

Our scripture this morning is Luke 1, 5 through 25.

In the days of Herod, king of Judah, there was a priest named Zechariah of the division of Abijah.

And he had a wife from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth.

And they were both righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord.

But they had no child because Elizabeth was barren, and both were advanced in years.

Now while he was serving as priest before God when his division was on duty, according to the custom of the priesthood, he was chosen by lot to enter the temple of the Lord and to burn incense.

And the whole multitude appeared to him, the whole multitude of the people were praying outside at the hour of the incense.

And there appeared to him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense.

And Zechariah was troubled when he saw him, and fear fell upon him.

But the angel said to him, Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John.

And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great before the Lord.

And he must not drink wine or strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb.

And he will turn many of the children of Israel the Lord to their God.

And he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just and to make ready for the Lord a people prepared.

And Zechariah said to the angel, how shall I know this?

For I am an old man and my wife has advanced in years.

And the angel answered him, I am Gabriel.

I stand in the presence of God and I was sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news.

And behold, you will be silent and unable to speak until the day that these things take place because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time.

And the people were waiting for Zechariah and they were wondering at his delay at the temple.

And 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.

And when his time of service was ended, he went to his home.

After these days, his wife Elizabeth conceived, and for five months she kept herself hidden, saying, Thus the Lord has done for me in the days when he looked upon me to take away my reproach among people.

Pray.

Heavenly Father, it's very easy this season to make decisions

the celebration, the festivities, the good vibes about pretty much anything but you.

So Lord, we just ask that you would help us first and foremost right now to fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.

Lord, that you would help us to make the study of your word about you.

Lord, that we would humbly hear from you

that we would faithfully consider what you have put here for us.

And Lord, we ask that as we go from here today, that you would give us the grace to make this season.

about you to our neighbors as we serve our neighbors, Lord, with the gospel and love them with the words and the actions of Christ.

Lord, we pray that you would help us to look for opportunities to speak to our families, our neighbors, our friends, just the good news of what we celebrate this season.

Lord, it's really easy to

be super busy and feel self-righteous about our busyness.

And Lord, it's super, it's easy to want to slow down and make this season about slowing down and caring for ourselves and be self-righteous in that too.

So Lord, I just pray that you would guard us even as we come to your word today from self-righteousness, knowing that Christ is our righteousness, Lord, and that we celebrate him this season.

We pray all this in Jesus' name.

Amen.

I don't know about you, but I really love that point in movies right before the climax, you know, when things are looking really bleak, as if all hope is lost.

And then there's that point, though, where everything changes.

It might not be quite when the Death Star blows up, but it's that point when, you know, the Millennium Falcon comes out of nowhere.

and takes out Darth Vader so Luke can take the shot.

Everything's looking bleak, and then Han Solo does the right thing.

He comes back and creates the opportunity for the climax, for things to be fixed and the Death Star to be destroyed.

It's like when Tom Hanks comes around the corner or comes off the elevator.

I was trying to remember this movie.

I should know.

My wife makes me watch it once a year.

Sleep was in Seattle.

Tom Hanks meets the girl on top of the Empire State Building when it looks like she's gonna leave and that there's gonna be, or he's gonna leave, I don't quite remember, one of them's gonna leave and all's gonna be lost, this relationship's gonna be ruined, but then they see him and then we all know that everything's gonna be okay.

They're gonna get together and they're gonna live happily ever after.

Or it's like when the ring finally makes it off of that cold piece of lava and just sinks into the lava there and is destroyed and all of Middle Earth is saved.

Why do we love this part of the story so much?

Sam or Samwise Gamgee from Lord of the Rings helps us, even within that story, understand and process why we love this moment right before the climax when things finally turn.

He says, it's like in the great stories, Mr. Frodo, the ones that really matter, full of darkness and danger they were.

And sometimes you didn't want to know the end because how could the end be happy?

How could the world go back to the way it was when so much bad  
had happened.

But in the end, it's only a passing thing, this shadow.

Even darkness must pass.

A new day will come, and when the sun shines, it will shine out the clearer.

Those were the stories that stayed with you, that meant something, even if you were too small to understand why.

I don't think Tolkien goes into why too much within the story, about why that sudden shift of events.

