

Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, (Note Jesus' words in Matt.. 17:10-12) TO TURN THE HEARTS OF THE FATHERS BACK TO THE CHILDREN, and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous, so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

What methods did God use to prepare your heart to welcome Jesus into your life? What ways has He used to draw you back? _____

ZACHARIAS' DOUBT

18 Zacharias said to the angel, "How will I know this for certain? For I am an old man and my wife is advanced in years." 19 The angel answered and said to him, "I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, *(demands respect – Gabriel was not a shoe salesman just giving him a sales pitch) and I have been sent ("apostled") to speak to you and to bring you this good news. 20 "And behold, you shall be silent and unable to speak until the day when these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their proper time." Do you think Zacharias' unbelief had anything to do with bitterness over how long it had taken God to "hear [his] petition"? Has this happened to you?

21 The people were waiting for Zacharias, and were wondering at his delay in the temple. 22 But when he came out, he was unable to speak to them; and they realized that he had seen a vision in the temple; and he kept making signs to them, and remained mute. 23 When the days of his priestly service were ended, he went back home.

24 After these days Elizabeth his wife became pregnant, and she kept herself in seclusion for five months, saying, 25 "This is the way the Lord has dealt with me in the days when He looked with favor upon me, to take away my disgrace among men." What is the Spirit of God saying to you through this passage? _____

Luke 1:5-25

GOD'S ICEBREAKER

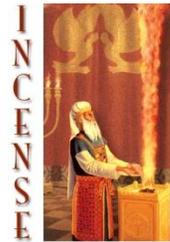
The narrative here changes here from the previous text – evidence that it was being translated from Aramaic. This is likely Mary's own account of these events...

INTRO In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zacharias (meaning "God remembers"), of the division of Abijah (meaning "My Father is God"); and he had a wife from the daughters of Aaron (priestly line), and her name was Elizabeth (Meaning "God is my oath"). 6 They were both righteous in the sight of God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and requirements of the Lord. 7 But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and they were both advanced in years.

Do you know the meaning of your name? Have you thought about God's purpose in your name? _____

PRIESTLY ROUTINE – INCENSE LIGHTER

8 Now it happened that while he was performing his priestly service before God in the appointed order of his division, 9 according to the custom of the priestly office, he was chosen by lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense. (This was likely a once-in-a-lifetime appointment)



"The Bible states (Ex. 30:34), "God said to Moses: Take fragrances such as balsam, onycha, galbanum, and pure frankincense, all of the same weight, as well as other specified fragrances."

The incense which was offered in the Holy Temple was made from eleven different ingredients, only four of which are mentioned by name in the verse above. The identity of the other seven spices has been passed down in the Oral Tradition. As is the case with regard to many other areas of Temple study, the exact classification of these ingredients is the subject of serious research and scholarship. Many of these are rare, and some can be obtained only in exotic and distant lands.

The method, or recipe, for preparing the special incense offering from these ingredients was a closely-guarded secret, passed down from generation to generation within the ranks of one particular family known as Avtinas. In addition to the identity of the spices and the

exact amounts and manner in which they are prepared, the clan protected another important secret of their trade: The identity of an herb known in Hebrew as ma'aleh ashan, literally "that which causes smoke to rise." This herb has a quality which enabled the smoke from the incense to rise up to heaven in a straight column. In our own time, some have speculated that this may be the plant *Leptadenia pyrotechnica*, which contains nitric acid.

About the Avtinas Family- The Avtinas family was appointed by the Sanhedrin to provide the incense, and they were exclusively responsible for its production, which was done in the chamber named for them, the Chamber of Avtinas. We have learned that this chamber was located in the south side of the court, over the "water gate." The Midrash (Shir HaShirim Rabbah, 3:4) provides several poignant glimpses of the Avtinas family, which tell us something of the great dedication that burned in their hearts for their holy occupation:

"The Avtinas family were expert in the preparation of the incense spices, and knew how to use the herb ma'aleh ashan, which caused the smoke to rise. But the rabbis were critical that they refused to teach these things to others, and suspended them from office. The sages sent to Alexandria for skilled craftsmen, and engaged these others to try and duplicate the Avtinas' incense. These craftsmen were expert in the spices, but they could not make the smoke rise up in a straight column like the Avtinas family... the smoke from their incense immediately diffused and scattered.

When the sages saw this, they remarked that everything which the Holy One created, He created only for the sake of His own honor, as the verse states (Isaiah 43): 'Every one that is called by My name, for I have created him for my glory; I have formed him, yes, I have made him.' They returned the Avtinas family to their task, and doubled their wages."

"But the wise men asked them: 'What is reason that you do not share secret of your profession; why want to teach others?' They responded: 'Our fathers passed on a tradition to us, that one day the Holy Temple will be destroyed. We did not want to teach our secret, so that it does not fall into the wrong hands, the hands of idolators; and one day, the holy incense offering which we presented before the Holy One would then be used for idolatry.' When the rabbis understood that this was the reason for their silence, the Avtinas family was greatly praised."

About the Incense Altar: Ex 30:1-10 The Altar of Incense

"Moreover, you shall make an altar as a place for burning incense; you shall make it of acacia wood. 2 "Its length shall be a cubit, and its width a cubit, it

shall be square, and its height shall be two cubits; its horns shall be of one piece with it. 3 "You shall overlay it with pure gold, its top and its sides all around, and its horns; and you shall make a gold molding all around for it. 4 "You shall make two gold rings for it under its molding; you shall make them on its two side walls — on opposite sides — and they shall be holders for poles with which to carry it. 5 "You shall make the poles of acacia wood and overlay them with gold. 6 "You shall put this altar in front of the veil that is near the ark of the testimony, in front of the mercy seat that is over the ark of the testimony, where I will meet with you. 7 "Aaron shall burn fragrant incense on it; he shall burn it every morning when he trims the lamps. 8 "When Aaron trims the lamps at twilight, he shall burn incense. There shall be perpetual incense before the LORD throughout your generations. 9 "You shall not offer any strange incense on this altar, or burnt offering or meal offering; and you shall not pour out a drink offering on it. 10 "Aaron shall make atonement on its horns once a year; he shall make atonement on it with the blood of the sin offering of atonement once a year throughout your generations. It is most holy to the LORD."

10 And the whole multitudes (*pleethos* – “fullness”) of the people were in prayer outside at the hour of the incense offering. For the connection between incense and prayer: See, Ps. 141:2, 1Tim. 2:8, Rev. 5:8, 8:30. Also, note that the folding of hands in prayer was never practiced by Jesus or his disciples – It is a fifth century Saxon tradition. Hands were lifted to pray – as indicated above. Have you considered the meaning of the rhythm of the incense offering for yourself as a temple of God? Is there any application in our lives today? _____

ANNOUNCING THE FORERUNNER

11 And an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing to the right of the altar of incense. (*The first recorded sighting of an angel in 400 years - His position in the Temple implied he had just come from the Holy of Holies! "...standing to the right of the altar of incense."*)* 12 Zacharias was troubled when he saw the angel, and fear gripped him. 13 But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your petition has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will give him the name John. (*Jochannan* – meaning 'God has given')14 "You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth. 15 For he will be great in the sight of the Lord; and he will drink no wine or liquor, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit while yet in his mother's womb. 16 And he will turn many of the sons of Israel back to the Lord their God. 17 It is he who will go as a forerunner before