah saw him, he was alarmed and felt afraid. <sup>13</sup>But the angel said to him, "Don't be afraid, Zechariah! God has heard your prayer, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son. You are to name him John. <sup>14</sup>How glad and happy you will be, and how happy many others will be when he is born!</p> <p><sup>15</sup>John will be great in the Lord's sight. He must not drink any wine or strong drink. From his very birth he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, <sup>16</sup>and he will bring back many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. <sup>17</sup>He will go ahead</p>

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<p>power of Elijah he will go before him, to turn the hearts of parents to their children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”</p> <p><sup>18</sup>Zachariah said to the angel, “How will I know that this is so? For I am an old man, and my wife is getting on in years.” <sup>19</sup>The angel replied, “I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news. <sup>20</sup>But now, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time, you will become mute, unable to speak, until the day these things occur.”</p> <p><sup>21</sup> Meanwhile the people were waiting for Zechariah, and wondered at his delay in the sanctuary. <sup>22</sup> When he did come out, he could not speak to them, and they realized that he had seen a vision in the sanctuary. He kept motioning to them and remained unable to speak. <sup>23</sup> When his time of service was ended, he went to his home.</p> <p><sup>24</sup>After those days his wife Elizabeth conceived, and for five months she remained in seclusion. She said, <sup>25</sup> This is what the Lord has done for me when he looked favorably on me and took away the disgrace I have endured among my people.”</p>	<p>herald God’s arrival in the style and strength of Elijah, soften the hearts of parents to children, and kindle devout understanding among hardened skeptics – he’ll get the people ready for God.”</p> <p><sup>18-20</sup>Zachariah said to the angel, “Do you expect me to believe this? I’m an old man and my wife is an old woman.” But the angel said, “I am Gabriel, the sentinel of God, sent especially to bring you this glad news. But because you won’t believe me, you’ll be unable to say a word until the day of your son’s birth. Every word I’ve spoken to you will come true on time—<i>God’s</i> time.”</p> <p><sup>21-23</sup>Meanwhile, the congregation waiting for Zachariah was getting restless, wondering what was keeping him so long in the sanctuary. When he came out and couldn’t speak, they knew he had seen a vision. He continued speechless and had to use sign language with the people. When the course of his priestly assignment was completed, he went back home.</p> <p><sup>24-25</sup>It wasn’t long before his wife, Elizabeth, conceived. She went off by herself for five months, relishing her pregnancy. “So, this is how God acts to remedy my unfortunate condition!” she said.</p>	<p>of the Lord, strong and mighty like the prophet Elijah. He will bring fathers and children together again; he will turn disobedient people back to the way of thinking of the righteous; he will get the Lord's people ready for him.”</p> <p><sup>18</sup>Zachariah said to the angel, “How shall I know if this is so? I am an old man, and my wife is old also.” <sup>19</sup>I am Gabriel,” the angel answered. “I stand in the presence of God, who sent me to speak to you and tell you this good news. <sup>20</sup>But you have not believed my message, which will come true at the right time. Because you have not believed, you will be unable to speak; you will remain silent until the day my promise to you comes true.”</p> <p><sup>21</sup> In the meantime the people were waiting for Zechariah and wondering why he was spending such a long time in the Temple. <sup>22</sup> When he came out, he could not speak to them, and so they knew that he had seen a vision in the Temple. Unable to say a word, he made signs to them with his hands. <sup>23</sup> When his period of service in the Temple was over, Zechariah went back home.</p> <p><sup>24</sup>Some time later his wife Elizabeth became pregnant and did not leave the house for five months. <sup>25</sup> “Now at last the Lord has helped me,” she said. “He has taken away my public disgrace!”</p>

Background: Here a Herod, There a Herod, Everywhere a Herod Herod...

(Adapted from [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Herod\\_the\\_Great](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Herod_the_Great))

**Herod** (74/73 BCE-4 BCE), also known as **Herod the Great** and **Herod I**, was a client king of Rome in of Judea (the Herodian kingdom). Scholars describe him as "a madman who murdered his own family and a great many rabbis", "the evil genius of the Judean nation", "prepared to commit any crime in order to gratify his unbounded ambition", and "the greatest builder in Jewish history". He is known for his colossal building projects throughout Judea, including his expansion of the Second Temple in Jerusalem (Herod's Temple), the construction of the port at Caesarea Maritima, and the fortresses at Masada and Herodium. Vital details of his life are recorded in the works of Josephus. Herod appears in the New Testament as the ruler of Judea at the time of the birth of Jesus when he orders the Massacre of the Innocents. Upon Herod's death, the Romans divided his kingdom among three of his sons and his sister – Archelaus became ethnarch of the tetrarchy of Judea, Herod Antipas became tetrarch of Galilee and Peraea, Philip became tetrarch of territories east of the Jordan, and Salome I was given a toparchy including the cities of Jabneh, Ashdod, Phasaelis.

