




THE TWELVE VOICES OF



CHRISTMAS

— WOODROW KROLL —

The Twelve Voices of Christmas
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ELIZABETH

VOICE OF BLESSING

LUKE 1:5-25, 57-80

Elizabeth had experienced God's blessing. He had taken away the reproach of her childlessness. He had signaled the presence of her Messiah through the joyful leap of the baby in her womb. In response, she pronounced a blessing that would extend beyond Mary, who stood before her. It would encompass the nation of Israel and eventually the whole world.

My husband, Zacharias, and I met one day when we were young, and we fell in love. I was the daughter of a priest, and he was a priest also, so our families and friends considered ours to be an excellent match. But more important than that, we knew in our hearts that we were right for each other. We said our vows and embarked on life together. We said our vows and embarked on life together.

We built our marriage on one thing – loving God, serving Him and doing whatever He commanded. We stood almost alone in our way of life in our village and the surrounding area. Few others were interested in devoting themselves to God. They thought it was too burdensome to try to keep the laws handed down from Moses. But we found joy in obeying God.

There was only one thing marring our happiness: We wanted a child, but I was barren.

Every Jewish family wanted a baby to hold and care for, a toddler to train, a growing child to guide toward maturity. Every Jewish family wanted a child who would blossom into full maturity and independence, becoming a stabilizing

force in the family and a hope for the future. And beyond all this there was the underlying hope that maybe, just maybe, the promised Messiah would be born to that family.

My youth passed quickly, with no baby. What had been a cloud over my life became a heavy sorrow. I never spoke about it to my friends, and they said nothing either; but I know they pitied me.

I would often lie awake at night thinking of Rachel, imagining her saying to Jacob, "Give me children, or else I die." I cried for her. I often thought of Hannah, grieving because she had no children. In my imagination I saw her stricken face as Peninnah, her husband's other wife, ridiculed her.

God heard Hannah's prayer and gave her a son. Why hadn't He heard mine? I prayed so fervently, so intensely, for so many years.

Again and again I asked Him why. I tried to do all He asked of me. Hadn't it been said that if we obeyed Him, He would give us children? Hadn't God promised our people what we would be blessed above all peoples, that there would not be a male or

female barren among us? Didn't He care? Or was there something wrong with me?

As the years went by, hope faded and was finally gone. We no longer spoke of the baby we had wanted so much. But I continued to express our pain in my prayers. I determined that I would not become bitter but would continue to serve God faithfully.

One day, while Zacharias was offering the incense to the Lord in the Holy Place, he was startled by the appearance of the angel Gabriel. His news was even more astonishing. I would give birth to a child, a son, whom we were to name John.

He would be great in the sight of the Lord and many would rejoice at his birth. He would prepare the way for the Messiah, and he would turn many of our people back to God.

I can only imagine the excitement and awe Zacharias must have felt when Gabriel broke the news to him. Yet when he came home, he couldn't tell me about it – he was literally speechless. He wrote down what had happened. "I didn't believe what the angel told me," he wrote. "And this is my punishment."

Zacharias was so ashamed. But I loved him nonetheless, and he loved me. As a result of that love, I conceived.

I had no one else to talk to who would have believed me if I had told them what an angel had told Zacharias – that I would bear a special son? Who would have believed that at my advanced age I was pregnant? No one. My neighbors knew I was barren. I couldn't face them

for perhaps five months – not until my pregnancy was obvious, not until I could show them that my reproach was gone.

Like Zacharias, I would be silent and alone. How wonderful it would be to meditate on the words the angel had spoken to Zacharias to think about the son we would have, to glorify God for the miracle of his promised birth. And I would still have time to think about the Messiah, my Lord, who evidently would appear soon – if my son were to prepare the way for Him.

In my sixth month of pregnancy, Mary arrived from Nazareth. I hadn't expected her visit, but I was very pleased to see her.

When I heard her voice, something strange happened. I felt my baby leap within me. I had felt the baby moving for some time, but never anything like this.

Immediately, I knew that Mary was the chosen mother of the Messiah and that even now she was pregnant with Him. Only the Spirit of God could have revealed that to me.

And He gave me words of blessing to speak that I had never planned to say: "O, Mary, you are so blessed among women, and so is the fruit of your womb. How is it that the other of my Lord should come to me?"

I felt inspired, transformed. Even as I was blessing Mary for her willingness to believe what the angel had told her, somehow my unborn son was offering homage to his Lord. Yet all the time, in the back of my mind I felt compassion for

Zacharias, who had not believed.

After my blessing, Mary responded with a song of praise to God, for His blessing on her, on Israel and on the world through His son.

That day we laughed and cried together. She told me what Gabriel had told her, and I repeated to her what he had told Zacharias. Each message confirmed the truth of the other. We talked and talked.

For three months we shared our feelings, our joys, our hopes, our concerns and anticipation. Our futures held many questions, but our joy was infectious. Then Mary returned home to face Joseph with the news of her pregnancy. And I faced childbirth.

I remember how I felt as she left. I was so happy. I loved my husband. I loved my baby, and I loved Mary. Both she and I were greatly blessed to be voices of the Christmas story. She was carrying the Messiah, the Savior of the world. And I was carrying His forerunner, the one who would prepare the way for Him.