

# Songs of the Savior

## Joy to the World

Fairview Missionary Church | Angola, IN

Scripture: Assorted

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Do you ever feel overlooked? Maybe it's in your own house. Maybe you are the middle child, or you are the middle child, and you just feel like you get overlooked. Maybe it's at your job, at your workplace, maybe it's in your community, or maybe it's even in the church. Do you ever think to yourself, "You know what? I'm not important. Nothing I do ever really matters. I am just a pawn in the chess game of life." You know what? When I am gone, no one will miss me.

First, let me tell you that these are all lies straight from the enemy. Don't believe them. And second, you need to know that you are not the only person that has ever felt like you are overlooked or you don't matter. Actually, surveys would tell us that the majority of people feel like they are just a cog in the wheel of life. You're not alone. Think about this short video that we just watched.

Here we are in church on Sunday morning, the day before Christmas, and nearly everybody in here or those watching online, even those that are listening on the radio, have heard the story of Mary and Joseph and Jesus. We expect to hear that story around Christmas. Yet, I would be willing to bet that half of us don't really know the story of Elizabeth Zechariah and John. But believe it or not, this story, the story of this family, is actually the introduction.

It's the groundwork for the story of Jesus and his family. The two actually flow together. Do you think that Elizabeth ever felt overlooked? Here she was experiencing a miracle of her own. But of course, she had to be overshadowed by the Messiah, right? Think about that. What about Zechariah and Joseph? We don't really hear much about their story. Joseph especially, we don't hear a lot about him in Scripture. At least last week, we took some time to talk about him.

So if you weren't here, I encourage you to go online and watch that message about Joseph. But regardless, both of these couples, both Mary and Joseph, and Zechariah and Elizabeth experienced a pretty big disruption in their life. They were unseen, unplanned for. They were difficult. It was hard for anybody else to understand exactly what they were going through. I'm sure they did feel alone and misunderstood.

I'm sure that they were judged, and people looked at them funny and differently as they walked around. But God had a plan. He had a plan for them that was bigger than anyone knew at the time. And so as we think about these two stories coming together, the question for us today is, how do we respond to the plan that God has for us? How are we supposed to respond to those things that happen in life that are unexpected?

How are we supposed to learn through those? What is the goal of what God is bringing us through? If you happen to bring your Bibles here with you this morning, I encourage you to open up to Luke chapter 1 verse 5. Luke chapter 1 verse 5. If not, the words will be on the screen behind me so that you can follow along. But let me pray before we begin in Luke 1:5. Heavenly Father, we come before you today.

We thank you for the celebration of Christmas, the time that we set aside to remember the birth of our Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. The fact that you came as a child. You came as a child in order to live as a

man, to carry our burden, to carry our shame, to carry our sin, and to bring those to the cross so that we could have a relationship with you.

And so, Lord, we do celebrate today. There are many here that are going through a difficult and unexpected season. I pray that you would give them peace, that they would feel your comfort and your love. And we ask this in Jesus' name, amen. I want to begin today by reading the story about John the Baptist, Elizabeth, and his father, Zechariah. Luke chapter 1, starting in verse 5.

In the time of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah who belonged to the priestly division of Abijah. His wife, Elizabeth, was also a descendant of Aaron, meaning a priest. Verse 6, "Both of them were righteous in the sight of God," Luke tells us, observing all the Lord's commands and decrees blamelessly. They were a good couple, a good man, a good woman of God just living their lives, verse 7.

But they were childless because Elizabeth was not able to conceive and they were both very old. How would you like that to be your description in Scripture? They were both very old. Verse 8, "Once when Zechariah's division was on duty and he was serving as priest before God, he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to go into the temple of the Lord and there burn incense.

And when the time for the burning of the incense came, all the assembled worshipers were praying outside while Zechariah was inside. Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense in the temple. And 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. For your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to call him John.

He will be a joy, and he will be a delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even before he was born. Think about that. John would be filled with the Holy Spirit even before he would come out of the womb. Verse 16, "He will bring back many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God.

And he will go on before the Lord in spirit and in the power of Elijah to turn the hearts of the parents to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous." In other words, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord. Verse 18, Zechariah asked the angel, "How can I be sure of this? I am an old man, and my wife is well along in years." That's a better way to put it, isn't it? Not old. She's well along in years.

