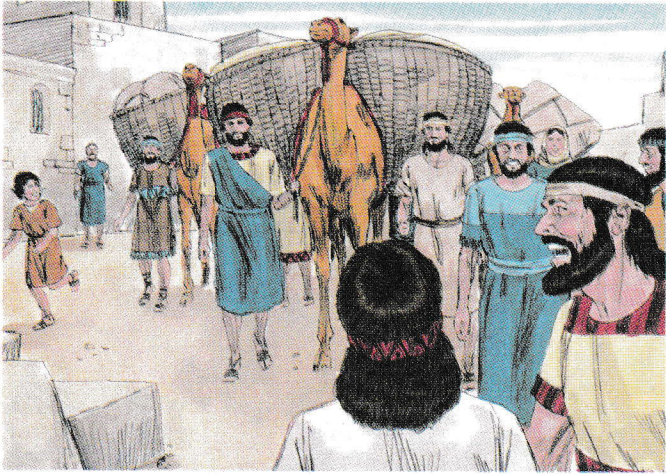
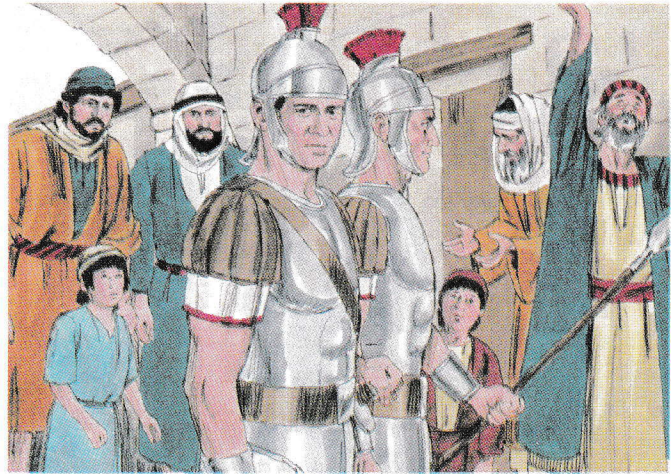


# An Angel Visits Zechariah



**1** Hundreds of years had passed since the Jews had returned from exile to their homeland. But foreign kings continued to rule over them. The land of Israel was now a part of the great Roman Empire.



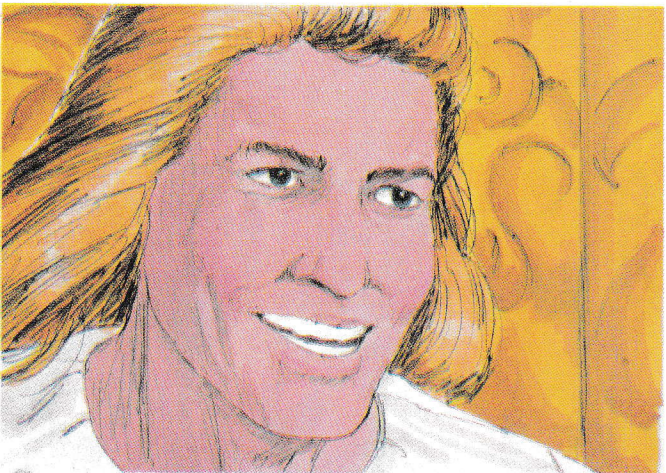
**2** The Jews longed for freedom. They dreamed of the day when the new kingdom promised by the prophets would come. They waited for the Messiah (Christ) to save them and rule over them.



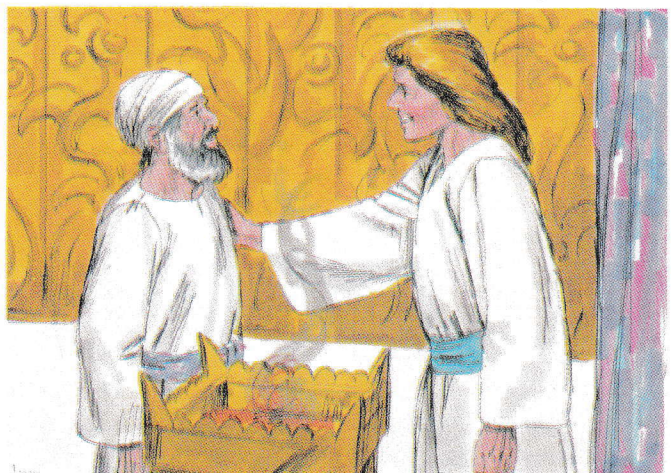
**3** In those days there was a priest named Zechariah. He and his wife Elizabeth were fine people who obeyed the laws of God. But they had never had any children, and now they were very old.



