

THE TWELVE VOICES OF



CHRISTMAS

— WOODROW KROLL —

The Twelve Voices of Christmas
Copyright © 2012
Back to the Bible
(The Good News Broadcasting Association, Inc.)
All rights reserved.



United States
P.O. Box 82808
Lincoln, NE 68501
800 759 2425
backtothebible.org

ZACHARIAS

VOICE OF DISBELIEF

LUKE 1:5-25, 57-80

“You will have a son,” the angel told Zacharias. Startled by this message he saw his life opened, exposed. Outer layers of devotion, service and submission were torn back, laying bare a root of bitterness and disbelief. But God took that discordant response to His message of Christmas and changed it into a song of praise.

I had three great loves in my life. Above all, I loved the Lord. I worshiped and served Him as faithfully as I knew how.

My second love was Elizabeth, my wife. We stood together in our faith, and we wanted to please God in everything we did.

My third love was my work. I was a priest, as was my father. I grew up in the temple precincts. Serving as a priest was all I ever wanted to do; and in spite of the spiritual decadence of many of the priests I worked with, I found my service stimulating and rewarding.

There could have been a fourth love – if only God had given us a child. Elizabeth and I had prayed for a son every day for years, but she was barren. Now we were well beyond the age for having children. It was too late.

In addition to having a son there was one other thing I wanted very much. I wanted to burn the incense, the offering on the golden altar in the Holy Place. What a privilege that would be – an opportunity never to be repeated in the lifetime of a priest! Every time lots were cast, I prayed that I might be chosen.

And then, one day, the lot fell to me.

As I entered the Holy Place that day, I focused my attention on the ceremony I was to perform and the prayer I was to offer on behalf of my people. The other priests worshiped and then withdrew from the room. Finally, I was alone. It was the most solemn moment of my life.

I could see the altar of incense only by the light of the seven-branched candlestick. When I placed the incense over the red coals on the altar, a cloud of smoke arose. Its fragrance permeated the sanctuary.

I was just about to worship and withdraw, when I realized that I was not alone. Someone was standing next to the altar – an angel.

I was terrified!

“Don’t be afraid,” he told me. “Your prayer have been heard. Your wife, Elizabeth, will bear a son, and you will name him John. He will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother’s womb. He will preach in the spirit and power of Elijah. And he will prepare the hearts of people for the Messiah.”

Instantly, something welled up from the depths of my heart – rebellion I didn't even know was there. *No*, I told myself, *it cannot be true*.

"I'm an old man," I said. "My wife is an old woman. People as old as we are don't become parents."

His response was immediate. "I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God. And I was sent to bring you this good news."

Gabriel's reply devastated me. How could I utter my feeble contradictions when God had spoken?

Why had I mistrusted him? He was obviously an angel. Why had I rejected what he said? Had I harbored bitterness against God all these years, thinking He had ignored my prayers? Had I covered disbelief with a layer of submission, not recognizing my sin?

If only I had been quiet and spent more time thinking instead of talking, I might have remembered that God made a similar promise to Abraham concerning a son to be born, and it came true.

I then asked for a sign. "How shall I know this will happen?" The angel gave me one, but it wasn't the kind of sign I had in mind. God would take away my ability to speak until after my son was born, because I had not believed the angel's message.