Verse 19, "The angel said to him, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to tell you this good news. And now you will be silent and not able to speak until the day this happens because you did not believe my words which will come true at their appointed time." Meanwhile, the people were waiting for Zechariah outside and wondering why he had stayed so long in the temple.

But when he came out, Zechariah could not speak to them. And they realized that he had seen a vision in the temple, for he kept making signs to them, but he remained unable to speak. And when his time of service was completed, he returned home. After this, his wife Elizabeth became pregnant and for five months remained in seclusion for the first five months. "The Lord has done this for me," she said.

"In these days, he has shown his favor and has taken away my disgrace among the people." If you didn't know already, John, this John, John the Baptist, and Jesus were related. They were family in some way. We don't know the exact relationship between Mary and Elizabeth, but there was a relationship there, a family relationship. Can you even imagine being Elizabeth, many people believe that she was roughly the age of 85 when she became pregnant with John?

Does that sound fun to any ladies out there at the age of 85? This truly is a miraculous birth. It's an exciting story. It's an exciting story of what God can do. Maybe it wasn't as exciting for Zechariah who couldn't speak

for nine months because he questioned God. But as we saw in the video, maybe his wife enjoyed that. Nine months. But it gets even more exciting. This is the precursor to the story that we celebrate on Christmas.

Luke felt like this story of Zechariah and Elizabeth and John needed to be shared before we get to the story that we all know, starting in verse 26. In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, so she has been pregnant for six months, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin who was pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary.

The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored, the Lord is with you." Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary. You have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great, and he will be called the Son of the Most High.

The Lord God will give him the throne of his father, David, and he will reign forever over Jacob's descendants forever. His kingdom will never end." "How will this be?" Mary asked the angel, "Since I am a virgin." And the angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you, so the Holy One to be born will be called the Son of God." Even Elizabeth, your relative, is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is actually in her sixth month.

For no word from God will ever fail. "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled, and then the angel left her." This is the part of the story that we all know. Many of us have heard. It's been read to us. And it all seems pretty neat from our perspective that God is doing this amazing thing amongst this family, but I'm not sure that it actually felt neat to them.

You see, pregnancies can either be really exciting or really terrifying, depending on when it happens and how it happens. And these pregnancies probably would fall in the latter category of being terrified. Elizabeth, as I told you, was roughly 85 years old. And though she was excited, many doctors would say that she was of advanced maternal age. That's what they say now, by the way, if you're over 35.

So she was double that plus some. And Mary was more than likely a teenager, 85 and a teenager, probably not the timeliest ages to get pregnant. Which leads us to our first point. Sometimes God's plans for us can include untimely events from our perspective. But yet you and I know or I believe certainly that God's timing is always perfect.

Elizabeth and Mary as they move through the season of their life prove to us that we can trust God in the good times as well as in the untimely times. You see, you and I are all going to have surprises in our lives. Many of you already have. You may be living in the midst of a surprise right now, and some of those surprises are blessings. They're things that we never expected that God has blessed us with, but others are seasons of struggle, also a surprise.

And it's in those seasons that you and I are encouraged to hold on to what the prophet Isaiah says in chapter 41:10 when he tells us, "So do not fear, for I am with you," God says. "Do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you. I will help you. I will uphold you with my righteous right hand." May you hear this today, that God is with you, whatever season you are in, whether it is a season of celebration or it is a season of pain.

Maybe you came to service today or you're watching online because you're experiencing something extremely difficult in life, and you thought, "You know what? The one place I probably should go is church." May you hear the words of God in Isaiah chapter 41 that He will be with you. You see, in our seasons of celebration and even in our seasons of doubt and discouragement and despair, God will encourage us.

You and I may believe Isaiah chapter 41, and we know it's true, but yet there's just something about an encouragement from another human being along the way, somebody that will walk with us, that will journey

with us during our difficult seasons. And God often gives that to us in unexpected ways. Moments of encouragement. Watch what God does for Mary and Elizabeth, starting in verse 39.

At that time, Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea where she met and entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. So think about this. You have John the Baptist in the womb of Elizabeth. You have Jesus in the womb of Mary. They meet for the first time there. And the baby, John, leaps inside her womb.

