

# The Nativity Story

## *Gabriel: God's Quiet Glory*

Fairview Missionary Church | Angola, IN

Scripture: Assorted

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November 30, 2025

And so it begins the Christmas season. Now that Thanksgiving is over, our minds shift to everything that needs to get done before December 25th. And so, if you are counting, we have 25 days left to put up the decorations, which includes the lights and the trees, the stockings, all of the knick-knacks around the house, buying all of the gifts, wrapping all of the gifts, making family plans, buying and preparing the food, making cookies.

Here at the church, there's even more with getting ready for Bethlehem Marketplace next weekend, preparing for the Christmas Eve services, attending all of the Christmas parties that exist, and everything else that takes place leading up to Christmas, it is easy for us to be overstressed, overbooked, and over-busy. The world around us seems to be clamoring for our attention.

With flashing screens and urgent deadlines, we often find ourselves scrolling through social media, shopping online, and packing our calendars to the gills. The average American checks their phone 144 times a day. Now, I know you don't want to believe that, but if you have Apple, they have screen time, and it actually will show you how often you do that. And we all are probably a lot closer than what we think.

And not only that, you and I are bombarded with 5,000 advertising messages a day, and I would imagine that number goes up during Christmas time. So much so that even when we try to squeeze in some quiet time, it is often interrupted by a push notification or some kid that's coming in with a question that needs to be answered. It is possible. Is it possible?

This is the question, is it possible for God to still get our attention when we live in a world that seems to have spiritual ADHD? Can we have hope that this year can look any different in our lives? My hope today is to remind us that God can indeed step into our world and into the noise and into the clutter and get our attention. In fact, God has many ways to get our attention.

We see from Scripture that God does sometimes use the large, huge, trumpet blasts from the heavenly hosts. He has those at His command. He can split the skies. He can shake the mountains to get somebody's attention just like He did with the shepherds. But God can also get our attention in the quiet and personal conversations with a messenger from God like He did with Mary.

God can also get our attention through a dream as He did with Joseph or the wise men who weren't led by some extreme GPS system that gave them turn-by-turn directions, but instead by a single patient star. Today, as we see the ways that God works in our world and gets our attention, my goal is that you and I would be reminded that Jesus didn't need a spotlight.

He only needs a manger. God's good news still breaks through in our world today, not always in the sky splitting angelic host ways, but often in the quiet, overlooked ones. The moments that you and I might dismiss as ordinary are often pregnant with the extraordinary.

So as we look at Scripture today and we see the ways that God gets our attention, let's pray that God would open our hearts and our minds today to get our attention even if it is through a snowstorm. Maybe that's exactly what we all needed to start the season. Let me pray. Heavenly Father, we know that this season can be filled with stress and with a to-do list that seems like it never ends.

It is easy for us to get caught up in all of the traditions and all of the things that we need to get done, that we can forget the real reason that we celebrate Christmas. May you get our attention during this season. Again, maybe the snowstorm was an opportunity for many of us to stay home or an opportunity for us this afternoon to just stay inside and maybe take a moment to catch a breath.

I pray that You would speak to us through Your Word, through somebody else, through a conversation. God, would You draw us closer to You? We ask this in Jesus' name, amen. The first section of Scripture I want to read is a common one, certainly during the Christmas season. Many of you have heard it before, but it does expose to us one of the ways that God speaks to us.

And this comes from Luke chapter 2 verses 8 through 14, where we read, "And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people.

Today in the town of David, a Savior has been born to you. He is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be assigned to you. You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a major. And suddenly, a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth, peace to those on whom his favor rests." Sometimes God does use the thunder to get our attention.

He can be a God who thunders. Some cultural context that might help us understand a little more of what is taking place there in the field that night is to understand the responsibility and the roles of shepherds. Shepherds were almost like how you and I would view the cowboys of the Wild Wild West. They were strong, they were rough, they were tough characters, and their responsibility, their sole purpose was to protect the flock 24/7.

They didn't work a simple eight-hour shift. They didn't even work a 12-hour shift. For 24 hours a day, the shepherd's responsibility was to fight off the wolves, the bears, the thieves, even in the dead of the night. They slept on rocks. They survived on whatever food they could find. And these shepherds, unlike cowboys, weren't respected. Instead, they smelled and they were often considered dumb by those in their society.

They were second-rate citizens, and they certainly were never on the list for those that were throwing a party. The fact that the story says they were terrified should shock us because these were hardened men that were used to facing down predators, and the fact that they were terrified should be a sign to us that this was a crazy, magnificent, large event. This was overwhelming.

It was earth-shattering. It was a pants wedding event, all right? For these shepherds. "The sky split open," Scripture says, "like a cosmic curtain and the largest choir in the universe began to sing." This is the type of event that Gabriel in our video is longing for.