There's a fancy word for it.

My professor in college made a whole blog called You Catastrophe.

It's a catastrophe

that's good, right?

It's a sudden change of events, seems to come out of nowhere, that changes everything for the better.

This is kind of written on our hearts.

And I think it's written on our hearts because that's what we see in the Gospels.

And that's actually kind of where we're at here at the beginning of Luke.

That's where Luke picks up the narrative, not just of the Gospel story or the story of Jesus and his birth and death and resurrection, but the whole story of redemption.

We've reached at this point the climax of history, the climax of the story of redemption, the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus.

But we're right in Luke chapter 1, we're right in the pivotal point before that climax is fully reached.

So the Old Testament ends pretty bleakly.

It ends with God's people who were supposed to be the conduit for the hope of mankind.

They were supposed to be the people through whom God revealed his glory and his greatness to the world.

But they're continually getting it wrong.

They continually leave God and worship other idols, bring glory to something else other than God, and they return to their sin.

But even in the midst of that bleakness, the thing that was supposed to be the hope for mankind actually doing the opposite, dragging mankind down into further darkness.

Even in the midst of that bleakness, you can hear a thread of promise in the last words of the Old Testament.

Or at least the way that we've arranged it.

Malachi chapter 4 is the last words of our Old Testament.

And Malachi writes,

The sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings.

You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall, and you shall tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day when I act, says the Lord of hosts.

Remember the law of my servant Moses, the statutes and rules that I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel.

Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes, and he will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their father's.

lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction.

So there's a lot going on here.

What I want us to notice, though, in amidst all the talk of destruction and God coming to judge the world, is this threat of hope.

This threat of hope for God's people.

This dawning sun.

And Luke chapters 1 and 2 describe the dawning of Malachi's son of righteousness.

If the cross and the resurrection of Jesus are the sun shining out all the brighter, the sun fully in the sky shining out all the brighter after a dark, dark night, Christmas and the birth of Jesus are the first rays of light peeking over the horizon.

And we're going to look at one of those beams of light that are peeking out over the horizon in Christmas this morning.

The beam that we're going to look at is this, that God uses impossible circumstances to

and unmerited or unmeritorious, if you're an English major, and even flawed individuals to accomplish his purposes.

He uses impossible circumstances and people that don't deserve it to accomplish his purposes.

We're going to kind of move through the passage by looking at the barren woman here at the beginning, and I'm kind of using that as a generic phrase because I think we're talking about more than Elizabeth, the barren woman, and then this beautiful messenger that comes and speaks hope to both Zechariah

and Elizabeth, but not just to them, to all of God's people, and how he is received with a botched reception, all right?

So barren woman, beautiful messenger, botched reception, help you remember a little bit more.

Let's look at the barren woman first, verses five to seven.

In the days of Herod, the king of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah of the division of Abijah, and he had a wife from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth,

And they were both righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all of the commandments and statutes of the Lord.

But they had no child because Elizabeth was barren and both were advanced in years.

All right, we got to zoom out for a minute and just see that this is describing, this passage is not just talking about Zachariah and Elizabeth, but really we're being linked back to a long history of important barren women.

The first characters we meet are Zachariah and Elizabeth.

And after finding out that they're both from a priestly heritage or priestly lineage, Zechariah obviously is from priestly lineage because he's a priest.

The only way you got to do that was if you were born into it.

And also Elizabeth, we're told, is from Aaron's line.

Aaron was the first high priest in Israel.

He was Moses' brother-in-law and was the first high priest of Israel.

And so we're told, we're to think of this whole priesthood, we'll look at this in a second, when we think about and look at Zechariah and Elizabeth.

But immediately we're told that Elizabeth is barren.

So we're brought into kind of the inner workings of Jewish religious life, and we're told at the heart here, or at the heart of what we can see, that Elizabeth is barren.

Barrenness is a prominent theme, as I said, throughout the Bible.

Much of the plot of the Bible is advanced through faithful women who were unable to have children.

especially in the first section, right?

The Pentateuch, and then shortly after Joshua and Judges.

From the time that God called Abraham and Sarah, right?

And he called his people through calling Abraham and Sarah to Rebecca, Rachel, Samuel's mother, Hannah.

