

Luke Chapter 1 v 1 - 25

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Preacher: Peter Robinson

- [0 : 00] of his splendor. And when we come to worship, we join with not only the angels as they worship God, but we join with all those who've gone before us, all those who have trusted and believed on the Lord God, who worship him day and night. And so our first hymn is that wonderful carol, Hark! Or listen, the herald angels are singing, Glory to the Newborn King. Let's stand and sing 206 and join our voices in the worship of God. 206.
206. 227 Another generation of Christ is born in Bethlehem.
- Hark the herald angels sing. Glory to the newborn King. Christ my highest heaven adored. Christ the everlasting Lord. Late in time behold him come. Offspring of the Virgin's womb. Held in flesh the Godhead see. Held in common deity. Jesus man with men to come.
- [2 : 07] Jesus our Emmanuel. Hark the herald angels sing. Glory to the newborn King.
- Hail the heaven of Prince of Peace. Hail the Son of Righteousness. Light and light to all he brings.
- Wrist with healing in his wings. As he lays his glory by. On that man the poor may die. Born to raise the sons on earth. Born to give the second plan. On the herald angels sing. Glory to the newborn King. favour the Lord. Die. Is the son that looked him shall fill. T■■■■ or moon. across life is the son. Chi Minh Yoss.
- [3 : 19] pele o praxis■■■■ out. hey Oh What a wonderful occasion it must have been for those shepherds as they heard the angelic host singing worship to our God.
- And what a great joy it is that we can sing worship to him too, that we can approach him and draw near to him, that he doesn't turn us away or reject us and not just when we sing but when we pray.
- So let us pray together now and draw near to God. Our most glorious and gracious Heavenly Father, you are truly the God who deserves our praise.
- You are truly the God who deserves our worship, our love, our attention, our obedience, our everything and our all in all because you are the only God, the true God, the God above all other gods, the God who has made, created and provided for this world, the God who has always had us in his mind and heart, the God who never ceases in his love towards those who have put their faith and trust in him, the God who gave the greatest gift to humanity, the greatest gift the world has ever seen, the greatest gift that has ever been given, the gift of your only begotten Son, the eternal Son of God, who became man, who became that baby, yes, born in Bethlehem, but became that one who is our Messiah, our Savior, our King, our Rescuer and our Redeemer, that one who came with the one goal in mind, that one mission and purpose, to bear the sin, the punishment that is ours, and to rescue us from its curse and consequences and hell.
- Oh Lord, you are the God who never changes, the God who is constantly the same, the God in whom we can and must put our faith and trust, and the God who we know will be with us not just this morning, but who will never leave us nor forsake us.

[6 : 31] Oh Lord, our God, be with us in a way that we know and feel and experience this morning. Be with us in a way, oh Lord, which means that we are changed and affected and altered by meeting with you.

Come amongst us by your Holy Spirit, and cause us, oh Lord, in our hearts and with our mouths, but Lord, with our whole lives, to burst forth into praise and worship and adoration, to be bubbling over, oh Lord, with the joy of our God.

Oh, come amongst us, we pray, and speak to us, we ask, for we bring our prayers to you. In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. The glass is back on.

1,025. It's page 1,025. And we're going to read from verse 1 through to verse 25. It's part of our preparing for Christmas for the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We'll begin with Luke and his introduction to his record of the life of Christ. So, page 1,025, Luke chapter 1, beginning at verse 1.

[7 : 46] Here is the Word of God. Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who, from the first, were eyewitnesses and servants of the Word.

With this in mind, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I too decided to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things that you have been taught.

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.

Both of them were righteous in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's commands and decrees blamelessly. But they were childless, because Elizabeth was not able to conceive, and they were both very old.

Once when Zechariah's division was on duty, 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 burn incense.

[9 : 05] And when the time for the burning of incense came, all the assembled worshippers were praying outside. 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, 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 call him John. He will be a joy and 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 fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from before he was born. He will bring back many of the people of Israel 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 parents to their children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.