He wants one of these sky-splitting, undeniable God moments that are so strong, God's presence is so obvious that even the most distracted person has to stop and pay attention. As much as we can laugh at that video, don't we often feel the same way sometimes? Don't we long for that earth-shattering moment? We maybe want Him to step in and do the miraculous.

Maybe that looks like healing a loved one or dramatically fixing a marriage. Maybe it means providing for a family financially in a way that truly would be miraculous. You and I live in a culture that wants evidence and proof to believe that God exists, and so we often ask God for the miraculous.

And although it is true that sometimes God does really split the skies, so to speak, we know without a shadow of a doubt that we do serve a God who still does miracles. All you have to do is think back to your story. We all have stories. Have there been times in your life when God's work was so obvious that it felt like a trumpet blast from heaven?

Maybe it was a dramatic healing. Maybe it was a restored relationship or an addiction that was broken in an instant. Or maybe it was an addiction that was broken through a lot of time and effort and pain, but you never thought you would get to the other side, and here you are at the other side. Can I encourage you that as you look back at your story and you remember those earth-shattering sky-splitting moments that you would write them down?

These are more than just memories, they are faith builders. Don't keep these God-thunder moments to yourself. Instead, use them to testify to God's goodness. Share them with others because it might be exactly what they need to hear, that God still does do miracles, while at the same time remembering that God's power and His presence aren't limited to the fireworks.

God also gets our attention through the whispers. 1 Kings chapter 19 verse 11 through 12, we read, "The Lord God said, 'Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by. Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind.

After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. And after the earthquake there came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And yet after the fire came a gentle whisper. Let me give you the backstory to what's taking place here in 1 Kings chapter 19. "The prophet Elijah has just called down fire from heaven on Mount Carmel in a standoff against the prophets of Baal." They were arguing who was the true God.

And Elijah has just seen God answer his prayer in the most dramatic way possible. The fire comes down from heaven and consumes not just the sacrifice, but also the wood and the stones and the water that was poured on it. The fire even licks up the dust around the altar, a moment where God proves that He is the true God.

But after this moment, King Ahaz's wife, Jezebel, begins to hunt down Elijah because all of the prophets of Baal were killed, and so Elijah runs away scared. Scripture lets us know that Elijah at this point is in a desperate place. He is emotionally and spiritually bankrupt, so much so that as you read the text, you can tell that Elijah just wants God to let him die even after witnessing this amazing miracle.

And so Elijah runs away and he goes and hides in a cave in the mountain and God speaks to Elijah and says, "Go stand on the edge of the cliff and look out." Elijah was probably expecting another firework moment from God, but instead, Scripture teaches us that God gave Him a theology lesson wrapped in a weather report. That God is not just in the big moments.

He can also be heard and seen in a whisper, so quiet that you'd have to lean in to hear it. In this moment, God was inviting Elijah into the intimacy, the closeness of a relationship. He wants him to listen and to be still enough to hear heaven's softest voice.

You see, God often speaks to us through the whisper moments. God does not need volume to prove His presence. Some of His most profound communications come in the frequencies only the quiet heart can detect. Sometimes I think we live in a world that has forgotten how to whisper.

Our culture seems to operate at maximum volume from the earbuds that we put in our ears to the political debates that take place on TV. And so we ask the question, do we make the space to hear God in the spaces between the noise? I want to encourage you and myself during this season to build rhythms of stillness and quiet into your day. Not just a prayer time.

I'm not asking that you set aside time to lay your requests before God. That's good. But I want you to build in truly quiet time where you are sitting to listen. Maybe it's five minutes in the silence of your car before you start it. Or if it's a cold day like today, start the car, but turn off the radio. Maybe it's two minutes before you get out of bed in the morning or before you walk out of the house that you just turn off the noise and you just listen.

But I would encourage you don't just stop there. Learn to take this idea of silence into your relationships as well. Be comfortable with silence in your conversations. Don't feel the need to fill every moment. Sometimes silent presence is better than a thousand words. Just a moment.

As you read Scripture, it is very clear that God can speak through the stillness just as well as He can speak through a sermon or singing. As a culture, you and I have grown increasingly impatient, but we serve a God who knows the importance of waiting. Not only do we serve a God that speaks in the thunder and serve a God who speaks in the whisper, we also serve a God who knows what it means to wait.

2 Peter 3:9, Peter tells us, "The Lord is not slow in keeping His promise as some understand slowness. Instead, He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance." Again, let me give you the setting of what is taking place. Here, Peter is writing to individuals who were getting anxious for Jesus' return.

For Jesus had left and said, "I am going to come back. I will come back for you." And it has been decades since Jesus has left. And people were beginning to wonder if He had changed his mind. And so Peter offers them a new and fresh perspective. He says, "Maybe it's possible that Jesus hasn't returned yet because He is being merciful.