All of these women were unable to have children until God miraculously intervened.

So we see time

And again, throughout the Old Testament, throughout this story of redemption, that not only does God show grace and kindness to these women, so he shows grace and kindness to these women in granting them children, in intervening, reversing their fortunes, and giving them children.

But through these miraculously conceived children, God blesses his people.

He provides promised blessings through these miracle babies.

Through the babies that God granted to these women miraculously.

So again, and again, and time after time, God is communicating to his people that he is working.

That he, the personal living God, is working.

It's his work.

supernatural power and wisdom working on behalf of his people, not merely natural processes.

They are being borne along and sustained and kept by his hand, not just by winding up a clock and letting it go and natural processes working their thing out.

His people are not privileged by some random series of events or cosmic luck.

Rather, the creator of the universe has chosen to work for them

and bless them in spite of the circumstances.

He's chosen to bless them, to show his glory through them in spite of the circumstances around him.

But barrenness is not just limited to individual women in the Old Testament, or this theme of barrenness is not just limited to individual women through the Old Testament, although it starts there.

But we also see that in the prophets, the prophets on behalf of God often refer to Israel as a barren woman.

I'll just give you one example.

Isaiah 54.1, Sing, O barren one who did not bear, break forth into singing and cry aloud, you who have not been in labors.

In particular, we see Israel who is exiled because of their sin, right?

So they're not in their land.

They're kicked out of their land.

They've been taken by other countries and made to serve other countries.

When Israel's in that state, the prophets come to them and they refer to Israel as a fruitless, a barren woman, and with hope, right?

That like the women in

In the stories of the Old Testament, their fortunes are about to be turned around by God, that God's about to do something miraculous and good for them.

So God shows his power.

What we need to see when we hear this, Elizabeth is barren.

She's unable to have children.

This ought to start priming the pump of anticipation.

So God, throughout the Old Testament, shows his power and his love to his people through individual barren women.

But also, barrenness here is a personification of God's people.

The Jews, particularly at the time that Jesus came.

Think of the Jews.

as kind of a fruitless, barren people.

And we see this a little bit further, or we have more indication of this, as we start just thinking and mulling over this description of Zachariah and Sarah.

So barrenness isn't the only thing that points us back to the Old Testament.

We could probably do a couple-month-long series on all of the Old Testament allusions here in Luke 1, but in this passage in particular.

I'm not going to do that.

I'm not going to drag you through that.

I got a good book for you.

If you want to chase them all down, that's fine.

It's interesting because Luke is Greek.

He addresses his book to a Greek reader.

And yet this whole first chapter is just chock full of Jewish scriptures, Old Testament allusions and imagery.

And then after chapter one, it just dives off a cliff.

So there's very little references to the Old Testament and very little imagery from the Old Testament throughout the rest of Luke compared to this first chapter.

What Luke is trying to do is connect Jesus and the story that he's telling into the bigger narrative, the big story of what God's been doing in the world up until that point.

We see that again in some of these references to Zachariah and Elizabeth.



I'm just going to kind of skip over them.

I'm not going to do a deep dive.

One, there's three main people, and there's more, but there's three main people that we're supposed to think of when we think of Zachariah and Elizabeth.

Or when we look at how God communicates with Zachariah and Elizabeth and how they respond, we're to think of three groups of people interacting with God in a similar way.

One, we already talked about it a little bit, but the priesthood.

There's a lot of references to priests.

especially Aaron, the first high priest.

And this whole story is set within priestly activity.

Zachariah's going in to offer incense on behalf of the people.

A lot of priestly stuff going on.

So one, we're supposed to see the priesthood in this story.

Two, Abraham and Sarah.

When we see Zachariah and Elizabeth, our minds ought to go immediately back to the story of Abraham and Sarah and how they were barren and advanced in age.

In fact,

Zachariah's response to Gabriel is almost an exact quote of Genesis 18 where Moses poses the problem like, you know, there's a problem here with Sarah having a baby and it's that they are old and advanced in years.

So Zachariah almost, he has to know what he's saying when he says this because it's almost a direct quote of Genesis 18 referring us back to Abraham and Sarah.

Lastly, the last person we need to think about

or two people, groups of people here, is Hannah and her son Samuel.