[10 : 11] Zechariah asked the angel, How can I be sure of this? I am an old man, and my wife is well on in years. 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, and wondering why he stayed so long in the temple. When he came out, he could not speak to them. They realized he had seen a vision in the temple, for he kept making signs to them, but remained unable to speak.

When his turn of service was completed, he returned home. After this, his wife Elizabeth became pregnant, and for five months remained in seclusion. The Lord has done this for me, she said.

In these days, he has shown his favor, and taken away my disgrace among the people. Please have Luke and chapter 1 open in your Bibles.

[11 : 24] That's page 1025. As we look at these events recorded by Luke, these opening events of his account concerning the life of our Lord Jesus Christ, his coming into the world.

Now, I know that Christmas can be, at times, something like a military operation, in the sense that it needs very careful and precise planning and preparation.

And I know that there are some of you here who have a very special list that you prepared years and years ago of all the jobs that have to be done before Christmas Day itself.

And on that list, each job is placed in its order with a deadline, as it were, as to when that job has to be done and finished and prepared.

And for each of us, there will be that list. Some of us mentally. For some of you, I know it's a very physical thing. And for each person who has a list or an order or a plan for Christmas, it all depends on really how long that list is or what needs to be done or how we've got on in the past as to when we start thinking about it.

[12 : 38] But there are some, I'm sure, who begin thinking about Christmas on Boxing Day, beginning to prepare, or at least New Year's Day, or just after, beginning to prepare for Christmas.

What do I need to get done? What do I need to prepare for? Who do I know to prepare presents for? And so on. And already the clock is ticking down. Now Luke, of course, has written for us here a very thorough, full account of the life of the Lord Jesus Christ as he understood it.

He tells us he went and carefully investigated everything. And he looked in and spoke to eyewitnesses and recorded events just as they were told to him.

And yet, though he's recording and concerned about the life of Jesus, he doesn't begin there, does he? He goes back further. He goes back beyond the coming of Christ into the world, goes beyond what we think of, especially as the nativity story.

He goes back to the visit six months earlier than the birth of Jesus to this time when he tells us about an old couple.

[13 : 49] In fact, you're told here they were very old. Probably over 60. That's how old they were. Yes, it's incredible, isn't it? That old, over 60.

Sorry, I'm being naughty there. They were both very old, he's told. Now why does Luke do that? Why does he sort of go back? Why does he try to sort of begin all the way back there?

Well, clearly, he thinks this is very important. The events surrounding Zachariah and Elizabeth and the birth of John the Baptist are counted by Luke as essential for his friend Theophilus to know and understand that he might understand the coming of Christ and his mission into the world.

And when you look at the birth of Jesus and the birth of John the Baptist, you see there's a great deal of similarity, isn't there? Most glaringly obvious is, of course, that both of these births were announced by Gabriel beforehand.

We all know about Gabriel going to Mary, his Gabriel meeting with Zachariah, telling him. We know that both their births were miraculous. They didn't happen naturally. Our Lord Jesus Christ, born of a virgin, but here, John the Baptist, born of a woman who was infertile and beyond the age of childbearing.

[15 : 07] We know as well as we go on in the story that there was a great deal of singing and rejoicing that took place at both of these births. Later on in Luke, in chapter 1, verse 67, Zachariah, at the birth of his son, burst out into this great song of praise and worship of God, just as there was much surrounding the birth of Jesus.

And we're told that the birth of these two boys was going to be a cause of joy. Verse 14, He will be a joy and delight to you and many will rejoice because of his birth.

Again, seeing that the implications of the birth of these two boys were to not just affect their families, but to affect communities, societies, and ultimately, the world.

So what I want us to do is this morning, tonight, and next Sunday morning, concentrate on Luke and what he has to say about the coming of Christ in relationship to these two elderly people and the gift of a son to them because this is how he begins.

And I believe he does so because he wants us to grasp better what it means that Christ came into the world, that we might understand what Christmas is all about, and that we might apply how God deals with these people to how God deals with us.

[16 : 25] And immediately, it seems to me that there is, as we look through the story, look at the events of Zechariah and Elizabeth, there pops up that age-old question, that age-old conundrum, which troubles all of us and all people.