**4** Zechariah's turn came to serve as a priest in Jerusalem. While he was burning incense in the Temple, he suddenly saw an angel standing by the altar. Zechariah was surprised and frightened.

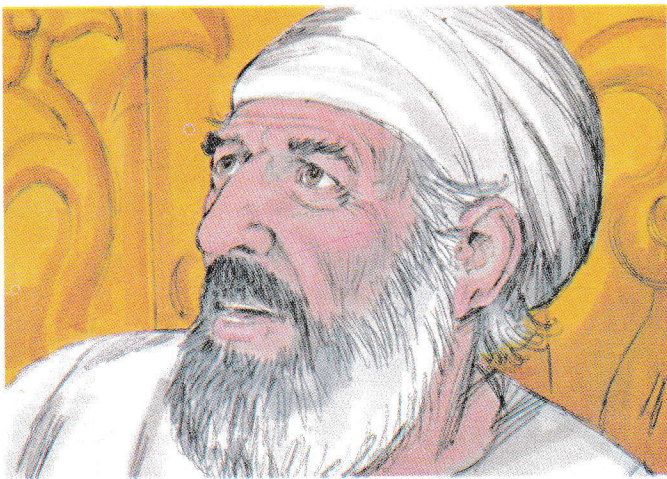


**5** The angel said, "Don't be afraid. God has heard your prayer. You and Elizabeth will have a baby boy. You shall name him John. He will be a great man in God's sight."

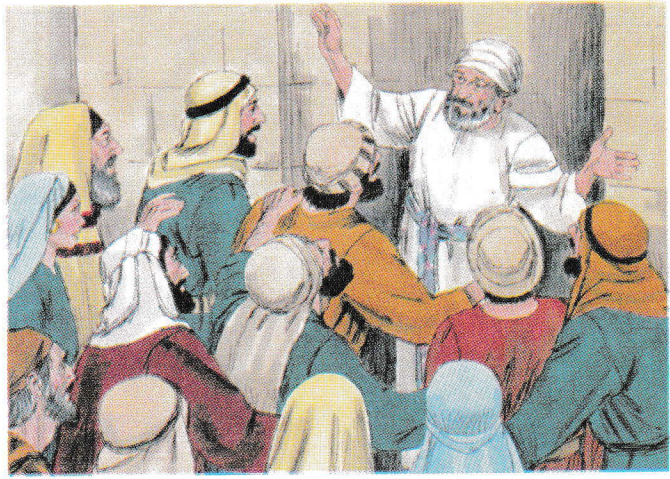


**6** "He will bring many Israelites back to the Lord. He will go ahead of the Lord like the prophet Elijah. He will get the people ready for the Lord."





**7** Zechariah said, "How can I be sure of this?" The angel said, "It was God who sent me with this good news. Since you have not believed it, you will be unable to speak until it comes true."



**8** The people standing outside the Temple wondered why Zechariah stayed inside so long. When he came out he could not speak, so they knew that he must have seen a vision.



**9** At the end of his duties, Zechariah went home. In time Elizabeth had a baby—a boy, just as the angel had said. Elizabeth was overjoyed that the Lord had given her a child. Her friends rejoiced, too.



**10** When the baby was a week old, he was circumcised. At that time they gave him a name. Their friends thought they would name him after his father. But Elizabeth said, "His name will be John."



**11** They were surprised and asked Zechariah what he wanted to name the child. Zechariah wrote on a tablet, "His name is John." At that very moment Zechariah became able to talk again.



**12** The child named John grew up and became strong in body and spirit. He lived apart from other people in the desert until the day he began to preach to the people of Israel.