

Who was Elizabeth in the Bible?

Elizabeth in the Bible was the wife of a priest named Zechariah; she was also a cousin of Mary, the mother of Jesus. Elizabeth and Zechariah are called “righteous and blameless” people who walked in all the commandments of the Lord (Luke 1:6). Elizabeth was barren; she was unable to have children (Luke 1:7). When Elizabeth is first mentioned in the Bible, she is an old woman, or as Luke puts it, “advanced in years” (Luke 1:7). This could mean anything from late middle-age to old age. In any case, she was past child-bearing age (Luke 1:18).

When Zechariah was in the temple offering incense to the Lord, the angel Gabriel appeared to him, saying that he and Elizabeth would soon be parents; they were to name the baby John. This baby would grow up to be “great before the Lord” and bring joy and gladness to them, as well as to many other people (Luke 1:14-15). Zechariah was doubtful because of his wife’s age and the fact that he was himself old (Luke 1:18), so Gabriel—the same angel who appeared later to Mary—told Zechariah that he would be unable to speak until the prophecy was fulfilled in the birth of John (Luke 1:19-20, 26-27).

Elizabeth, when finding herself pregnant, kept herself in seclusion for five months. She said, “The Lord has done this for me. . . . In these days he has shown his favor and taken away my disgrace among the people” (Luke 1:25). Six months after Elizabeth conceived, Mary also became pregnant, and she went to visit Elizabeth, because Gabriel had told her of Elizabeth’s pregnancy (Luke 1:36-37). It is a sign of God’s love and care that he placed these women in the same family. He could have just as easily made them strangers to one another, but, by making them relatives, He gave them mutual comfort and encouragement. Especially for Mary, the experience of being pregnant outside of wedlock must have been frightening and shocking. But God provided Elizabeth as a

comforting presence—a trusted and known relation and older woman who was going through a similarly miraculous event (Luke 1:38-45).

As soon as Mary arrived at Elizabeth's home and Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, "the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. In a loud voice she exclaimed: 'Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!'" (Luke 1:41-45). The Holy Spirit told Elizabeth of Mary's condition even before Mary could say a word.

Eight days after Elizabeth's child was born, several neighbors and relatives were there for the ceremony of circumcision. It was during this time that children were officially given their names, and Elizabeth declared her baby's name to be John—Zechariah was still unable to speak. The neighbors questioned Elizabeth about the name; none of her relatives had ever been called John—certainly they should name him Zechariah. But Zechariah procured a tablet and wrote on it the name of John. In this he showed his faith in the angel's prophecy, and, with that, Zechariah was able to speak again (Luke 1:57-64).

Elizabeth's son grew up to be John the Baptist, who ministered "before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah" (Luke 1:17) and was the prophet who prepared the way of the Lord, fulfilling Malachi's prophecy (Malachi 3:1; Luke 1:76; John 3:1-6).