So you remember in Samuel 1 that Gabriel comes to, or that angel comes to Hannah, and she's...

given a child and she promises that child back to God.

Gabriel here says much of the same things to Zachariah that were said to Hannah through both the priest and by God.

And Elizabeth, when she finds out that she's pregnant, says a lot of the same things that Hannah said when she found out that she was pregnant and she discovered that she was pregnant and that she was going to have a son.

So anyways, we'll talk about these connections.

They're important not only for our story, but also for the angel coming to Mary and some of the other things that happened here in Luke chapter one.

So we'll talk about those a little bit more in the future.

But what we need to see from like a 10,000 foot view in this scene is that Zachariah and Elizabeth are more broadly about God and his people, right?

That there's something bigger going on here than just Zachariah and Elizabeth that Luke and God through Luke are trying to communicate

about his relationship with his people, the Jewish people at this time, and their response back to him.

In other words, Gabriel's message isn't just for Zechariah and Elizabeth.

It's for all of God's people and immediately here in the passage in context for the Jewish people at that time.

Also, Zechariah and Elizabeth's response to Gabriel's message, it's a response that is indicative of how the Jewish people have been at that time responding to God.

So let's just look really quick at the message and then how Zechariah responds.

So we're to hear God speaking to his people, particularly the Jewish people at that time, and we really need to get a sense or a flavor of how the Jewish people at that time responded to God

And also consider how we're currently responding to God.

So let's look at the message or the messenger in particular and his message.

Look at verses 11 to 17.

And there appeared to him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense.

So that's kind of crazy, right?

He goes in there to do his job in the temple and he actually meets a messenger from the Lord.

And Zechariah was troubled when he saw him and fear fell upon him.

That's a proper response.

We're not going to talk about it a ton.

But you'll see all throughout the Old Testament, that's exactly what happens when people meet God or they meet people sent by God.

Fear fell upon him, but the angel said to him, Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John.

And he will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great before the Lord.

And he must not drink wine or strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even from his mother's womb.

And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God.

And he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just to make ready for the Lord a people prepared.

So Gabriel comes to Zechariah, to Israel, with a word from God.

The first thing that would stand out to anybody familiar with the Old Testament at all

is that nearly every phrase in this message comes from the Old Testament.

We'll just look at a couple.

One, verse 13, is a very common, a very recognizable greeting that messengers from the Lord had given to the people that they were meeting throughout the Old Testament.

Should have been very recognizable.

Also, verse 15,

Gabriel, let's read verse 15 just as a refresher here.

For he will be great before the Lord, and he must not drink wine or strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit.

Gabriel indicates here that John would be set apart for the Lord, so that he's going to be born to do a specific job for the Lord, that he's going to be different than all the other babies because he was going to do this thing that God had called him to do.

And that that set-apartness was to be indicated by taking a Nazarite vow.

I'm not going to do a deep dive into that, but there were two main tenets of Nazarite vows that was a pretty common thing to do throughout the Old Testament.

It wasn't highly unusual, let's put it that way.

Two tenets for a Nazarite vow were that you don't drink alcohol and you don't cut your hair.

So you had this visual indicator and this behavioral indicator that you were set-apart for the Lord to do something special that he had given you, directly given you to do.

Hannah vows in 1 Samuel 1.11, O Lord of hosts, if you will indeed look on the affliction of your servant and remember me and not forget your servant, but will give to your servant a son, then

I will give him to the Lord all the days of his life and no razor shall touch his head, indicating that she on his behalf was taking this Nazarite vow for the Lord.

All I want us to see is that it's not super unusual.

In fact, it would probably be expected that if a child was miraculously given by the Lord and he was to be set apart for a specific task by the Lord, that he would be under these Nazarite restrictions.

So it's another point of recognition that should have clicked with Zechariah and verified the authenticity of the messenger.

One more thing, verse 17 says,

Let me read it.

And he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just.

This is clearly an allusion to Malachi 4, that passage I read at the beginning of the sermon.

Malachi 4, 5-6 says, Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes, and he will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction.

It was not uncommon for people to change the words of a paraphrase or a quote to help explain it.

I think that's what Gabriel's doing here.