And it's simply this question. Why don't good things happen to good people? Why don't good things happen to good people? Here is a couple that we are told have devoted themselves to serving God all their lives.

They were both descendants of Aaron. He was the very first high priest, and every one of his children, his descendants, were to be those who served this particular ministry of priests.

Not anybody could be a priest in the Old Testament, only those descendant from Aaron. And they counted their responsibility as descendants of Aaron and their privileges of being serving God very seriously.

We're told that they observed the Lord's commands and decrees blamelessly. We're told they were righteous in the sight of God. And of course, we know that Zechariah particularly carried out his duties and his work as a priest.

[17 : 35] Now when God says here in his word that they were blameless, he doesn't say that they are sinless. There's a very big difference to that. So these were not perfect people.

They were not people who did everything absolutely right. They were people who served God from their hearts. In other words, their hearts wanted to serve God. They wanted to love Him, sought to follow Him.

But of course, like all of us, they failed and they got it wrong. But nevertheless, they stood out from the world around about them. They stood out as people who were true followers of the living God.

But, notice after we're told about them and told about their good deeds and told about their heritage and told about their service, but, says verse 7, they were childless.

And there was two reasons they were childless. The first reason was that Elizabeth was unable to conceive. Even when she was younger and they were first married, we don't know how long they were married, but when they were first married, she just did not have what was necessary to conceive.

[18 : 39] She was sadly infertile. But the second reason they had no children was because they were both very old. Elizabeth had passed the age of childbearing. It differs, as you know, between women, but she was well past that possibility of ever being able to children.

If she had been able to have children when she was young, which she couldn't, she certainly wouldn't be able to have them now she was old. It was two things against her having children. It made it impossible for her to have children.

And that lack of a child, that lack of children, was something which was very crushing for them. It was something very painful for them, as it must be for all those who struggle with that.

It was something that they didn't find easy. And it was particularly hard for Elizabeth. There was a sort of stigma attached to not being able to have children for a woman in those days.

Not only because there was the expectation of the family. Everybody, when they got married, everybody was looking forward to when are you going to have children, when are you going to have children, when are you going to, you know what it can be like. Sometimes grandparents, or prospective grandparents, can be very impatient.

[19 : 46] Can't they? But also, much more seriously, as those who believed in God, those who served God, they thought, or understood, that children were a sign of God's blessing.

So, if God was happy with you, then God would bless you with children. And this was something which was very painful. See, right at the end of verse 25, where Elizabeth is pregnant, she says, the Lord has done this for me.

In these days, he's shown me his favor, and this is important, taken away my disgrace among the people. She felt disgrace. She felt second class. She felt like she had failed God.

She felt like she had failed her family. She felt disgrace. A terrible thing. A very sad, sad thing. And that brings us, then, to this question. Why don't good things happen to good people?

Or, as we might put it another way, why do bad things happen to good people? Not having a child was a bad thing as far as she was concerned and her family were concerned. Why do these things happen?

[20 : 54] It's such a question that we struggle with ourselves, for ourselves personally, for our loved ones, for the people around about us. Just as I prayed this morning and heard on the news this morning, here's a church in Nigeria, a group of Christian people meeting together, and the church roof falls in and kills 60 of them.

Well, why does this happen? How do we have to understand? How do we approach these things in life? Now, we're right, and in this sense here, she was right to believe that God is the one who alone gives life.

Children are a gift from God. He has the right to give children and the right to withhold children, but wrong in thinking that to not have a child is a sign of God's displeasure.

Let me say this to anybody here. If this is something that you yourself have struggled with or something that you find difficult, for one reason or another, you've not been able to have children, for whatever reason that is, let me say this to you, this is not a sign of God's displeasure towards you.

This is not God dealing with you in a way because you are bad or because you've done wrong or because you're unworthy or any of those things. It's important that we know that. It's important that we understand that.

[22 : 09] But it still raises that question, why? Well, what can we see here? Let's move on in the story. So, we read to verse 7. We read on from verse 8 to 10.

