A View from Above: The Announcement of Advent

Luke 1:5-20

1. As your group comes back together after a possible Thanksgiving break, share how your Thanksgiving was, what you are thankful for/in and what are your Christmas plans. **Open answers.**
2. What is Advent? **The word advent comes from a Latin word meaning "coming". Advent is the expectant waiting and preparation for the celebration of the incarnation of God the Son as a human being.**
3. Read Luke 1:5-20. What did Zechariah and Elizabeth's inability to have children have to do with this whole situation? **Elizabeth's barren womb was a considered a disgrace in that culture (and even grounds for divorce) and so to give birth to John (also known as John the Baptist and the return of Elijah) was a gift of Grace and a miracle of the highest order. It also proves that this is a total "God thing" and that God is at work in a much bigger way than just giving a baby to a barren woman.**
4. Read verses 12 and 13 of Luke 1. The angel Gabriel tells Zechariah "Do not be afraid". How does fear limit Zechariah in this encounter with Gabriel and the Lord? **Fear led to unbelief and caused Gabriel to take away Zechariah's speech so to get his attention and have him review and rethink all that God was doing.**
5. Read Luke 1:5-25. What is special about the lineage of both Zechariah and Elizabeth? **They were both from the Priestly line of Aaron**. How did Gabriel choose to answer Zechariah's request for proof? **He answered the question of HOW by telling him WHO he was and WHO he represented. Then he disciplined Gabriel for his lack of faith by making him mute.** How do you think family friends responded when this barren couple now included a father whom God had made mute when he was in God's presence? **They must have been the talk of the town and felt tremendous disgrace (see verse 20-25 where Elizabeth says God has removed her disgrace.).** Amidst this earthly perspective, what is God's view of this couple? **According to verse 2, they were upright.)**

6. Often when we doubt the promises of God that we read in Scripture. It is easy to think, If only God would prove himself first, it would be easier to believe in His promises. How Zechariah's story stand against that kind of wishful thinking? **A man, standing in the presence of God (the holy of holies) talking to an angel face to face, still had the audacity to doubt what God had said. Human nature is always to believe sight over faith, the flesh over the spirit.** Read Luke 1:57-80. What did God do in that year of silence in Zechariah's heart to change his tune from doubting to praising? **He saw the promise being fulfilled, day after day in his wife.**
7. Bill commented, "Disgrace in the worlds eyes does not always match God's perspective, in fact, disgrace might be part of God's plan." How have you seen this true in your life or the life of other believers? **Open Answer.**
8. This story has a tension within it. On one hand, Elizabeth and Zechariah are not barren because God is punishing them for any fault, as the world might have assumed. But on the other hand, Zechariah is disciplined by God for his lack of faith when he loses his ability to speak for nearly a year. How do we hold these two truths in tension? **Open Answer.**
9. Can you share some prayers in your life that you felt as if God answered at the wrong time?

Close by praying that God would be giving us the view from above on our pain and problems as we prepare our hearts for Christmas this year.