He's saying what God was really communicating through Malachi in saying that he would turn the hearts of the children to their fathers was this idea of disobedience to the wise, right?

So, clear allusion to Malachi 4.

That was like the last words, as we said, of the Old Testament.

It would have been Israel's, again, Israel at that time.

It would have been their rapture and second coming of Christ that everyone was waiting and looking for.

They're looking for this Elijah-like prophet to come and prepare the way for the Messiah.

That's what they should have been preparing.

looking for, anticipating.

So all of this should have been very recognizable.

Like this message should have been something that Zachariah picked up on and picked up on

quickly and not only just recognized, but a lot of it should have been eagerly anticipated, right?

That this was going to happen.

This is the thread of hope we were left with, that we were given.

And it comes and it lands right in Zechariah's lap.

And before we move on to his response, I think we need to take one more minute, just one more minute, and recognize the beauty of the message, right?

So not only is it like,

referential and factual to stuff that Zechariah grew up studying.

He was a priest after all.

He was in the Old Testament, quizzed on it, tested on it throughout his life.

So not only was this full of content that he should have known, but there was a beauty to the message.

There's a beauty to the message that ought to have been recognizable as well.

Zechariah and Elizabeth aren't just promised a son.

They're promised a son here, but Gabriel tells them that God, God their creator,

and sustainer will give them joy and happiness through this son.

And not just them, right?

It's not just the son, or it's not just the happiness of being granted a child after years of barrenness, though I don't want to diminish that.

He's saying this kid will bring joy to many, right?

To other people, that there's a joy and a happiness that's coming through this son that's going to be beyond merely just giving a child to hold.

Now, if God...

sends a messenger to tell you that he is bringing you joy and happiness, you want this joy, right?

I want that kind of joy.

God who invented joy and happiness, he's the one that we want to bring us joy and happiness, right?

We're looking for joy and happiness and all kinds of stuff.

that really have nothing to do with joy and happiness.

They're not marked by it.

They didn't make it.

They didn't create the idea of joy and happiness, and we're looking to get it from there.

And here we have joy and happiness incarnate telling you, I'm going to make you joyful and happy.

That ought to perk up our ears.

There ought to be an anticipation and an eagerness to embrace this message coming from God.

Now, spoiler alert, looking ahead, Christ coming to earth to die, rising again, which John was preparing the way for, this plan is for our joy.

God is speaking the same message to us.

I've come to bring you true joy and happiness, and I do it at great cost to myself.

Again, which is why this vision of God turning the people's hearts back to God, or John coming and turning the people's hearts back,

back to God is so beautiful because true joy, right?

And the joy that John the Baptist comes to preach is only found in God.

Now, we do notice that John and his message are not the joy itself, right?

That John has come in a preparatory way

to prepare the way for the culmination of this joy.

There is joy in anticipation, right?

That's why we love having a month for Christmas, or more if you're Pastor Drew, who got started a little early, but that's fine.

We love spending this month anticipating the day, right?

Because there's a certain joy in waiting, in the anticipation, there's a certain happiness that comes in waiting.

That's the kind of joy that John himself is bringing to

but he's pointing to that ultimate joy that comes from the Lord.

But how does John prepare the way?

So like we're saying, this son's bringing joy, this son's bringing happiness.

He's pointing to a greater joy and happiness that we're supposed to anticipate.

But how specifically does Luke say here that John is to prepare the way or to bring us that joy?

Well, first off, he says that he's preparing the way  
in the spirit and power of Elijah, which is a big deal.  
and also kind of nebulous, right?

So what does it look like that he's coming in the spirit and power of Elijah, like the greatest  
Elijah and Elisha, like the greatest prophets.

Miracles were done through Elijah and Elisha that were not done by anybody else, right?

They raised the dead.

They made axe heads float.

Like he saw God's army around.

There's a lot of stuff that happened through Elijah and Elisha that didn't happen through  
anybody else.

And he's saying he's coming in that kind of power  
to prepare the way for the Lord.

So is he coming to do the same thing?

Is he coming to do miracles?

Is he coming to make axe heads float?

Is he coming to heal people of their diseases?

Is he coming to raise the dead?

Is he coming to make people fall on the ground and shake and say weird things?

