

## OUR COMING SAVIOUR

*Elizabeth & Zechariah* – Luke 1:11-13a, 18-19

How well do we wait? Think about it – we wait for a lot of things... Christmas morning – Family to come over – The toast to pop – The little plastic do-hickey on the turkey – family to arrive – our computers to boot up – an important phone call – family to GO HOME. **Any others you can think of? What else do we wait for?**

God makes us wait. Things happen in God's time – not in our own. Simeon is told to sit in front of the temple and wait, because eventually he will see the baby born to be the Messiah. Elizabeth and Sarah had to wait to have children until they were old women. Can you imagine running after a five-year-old when you're a hundred?

Tom Petty sang: "The waiting is the hardest part. Every day you see one more card. You take it on faith. You take it to heart. The waiting is the hardest part."

When you think about it, that's one huge time-out God gave Zechariah. I mean, if you're a parent, then you've probably put your kids in the corner or sent them to their rooms for five minutes or so. For a kid, those five minutes is an eternity. Zechariah got nine months.

And what about the name they were to give their long-awaited child: John. **How did you decide what to name your child? How many used a family name? How many tried to use names from the Bible? How many tried to be different?** I know one mother who named her youngest Zander, after the movie Triple X.

Names in the Bible have great significance. The naming of a child is not only meant to identify the individual, it also carries with it destiny, character trait, and rich symbolic meaning. We saw Zechariah writing down the name of their promised child for Elizabeth. This would not be the last time Zechariah wrote down the name. When family and friends heard of the birth, they assumed that Zechariah would follow Jewish tradition and name his firstborn son after him. However, this special child, who both fulfilled and spoke prophecy while extending hope, would be given another name: "His name is John."

Zechariah and Elizabeth had difficulty believing the words of the angel. All of God's words can and should be believed to come true at the appropriate time. From the beginning, God has been authoring a story that leads to salvation, deliverance, and rescue for all people who will call upon his holy name. This is what Christmas is about. It's about the advent or arrival of God. He's following through on his promise, his covenant to bring us a Deliverer, a Messiah. He's bringing a people who are in darkness into a new day of marvelous light.

Elizabeth's sadness, shame, and stigma soon would come to an end. Zechariah's silence would be broken with a song that would later be known as the Benedictus. The prophet of the Most High would be a cousin and forerunner to the Most High God come to deliver his people—just as God had promised.

**We join in singing the carol, "What Child Is This?"**

## **OUR COMING SAVIOUR**

### ***Joseph & Mary*** – Matthew 1:18-25

#### **What are the things that scare you? What makes you afraid?**

“Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins” (Matthew 1:20-21).

It’s interesting that the angel of the Lord told both Mary and Joseph on separate occasions not to be afraid. The angel of the Lord gave the same command to Zechariah in the temple as well as to the shepherds who were out in the fields watching over their flocks by night. All four times the angel of the Lord met and spoke to these four different groups, the same command of not being afraid was part of the message. Imagine how different things might have been had even one of these four groups chosen to let their emotions lead their actions rather than choosing to heed and obey the command not to be afraid.

We’ve talked about the angels before. These aren’t little naked babies with wings and harps flitting about the sky. Cherubim and Seraphim were like something out of Game of Thrones . . . with flaming swords. Mary, Joseph, the Shepherds, the wise men . . . all had reason to be afraid, yet somehow they weren’t. Remember when your dad was the biggest, strongest man in the world? You could use him like playground bars. He was a giant who towered over you. He could be scary, too, right? But when you were afraid, there was nothing safer. I imagine the angel’s voice being like that of a dad during a thunderstorm taking a two-year-old into his arms: “It’s okay. Everything is all right. Don’t be afraid.”

If Zechariah hadn’t obeyed and instead chose to let fear be his guide, perhaps the destiny of his son, John, would have been different.

If the shepherds had not obeyed and instead chose to let fear be their guide, they would not have fulfilled their mission of being the first evangelists who shared the good news of great joy that was for all the people.

If Joseph had not obeyed and instead chose to let fear be his guide, perhaps he would not have taken Mary as his wife and instead would have quietly divorced her, thus leaving her alone in shame rather than taking her as his bride who would give birth in the city of David in the coming months.

If Mary had not obeyed and instead had chosen to let fear be her guide, perhaps she would have stayed with her cousin Elizabeth and given birth near to her nephew John in his home, not in Bethlehem as the prophecy of Micah 5:2 foretold.

The immediate obedience of these characters in the Christmas story all led to the fulfillment of God’s sovereign and timely plan for salvation.