And now she is going to be filled with the Holy Spirit. And look at what she says, filled with the Holy Spirit. In a loud voice, Elizabeth exclaims, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear. But why am I so favored that the mother of my Lord should come to me? And as soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her.

Can you imagine how encouraging this meeting was for these two women? These two women were experiencing something that nobody else could really understand. And finally, it seems like somebody understands. God gives Elizabeth the power of the Holy Spirit to make this proclamation to Mary. Finally, somebody who gets it. In our seasons of struggle, God will often give us that unexpected encouragement.

You and I live in a culture that is obsessed with judging everyone. We are obsessed with looking at the lives of others and pointing out all of the things that we don't like or we think they should change or they're a good parent or a bad parent because they do this or they don't do that. Maybe you come today and you just need to be encouraged and you just want to know that someone has your back.

You see, it's important for us as followers of Jesus Christ to be people of encouragement, to lift each other up, to encourage one another, not judge one another. We have no idea often what is going on in the life of somebody beside us. Again, Isaiah says in chapter 40:29, "He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak.

Even youths, even children grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall. But those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles. They will run and not grow weary. They will walk and not be faint. You and I need to be reminded that in the season of giving gifts, that sometimes the best gift we can give is simply support and encouragement to those we love.

But here is the best news of this story, that if you and I will continue to trust and hold on to the truth of what God has promised us, you and I have the possibility of witnessing an unmatched miracle. As we read this story today, may you and I never forget the story of two baby boys that were miraculously born six months apart who would turn the entire world upside down.

John the Baptist and Jesus, our Messiah. Of course, the biggest miracle that you and I can receive is John 3:16, recognizing this truth, "For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life." John tells us that Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

As we read these stories of these two miracle births, there is a miracle that is available to every one of us this Christmas, and that miracle is the salvation that comes through Jesus Christ. That salvation is offered to us not because of our goodness, not because of our obedience, not because we're better than anybody else. It is offered to us through the love of a Heavenly Father.

Today, you may be in the midst of an untimely event. You may have had unexpected encouragement from family or friends over the last few days or weeks, or maybe you come today and you say, "Pastor, life just

seems to be going down the road. I don't have many highs or many lows. I'm just kind of going through life. It doesn't matter where you are at.

God wants you to say yes to the joy of knowing Him." He wants you to say yes to inviting him into your heart and into your life. Can I assure you that you have not been overlooked this season? You have not been overlooked by the Creator of the universe. There is a God that would do anything for you.

There is a God who is crazy about you, so crazy that He gave up everything for you so that you could have a relationship with Him. Maybe you are here today and you are in a season of disruption and you don't know why. Maybe the why is so that you would be here today and hear about the God who loves you. Can I encourage you to hang in there?

Encouragement might be just around the corner, but even if it isn't in human form, may you be assured that God is walking with you even in the disruption. Remember that God's timing is perfect. I know it doesn't always feel that way. That makes you normal. If you say, "You know what? It doesn't seem like the right time. It doesn't seem like a blessing that I'm going through what I'm going through," I understand.

I can guarantee you that both Mary and Elizabeth didn't think that God's timing was perfect in many seasons of their life, but they took one step at a time, and you and I are encouraged during this season to be filled with joy. We're going to close our service today by singing joy to the world. And as always, if you're new here, we'll have people that will be on both sides up here that will be offering prayer.

If you want prayer for anything, just come up and tell them what you want prayer for, and they will pray with you. You can go back to your seat. As always, the altars are open. But if you say, "You know what? I want to come and I want to do business with God, but I don't want to be bothered by somebody I don't know or have that awkward conversation." That's fine. Come to the altars. Nobody's going to bother you. You can do your own thing. But if you want somebody to pray with you, we will have people available both on the north side and the south side of the sanctuary. Let's close in prayer.

Heavenly Father, thank you for sending your Son, Jesus, coming in the most gentle way possible so that we could receive him coming as a baby.

And so as we celebrate Christmas, as family, with friends, as we take the day tomorrow, may we offer thanks to you. And Lord, if there are some here today, even some that may be watching online or listening on the radio that have never invited you into their hearts and into their lives, may they be encouraged to do so today by the power of your Spirit.

May they feel your encouragement and your love. We ask this in the name of Jesus. Amen.