What's he coming to do?

What's his power look like?

They say nothing physical.

Gabriel says nothing about physical miracles here.

He says he's coming with the power of Elijah, the supernatural power of Elijah, to humble  
proud parents.

and turn them to their kids, right?

And again, which ought to be kind of a natural thing, but to humble them to serve their children  
and to cause disobedient people or disobedient kids to see their need of repentance and  
wisdom.

That's the supernatural power that's on display here.

A humbling.

He's going to bring humility to God's people.

He's going to bring humility to proud religious Israel.

And he's going to show them their need, their sin, and their need of repentance.

And that takes supernatural power.

The fact that you see your sin, the fact that you feel compelled to repent of your sin,  
and to turn it back over to God.

Any ounce of hatred that you have for your sin and any ounce of love that you have for the holiness and the beauty of God did not originate in you, right?

It originated in the supernatural work and power of God.

Elijah-like supernatural work and power.

He raised the dead.

We need a spiritual resurrection in order to see God that way and love God that way.

Again, Gabriel's message is beautiful because, one, it's just beautiful in its content and the love and the power that God has for his people.

But it's also beautiful because that love and that power was the fulfillment, is the fulfillment of things foretold and what ought to have been eagerly anticipated from the Old Testament, should have been expected and eagerly anticipated by the Jewish people, especially a Jewish priest.

But instead, what we see here is that this message, this messenger, was received with a botched reception.

Let's take a quick look at it.

Zechariah's response here is both ironic and proud, maybe not necessarily in that order, but look at verse 18.

He says, And Zechariah said to the angel, How shall I know this?

For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years.

Zechariah's response was ironic because he should have recognized God's hand at work.

We've already discussed this.

This is just like God to use the unlikely, to use the broken, to use the barren, to advance his purposes and his glory amongst his people.



I mean, we ought to see God's hand and his character all over this.

This is just what he's done, it's what he did, and it's what he will do, what he's doing right now.

And not only does he not recognize it,

But he responds by raising as proof for his skepticism the very thing that should have been proof that God was at work, right?

How am I gonna know this?

I'm old and my wife has advanced in years.

God's like, big deal.

Like, don't you know what I've done before?

Like, haven't you seen my head at work throughout all of history?

Like, that's really your response?

That's your objection?

Like, you couldn't come up with anything better?

Zechariah may, we ought to see ourselves here, right?

I know I see myself here.

Zechariah may have heard the scriptures and knew about the scriptures really well, but he didn't believe them.

He knew him, he heard about him, but he didn't bleed him.

Charles Spurgeon says this of John Bunyan, prick him anywhere and you will find that his blood is Bibline.

The very essence of the Bible flows from him.

He cannot speak without quoting a text for his soul is full of the word of God.

His soul is full of

So his reflexes are biblical, right?

His unconscious responses are godly.

There's a difference between knowing the scriptures and living them.

We can beat up on Zachariah here, but, you know, like, this happened pretty quick.

He went in there to offer the sacrifice and then, boom, angel there, very scary angel, falls down, you know, in fear.

and gives them this message, and then he's got to respond, right?

He's got to say something.

There's like a pause in the delivery here requiring a response.

He's got to say something, and, you know, so he says something stupid.

I've been there.

You've been there.

But what comes out, as we talked about in Sunday school today, right, when you knock the glass, whatever's in the glass comes out, right?

It had to be there before.

What came out of Zechariah was not the scriptures or the essence of the scriptures.

So how are you doing?

Maybe your biblical reflexes haven't been tested by Gabriel the angel this week.

But maybe they've been tested by hardship or not getting your way or someone stepping on your toes.

Or a dumb drop ceiling that is only two inches below the floor joist so you can't get the tiles in or anything else and everything goes really slow.

That's just hypothetical though.

I wouldn't know anything about it.

Maybe it's tested by something else.

Did your blood bleed Bibline?

Or were your reflexes ungodly?

Did you lean on your own understanding?

Which is exactly what Zachariah does here.

How shall I know this?

God, you owe me an explanation.

You owe me proof.

I need you to speak to me directly.

I need a sense of peace.

I need something more.

I need something new than what you've already said.

I need something in addition to all of the things that you have said to your people throughout these years.