It isn’t about resolving or considering . . . it’s about the heart. It’s about moving forward. It’s about living life unafraid. We all have that ability. We all have a chance to share that with a world that’s afraid. We’re not afraid. Let it be as God has said. **CH’S MESSAGE**

## OUR COMING SAVIOUR

*Innkeeper* – Luke 2:1-5

If I had known she was carrying the Christ child I would have given them my own bed.

If I had known Apple stocks were going to do that I would have invested when they first started.

If I had known the habeneros were that hot I wouldn't have ordered that burrito.

If I had known he was really that drunk I would have taken his keys.

If I had known he and his family were homeless, I would have at least offered them a meal.

Hindsight is always 20/20 isn't it? What does looking at the past teach us? How do we learn from it?

I don't think we really appreciate what is meant in Scripture when it says each person had to go to their hometown for the census. The government could have sent people out to count folks where they were, but sometimes government likes to make us stand in line. We get upset when we have to go to the DMV. But think about Mary – she rode for days on the back of a donkey when she was 9 months pregnant!

The story of the innkeeper shows us how **you never know who God will put in your way.**

Most of us look at our spouse and firmly believe that God brought this person into our lives. Even in the wedding vows we say, "What God has joined together..."

Picture in your mind a dinner table and around it sits your greatest mentors. Your Mom or Dad, your coach, maybe a favorite author that you haven't met. They're all there. What if the last place at the table is empty and into your dinner party walks the one person in your life you really can't stand? Isn't it true that sometimes we learn most from these people? Don't these people make us stronger?

What if you treated every single person you met in a given day as if God had put them there for a reason? God put that cashier in your day. Whether she says, "Have a nice day" like she means it or whether she rolls her eyes when you can't get the credit card machine to work. God put her in your life. Would you treat her differently if you thought that way?

The innkeeper would now say, "You always make room." Who we make room for in our lives is always a choice. This is what Advent and Christmas are all about – it's about making room for Jesus.

We, too, are innkeepers. We're busy. We're full up. That whole virgin birth thing really knows how to mess up a holiday.

But, Christmas is about making room. We get upset about how many Christmas cards we have to buy and who's on our list and who didn't send US one last year.

Tonight we are reminded of this - Jesus showed up and changed everything. So far, the Christmas story...

**Let's join in professing our faith in a Christmas version of the Apostle's Creed...**

## OUR COMING SAVIOUR

### *Shepherds* – Luke 2:8-15

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. The image of God as a shepherd is seen throughout the Scriptures.

Shepherding was not a profession that was looked on with great esteem. The only people who went into shepherding were the people who took it on as a family business or didn't have any other opportunities. Maybe it's like being a parking attendant or toll booth worker. It's not a profession that's looked on with great esteem but these people see the whole realm of human behavior. They observe. They watch. They keep track. They see what we so often don't see... because they are paying attention.

Now, try to imagine an angel. We hear "cherubim" and seraphim" and think of little floating naked beings with harps flitting about God's head like gnats. But, in the Scriptures angels are warriors. They have armor and swords. Most of us have been part of a children's Christmas program in one way or another. Do you remember all those cute cherubs dressed up in white robes and halos on their heads? **What if we would have given them swords?**

Well, with the shepherds on that first Christmas we finally get a little honesty. The angel appears to Mary and she says, "I am the Lord's servant." The angel appears to Joseph in a dream and he gets up and does what God called him to do. The shepherds, well, they were scared out of their minds. The King James says the shepherds were "sore afraid." It's not a literal translation but the words in Greek do mean to be so afraid it hurts. It means to be filled with both awe **and** terror.

Often in Scripture we are told to approach God with fear and trembling. Does God want us to be terrified of Him? Or when we approach God should we fall down on our knees in awe? When we encounter God or when God sends us, it's scary, but once we have that profound experience... nothing can be the same. The world around us does not change... **WE** change.

God chose to bring his Good News to people on the outskirts, people in the margins, people who wouldn't even be noticed or approached by most. And this...this is good News to all people.

ALL PEOPLE: The soccer Mom in the SUV who cut you off in traffic. The kid working the drive-thru who can't quite get the hang of the phrase "NO pickles." Democrats and Republicans. The teacher in school who didn't believe in you. The person who hurt you intentionally. THOSE people in THAT church who worship like THAT.

**And you (pointing) and you (pointing) and...Me too.**

**Please stand for the conclusion of the Christmas Gospel....Luke 2:16-20**