

Zack and Betty

Zack and Betty were a lovely old couple and everybody loved them. Zack had been vicar of his tiny country parish for as long as most people could remember and Betty had always been his faithful companion and partner in showing kindness to everybody in the community. Their one sadness was that they had never been able to have children and now it was too late. They were both too old.

Zack's long and faithful service had been honoured with the title of canon, which meant that he was sometimes expected to minister in the cathedral. On one such occasion, he was praying alone in the Lady Chapel when, to his astonishment, he saw an angel standing beside the altar. Now, Zack had believed in angels all his life, had often thought of them invisibly guarding us on our way through life and inaudibly sharing in our songs of worship. He expected, through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, to spend eternity in heaven with the angels singing God's praises. He had never, however, expected to see an angel on earth! Zack was scared, but the angel told him not to be afraid. Zack's prayers would at last be answered. Betty would bear a child. His name would be John. His life would be dedicated to the Lord and he would do great things. He would prepare people for the coming Kingdom of God.

It was all too much for Zack, "How do I know all this is true?" he said to the angel. "My wife and I are too old."

The angel replied, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God. He sent me to tell you this good news, but because you don't believe me, you won't be able to speak again until it all happens."

So they went home to their own village and, in due course, Betty discovered that she was pregnant. She felt so shy about it that she hid herself away. Six months into the pregnancy, Betty had a visit from her cousin Miriam. Miriam, too, had had a visit from the angel and she too was going to have a baby. His name would be Joshua because, through Him, the Lord would save the world. The two women praised God together and even Betty's unborn child jumped for joy in his mother's womb.

When Betty's baby was born, they took him to church to be christened. When the vicar asked the godparents to "name this child", they called him Zachariah after his father, but Betty stopped the ceremony and demanded that he should be called John, as the angel had said. They argued, but she insisted on asking the baby's father even though he still couldn't speak. Zack wrote down, "His name is John". Zack recovered his voice and praised the Lord, as did they all, while wondering what all this would lead to.

That's my go at updating the story of the Birth of St John the Baptist. You can read what really happened in St Luke's Gospel chapter 1. John went on to prepare the way for Jesus, Who is, of course, the Saviour of the world.

We shall celebrate John's birthday on 24th June with Holy Communion in the parish church at 11.00, tea at 4.00 (outside if fine, in the church if not) and Evening Prayer at 5.30 pm. Of course, you are all welcome.

Roger Knight,
Rector of Cuxton & Halling.