You owe me some kind of insight, some kind of explanation.

I need to know.

And God's saying, listen, I've given you everything you need for life and godliness in my spirit-inspired word.

Enough, not just for you, but enough for all of my people, even those around you.

We see that this, I'm going to call it a knee-jerk reaction, a reflex here, ungodly reflex, had far-reaching ripple effects, not only to Zachariah, but the people around him as well.

We see the effect on Zechariah because he's made mute immediately.

Gabriel's like, wrong.

You should have recognized this.

That was not right.

You're done talking for a while.

You're going to listen.

And he makes him mute.

But it also had effects on the crowd that were waiting outside.

right?

They should have been given an explanation and a great message of hope and joy.

But instead, you got Zachariah coming out who can't talk and they're just confused and bewildered.

Like, okay, God did something, but we have no idea, right?

Like, what is he doing?

What happened?

And Elizabeth, you know, I couldn't quite figure out why she's not telling anybody she's pregnant, right?

She's

She gives thanks to God and gives this great little speech that mimics Hannah's, that he's removed her reproach from among the people.

And yet, Luke also tells us that she remained hidden for five months.

So she's been mocked, told she was sinful, whatever.

for not having kids for her whole life, you'd think one of the first things you'd do is go around and be like, I'm pregnant, right?

I'm having a baby, you know, I'm full of joy.

And yet she stays hidden.

It seems to me that she was equally as confused, right?

If you think about it, she didn't talk to Gabriel.

She was just pregnant.

And she's like, well, God's doing something, but I'm not exactly sure what.

She missed out on the explanation that Zachariah got.

She needed the interpretation of the miracle.

She experienced the miracle, but she needed the explanation and the interpretation of the miracle that Zachariah got.

And the community needed it as well.

So because of Zachariah's proud response, you see these ripple effects throughout the community through his wife and to those around him.

But by God's grace, they didn't last long, right?

So

Our sinful responses, selfish responses, sometimes have effects not only to us but to others.

But by God's grace, he overcomes them.

And we'll see in a few weeks that Zachariah names the son John the way he's supposed to.

He's allowed to speak again.

And God's message is communicated through John and through his parents the way that it was intended to be.

This all shows us, right, even in how the story ends, even in the ups and the downs and the victories and the flaws and the failures, that God uses impossible circumstances and he uses unmerited or just people that didn't do anything to earn it, flawed individuals to accomplish his purposes.

It's my prayer this morning, it's my hope coming out of this story, seeing God at work in this story.

that we would be so full of God's word and a knowledge of the Lord from his word that we respond to God's work around us.

When we see God at work around us changing hearts and lives, that we respond to what God's doing both in us and around us with biblical godly reflexes.

That we don't respond to what God might be doing in somebody's life by squashing it or killing it

or saying something dumb like Zachariah did, and that by his grace, we're able to participate with what God's doing and not get in the way, not be a hindrance to what he's doing.

Because, as we've seen, his purposes are for his glory, and they're for our joy and happiness.

His glory and our joy and happiness are so united through the gospel that when he works for one, he works for the other.

And they're demonstrated not only in Christ's birth here,

His purposes and our joy and our happiness are demonstrated not just in Christ's birth, but they're most profoundly demonstrated in his death and his resurrection that we remember at the table today.

Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, you who are mighty have done a great thing.

You've taken our curse and you've conquered death's stake.

And Lord, as we've seen today, even as we walk these next couple weeks to that full and blazing sunrise of grace and mercy on the cross and in the empty tomb, Lord, that how you got us there is equally as beautiful and revelatory as the act itself, Lord.

Lord, we're thankful that we can see your heart in all of these characters that you've woven into this great story of redemption, that we can see your grace and your mercy, both in faithful responses and unfaithful responses.

And Lord, we just ask for grace that's new every morning to respond rightly

for your glory and for our joy.

Lord, we ask that it would happen right now, even as we come to the table and we remember your son's sacrifice for us as we proclaim his death and resurrection by together, obediently and faithfully participating in this table.

Lord, we just ask that you would cleanse us of our sin as we confess it.

And that you'd be honored and glorified by all that we say and do together now.

Pray all this in Jesus' name.

Amen.