

VOICES OF THE NATIVITY

By Jill Lamkin

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DEDICATION

To my husband, Rob and my parents, Mark and Pat, thank you for your love and encouragement; and to my son, Jacob, you are my inspiration to write about birth.

The Playwright

STORY OF THE PLAY

What do you say when you see an angel? How do you say "thank you" when the child you've longed for is finally born? How do you let go of your daughter to her new husband and expected child? What are your first words to the tiny, newborn Son of God? Through Christ's birth, God entered and shared our humanity. In this monologue collection, Elizabeth, Zacharias, Mary, Mary's mother, Joseph, and a shepherd tell their stories. They are stories of worship and stories of wonder at a God who would want to be such an intimate part of our lives. Each monologue tells its own story and can be performed alone. When performed together they weave a rich story of the nativity.

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I WAS LOOKING FOR A LAMB

WHEN THE ANGEL APPEARED - Shepherd.

Something Is Happening

(A Monologue for Elizabeth)

Something is happening. I can feel it. Something so immense, it will change everything. For years we have waited...waited for another prophet, waited for the promised Messiah, waited for God to speak...waited and waited...and waited...but we only heard silence, and we only saw emptiness.

The priests continued their duties. My husband, Zacharias, faithfully performed his service to God in the temple. He never said it, but I think he started to wonder why...why all the waiting, all the hoping, all the serving? Where was God? It reminded me of a woman who longs...longs, with every fiber of her being, for a child. Month after month she waits. It reminded me...of me.

When we first married, I looked at my friends' babies, knowing I would soon hold my own. The months and the years passed. I held only my anguish in my empty arms. I'd hear an occasional whisper and see a knowing nod. *(In a whispered voice.)* "Elizabeth is barren"...I was barren. My heart was empty; so, it seemed was the heart of Israel. Since birth was on my mind, when I thought of Israel, I thought of my people in need of a birth. *(With a laugh.)* I guess when you have babies on your mind, it seems a child can bring hope anywhere, even to a battered, yearning nation.

All these thoughts were circling through my mind, finding no answers, when Zacharias returned home after his days of service in the temple. He was so quiet. It was the first time I could remember he didn't call a greeting to me. He sat down, rested his head in his hand, and closed his eyes.

The longer he sat, the more worried I became. I sensed a deep struggle in him. I expected him to say he could no longer serve as a priest. I wondered if the doubt had finally conquered him, but he said nothing. He only motioned for me to sit next to him.

Then, through a series of gestures and writing, he told me a story I could hardly let myself believe.

He had seen an angel! I still shiver when I think of it. He had gone into the temple to burn incense, and there, just to the right of the altar was an angel. My heart missed a beat when he told me. Was Israel's time finally coming? Was God about to break his silence? Would there again be a time of prophets, and of angels? Would we again hear from God? Hope began to warm me, and then I looked at Zacharias. His face was full of...of...of an emotion I had never seen in him. Tears began to roll down his face. I asked if the angel had seen him. He nodded. I suspected it was more than the cold, smoke-filled air that had taken his voice.

I reached for him. As I held his trembling hands, I remembered the old stories. Those who saw angels were filled with wonder and terror. They wrestled and struggled and their lives took a different direction...forever. Something had happened in the temple, but he had no voice to tell me.

Again, I struggled to understand, and he struggled to communicate it. He seemed to be talking about a baby. I smiled and said that the time for Israel to give birth must be coming. I had told him so often that Israel reminded me of a barren people waiting for life...waiting for birth. But when I talked about Israel, Zacharias would shake his head and point to me. Finally I understood. The baby that would be born was ours. Our own baby.

Tears ran down my face. Could I dare believe it? My hope had never wavered for Israel. God would redeem her. God would bring her the new birth she longed for. But hope had run out for me. When I aged past normal childbearing years, I mourned what would never be.

The angel told Zacharias we will have a son. We are to name him John. (*Long pause, quietly.*) There's more. This angel told Zacharias that our son is a forerunner. He will go out in the power and spirit of Elijah to prepare the hearts of people for the Lord. It is more than I could have imagined.

It is more than Zacharias could fathom as well. He asked the angel the question he had been asking himself for so long. "How will I know for certain?"

I can hear him asking the angel. I have heard him ask it so often. When the years seemed to drag by without so much as a whisper from God, I would say, "God will speak. You'll hear Him." He would say, "How will I know for certain?" Because of his doubt, and as a sign to him, the angel took away his voice until the time when these things will happen. He doesn't ask the question now. His thoughts are hard to read.

Here I am waiting again. Waiting for our son to be born. (*Gently places hands on stomach.*) Waiting for my husband to speak. Waiting, with all of Israel for something, or someone that seems so close. Life is made of so much waiting. We have three months to wait for our child to be born...for our son, John.

I'm convinced time runs more slowly in the waiting periods. There is space in the waiting to think and to wonder. Are we about to witness the coming of our Messiah? Is our son to play a part in his appearance? I can't help but think about birth. I can't help but wonder what form Israel's new birth will take.

I just got word that my cousin, Mary, is coming to visit. She has some kind of news. No one is saying what kind. Something in me says she has news of Israel's birth.

THE END

I No Longer Fear The Silence

(A Monologue for Zacharias)

My own words sound strange to my ears. For almost a year, I have been without a voice. I had more to speak of during those months than ever before, but I was silenced. I pointed, nodded, gestured and wrote. People made whatever sense of me they could. Still there was no way to express all that had happened. Even now that I have a voice, the words to describe it sometimes escape me. But I will try to find them, because I want you to know...I want you to know of the tender mercy of our God. I want you to know His great faithfulness to me and to my people.

I had only known His silence. I performed my duties in the temple, but I only heard His silence. I had prayed for our Messiah to come. Again, I heard silence. I had prayed for a child...only silence...and then I saw the angel...and then I heard my own silence...and then (*Slowly nods head.*), then I understood.

The silence of my voice made room for the singing of my soul. What couldn't come out, went deep inside. Words of praise found their home in me and whispered to a heart that had long ago covered its ears with doubt. So much happens in silence...so much is prepared...so much is given...so much waits to be revealed. I no longer mistrust the silence. Instead I wait with it...and rest with it. I need it. The silence draws me to the treasure it holds. I imagine silence to be like a dark, still night waiting to be penetrated by song...or a silent sleep waiting to be broken by the hungry cry of an infant. (*Smiles.*) That is something I can imagine very vividly.

Our son, John, is nine days old today. It was only yesterday that I received my voice back. During Elizabeth's entire pregnancy, I was silent. Even though she understood the reason for it, I sometimes wondered if she felt abandoned by me. When she was sick and exhausted and tearful, I was silent.

End of Freeview

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