

Zechariah

Full of Doubt, Full of Faith

Luke 1:5-25, 57-58, 63-65, 67-80

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The season of Advent conjures up the image of the pondering Mary. This image is poignant, especially, as I reckon Mary to be a peasant teenager whose dreams of marriage were almost broken by news of the miraculous pregnancy. This Advent, being the tenth consecutive year away from family, my ponderings have been pervaded by the idea of broken dreams.

Growing up, I dreamed that I would be married and have a family of my own by the time I was like 30 years old. Now at 34, not yet married, feeling unsettled, sometimes it feels like I am living in the wake of the broken dream. Reckoning with broken dreams creates doubts—sometimes doubting God’s provision, other times doubting self-efficacy. The fruit of doubt is shame!

Shame is a significant human emotion in the Bible. When Adam and Eve broke the blessed order of creation, they were overwhelmed by the emotion of shame. Perhaps it shouldn’t be surprising that Luke’s Gospel starts with a story of shame—Zechariah, the old priest at the temple, and his wife Elizabeth who bore the shame of being childless. Theirs was a story of a broken dream. Their story is paradigmatic of all human lives with broken dreams—not having that dream job we always wanted, our spouse not quite living up to our idealized dream/image, our children’s lives getting derailed from their dreams, our loved one dying prematurely or unexpectedly incurring a long-term disability. Our lives are strewn with broken dreams because we live in a broken world.

In the run up to the first Advent the elderly Zechariah and Elizabeth had a surprise child who turned out to be the blessed John the Baptist. Their shame was transmuted into an unexpected blessing. Advent is a time that reminds us that our Father in Heaven cares about the hurts and sorrows of our broken dreams. He does not just slap our broken dreams back together the way we want it. Rather, our Father re-forges our broken dreams into unexpected new prospects, pregnant with beautiful blessings.

This Advent we don’t have to be stuck pinning over broken dreams or pondering our doubts or wallowing secretly in our shame. Rather, meditating in the Gospels about the love of our Lord Jesus Christ, we can be moved, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to full faith in our Father in Heaven who re-forges our broken dreams into a new beautiful blessedness!

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