He wants to allow as much time as possible for others to choose Him." And so today, you might be in a season of waiting. You might be in a season where you are praying for God to speak through the thunder. Maybe you're at a point where you would say, "God, I'll even take the whisper right now. I just need you." The question that you and I need to answer is, what is God trying to teach us in our moment of waiting?

Again, we live in a world that is becoming increasingly impatient. We want things now, movies, food, success, wealth. I always laugh when I am with my children and they watch some television show, whatever it is, and they're using streaming, and so they can go from one episode to the next episode to the next episode, and I laugh at them and tell them, "You know, we used to have to wait a week before the next episode came out. We just live in a world where we don't like to wait anymore.

And yet, you and I should be grateful that God is patient. Even with the distracted and disinterested." Again, think about your own story. How long did God wait for you? How patient has He been with your doubts, with your questions, and with your concerns? Many of us over the past few days have spent time with family and friends as we celebrated Thanksgiving, and maybe you come to church today or you're watching online and you've just come to the conclusion, "Man, I have been praying for this family member for a long time, but after this weekend, they're just a lost cause.

Once again, I tried to be gracious. Once again, I tried to talk about the love of God with them and they kept turning me away. Can I just encourage you that in your moment of patience right now, that you not stop praying for them? Keep praying for those family members that seem like the impossible case. If God seems slow in answering, maybe you and I can consider that He is working on them in a deeper level than maybe we know.

Instead of seeing it as denial, maybe you and I can interpret it as divine patience. If you want to go a step further, learn to practice gratitude for God's patience as He is training with you. Now, this is one of the prayers that I don't pray. I don't pray for patience. That's a dangerous prayer. But pray that God would speak to us and grant us that. Be patient with those you have been praying for. They're on a journey.

Go on the journey with them and give them time to process. Of course, you and I naturally want to see immediate change. We want to see those life-shattering moments where somebody goes from walking away from God to immediately turning and having this huge thing. But the process can be just as beautiful as you see

gradual changes. One last verse that you all are familiar with today, John chapter 1 verse 14, we read, "The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us.

We have seen His glory, the glory of the one and only Son who came from the Father, full of grace and truth." Not only does God speak through the lightning and the whisper, and God is with us in those moments, He understands we also serve a God who dwells with us. As we celebrate Christmas, we are celebrating a God who chose to enter His creation in the humblest accommodations possible.

He came as a baby born in a feeding trough. The God who created the galaxies chose to sleep on straw. The God who commands the angels chose to cry when he was hungry. The God who could have demanded a royal welcome chose to be born unnoticed by anyone who would have been considered important in that time.

You and I live in a world that is obsessed by power and greed. You and I live in a world that is filled with selfishness and wanting what is best for us, even if it is at the expense of someone else. But yet, during Christmas, that paradigm changes. Even in a sinful and fallen world, we recognize the importance and are taught the importance of giving to others.

Jesus chose to come in a manger, not to be praised by those that are in the most power at that time, not in a huge, dramatic way where the whole world would see, but he chose to come as a baby in a manger so that he could be approachable by all. It wasn't just the elite. It wasn't just the wealthy or the religious or the educated that could understand the story all were welcome to see the child.

Again, Jesus didn't need a spotlight. He used a manger. One of the struggles that many have in coming to know Jesus is feeling the need to fix themselves and clean the mess before you invite God into it. Can I remind you that God is not afraid of your mess? Remember, he was born in a barn.

He is used to the messy, which also gives him the right to leave any door open he wants to. Have you guys ever had your parents tell you that? Were you born in a barn? Could you imagine being like, "Yes, I was. Yes, I was." So you can leave the door open. This season, as we get ready to celebrate Christmas in many different ways, God may choose to speak to you in the spectacular. He may give you the dramatic answer to prayer, the miraculous provision, the undeniable sign that He is real.

But I also want you to know that during this season, God may speak to you in the stillness. He may speak to you in the waiting, in the ordinary moments that feel unremarkable but are pregnant with His presence. The question really is not whether God is speaking. The question is whether you and I are listening. Remember that God is with us.

So in the chaos of Christmas shopping and in the quiet of Christmas morning, in the joy of family gatherings, and then in the loneliness of empty chairs, in the abundance of feast and in the scarcity of struggle, may you and I be reminded that God is with us. That is the message of Christmas, that God is with us because He loves us and He wants to be with us.

Let me pray. Heavenly Father, again, I recognize that this season can be extremely difficult for many people. It's supposed to be a season that's filled with joy. It's supposed to be a season that's filled with anticipation and excitement. That we would be looking forward to getting together with family and friends and giving gifts and eating. But for many, those things don't exist.

And so, Father, I pray during this season that we would hear You, that we would listen. Father, I pray that in the hectic and busy schedules that we often find during this month, we would schedule time to simply be still, to be quiet, and to listen to you.

May we quiet our hearts enough to hear? It's in Jesus' name we pray. Amen.