



Advent Day 18 (written by Deb Bakken)

Censer

Luke 1:11-13, 16-17

Then an angel of the LORD appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear. But the angel said to him: "Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to give him the name John.... Many of the people of Israel will he bring back to the LORD their God. And he will go on before the

LORD, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the LORD." (NIV 1984)

People all over the United States keep an eye out for the Publishers' Clearing House Prize Patrol. Why? They have entered a contest and want to be the first to know they have won.

What if someone told you that you had won a contest you never even entered? You might think it was just too good to be true. What if the "Prize Patrol" was an angel? That is exactly what happened to Zechariah, and he thought it was too good to be true.

The symbol of a censer reminds us of what Zechariah was doing the day God's angel spoke to him. He had been offering incense and prayers to God. Does it seem strange that a person praying would not believe the word of an angel?

Our sinful self does not want to believe God's promises. Our sinful self wants to take care of its own problems and work its way back into God's favor. God will not accept anything less than perfect. So God has a better plan. His favor is a free gift to us. It has been paid for by the holy life and innocent death of Jesus. Even though it

seems too good to be true, it is the only way God offers. Jesus said, "I am the Way and the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father, except through me." (John 14:6)

Prayer: Lord, when I am tempted to think you are too good to be true, help me to trust in you. Amen.