(From various online dictionaries)

- **Ethnarch:** Ruler of a an ethnic group or homogeneous kingdom.
- **Tetrach:** Ruler of a principality; originally the ruler of one-quarter of a region or province.
- **Toparch:** Ruler of a district within a province.

(From <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Herod>)

**Herod** is a name used of several kings belonging to the Herodian Dynasty of the Roman province of Judaea:

- **Herod the Great** (c. 74–4 BC), client king of Judea who rebuilt the Second Temple (in Jerusalem) into Herod's Temple
- **Herod Archelaus** (23 BC–c. AD 18), ethnarch of Samaria, Judea, and Idumea
- **Herod Antipas** (20 BC–c. AD 40), tetrarch of Galilee and Peraea, called "Herod the Tetrarch" or "Herod" in the New Testament, and described as ordering John the Baptist's death and mocking Jesus
- **Herod II** (c. 27 BC–33 AD), sometimes called Herod Philip I, father of Salome
- **Philip the Tetrarch** (4 BC–AD 34), sometimes called Herod Philip II, tetrarch of Iturea and Trachonitis
- **Herod Agrippa** (c. 10 BC–AD 44), client king of Judaea, called "King Herod" or "Herod" in Acts 12 of the New Testament
- **Herod of Chalcis** (AD 41–48), also known as Herod III, king of Chalcis
- **Herod Agrippa II** (AD 27–100), tetrarch of Chalcis who was described in Acts of the Apostles as "King Agrippa" before whom Paul of Tarsus defended himself

1. Verses 5-7: Why does Luke mention Herod of Judea? Why does he give the parentage of Zechariah and Elizabeth? What additional information does Luke give about them? Why?
2. Verses 8-10: What was Zechariah doing in the temple? How was he chosen to be there? Why was he doing what he was doing? Who was with him at the time?
3. Verses 11-14: Who appeared to Zechariah? What was Zechariah's reaction? How might you have reacted?

(From <http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/abijah.html>): Chief priest Abijah – a descendant of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, a chief of one of the twenty-four orders into which the priesthood was divided by David (1 Chr. 24:10). The order of Abijah was one of those which did not return from the Captivity).

## Luke 1:5-25

## Take hold of God's favor and put away your disgrace

4. What does the angel first say to Zechariah? Why? What news does the angel give to Zechariah?
5. Why does the angel say to name the baby John? Why?
6. Verses 14b-17: What impact will John have upon humanity? What will empower him to have such an impact?
7. Consider the following from verse 17 in the three translations: "...he will...turn the hearts of parents to their children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." "He will... soften the hearts of parents to children, and kindle devout understanding among hardened skeptics – he'll get the people ready for God." "He will bring fathers and children together again; he will turn disobedient people back to the way of thinking of the righteous; he will get the Lord's people ready for him." How might these things take place, i.e., what activities would serve as proof that they have taken place? From what you know of the life of John, did these activities take place?
8. Verses 18-20: What is Zechariah's reaction to the angel's announcement? Which part of the announcement – about Elizabeth or about John – does Zechariah doubt? Is Zechariah's reaction reasonable?
9. How does the angel respond to Zechariah's incredulity? What does the angel say about himself that had not been mentioned before? If the angel had said these things when he first appeared, do you think Zechariah might have reacted differently? Is the angel's response fitting, given Zechariah's situation in life? What, if anything, does this say about what might be called angelic volition? What, if anything, does this say about angelic personalities?
10. Verses 21-23: What were the people outside the sanctuary doing? Who might be included in this group? How did Zechariah communicate with them? Do you think his communications were clear, that the people in the group understood what had happened, as well as what has been foretold by the angel? What do you think the people are thinking about Zechariah's mental and emotional condition? What does Zechariah do when he has finished his work? What might be going through his mind at this time?
11. Verses 24-25: What happens later? What role does Zechariah play in this? How long did Elizabeth stay secluded? Why?
12. Are there ways in which God has shown favor to you? Are there ways in which God has taken away your disgrace, be it real or imagined, be it deserved or undeserved? Like Zechariah, did you have a role to play in making God's favor real, in removing the disgrace?

(From <http://www.sheknows.com/baby-names/name/>):  
In Hebrew the meaning of the name John is Jehovah has been gracious or Jehovah has shown favor.