Once when Zechariah's division was on duty, he was serving as a priest before God. He was chosen by Lot. Now, there were thousands and thousands of priests. As you can imagine, all the descendants of Aaron were thousands and thousands.

Now, only the men, of course, could serve as priests within the temple. But all those priests were divided into 24 divisions, 24 groups. And Zechariah's division, we're told, was called Abijah.

They're in verse 5. And it was 8th in the order of the 12. And they would do this sort of circuit. Twice a year, Zechariah and those in Abijah's group, as it were, would go up to the temple, go up to Jerusalem from their home, and serve there for a week in the temple.

So, they would just, it would be on a rotor system, shift system. Not bad, is it, if you had shifts just two weeks out of a year. That was your shift. But, there were so many priests that they used to draw lots, a bit like picking the shortest straw type of thing, to see who would have the special jobs.

[23 : 26] There were lots of other jobs, cleaning up, mucking up, and all the things like that. But there were special jobs like burning incense on the altar to the Lord and doing things like that, which meant that you had to go into the holy place, into one of the special parts of the temple by yourself.

And this happened, we're told, that Zachariah was chosen by lot. You only ever did one of the special jobs once in your lifetime.

So once you'd had your turn and offered incense or done something super special like that, then that was it. You just did all the menial tasks and the other tasks as well. So Zachariah, all his life, he's an old man now, probably coming very close to the end of being a priest and unable to serve.

Now at last, he's chosen. Now at last, he's given this opportunity to go into the temple, into the holy place and offer incense.

Clearly something's happening, isn't it? Something special is happening. Why has it taken so long until now for him to draw the short straw to go in? Why has he had to wait until he's an old man when he'd almost given up hope of ever being able to get into the holy place or to offer incense or to do one of the special jobs?

[24 : 43] It's clear, God is doing something. God is doing something. The Bible tells us in Proverbs 16, the lot is cast, okay, but the decision is from the Lord.

There's no such thing as luck, there's no such thing as fate, there's no such thing as chance. Zachariah's life, like each one of us, is ordered by a sovereign God, a God who has his finger, as it were, in every part of our lives, a God who is involved in the details of our lives.

Your life and mine is the arena in which God is working. Everything that has happened to us from that moment of our conception to the moment of now, God has seen and known and God has been involved with and is working in.

And let me say that to you here this morning if you're not a Christian. You may be thinking, why am I here this morning? Why am I here in church amongst these Christian people when I know that I'm not a Christian myself?

Well, it's because God has brought you and engineered and worked in all things to bring you here. And you may say, well, it's my free choice and I decided to come because so-and-so asked me to come or because I thought I should come, but ultimately in everything, God is bringing you to that place of fulfilling his purposes, of hearing his gospel, of coming to know his son.

[26 : 15] So nothing happens by chance. So Zechariah being called up at that time to go and do his work in the division of Abijah, that wasn't by chance.

It wasn't by chance that the lot fell to him and it was his turn to go into the inner place. But still doesn't answer our question does it? Still doesn't answer our question why don't good things happen to good people?

So what else do we see? Well, verse 11 tells us that there in the temple God meets with Zechariah.

In other words, we learn that God meets us where we expect him to. God meets us where we expect him to. Zechariah is in the temple of God when he meets with God's messenger, Gabriel.

The temple was much more than just like a church, if I can put it that way. It wasn't just a building where they made offerings to God and sacrifices to God and worshipped God. The temple was the physical symbol of God's presence with his people.

[27 : 27] It was, in one sense, God saying, I am here. This is my monument or this is a symbol to myself. This is a sign that I am amongst my people. And it was meant to be a reflection of heaven.

So when Moses was given a description of the tabernacle, which then was made into the temple, he was shown what was in heaven. And it was a reflection, a shadow of what was to be made on earth.

So Zechariah is in the temple and he meets with God. God has met him where you would expect God to meet him. So if we're going to find answers to our questions, if we're going to hear from God some of the answers to the problems and the questions of life, then it's going to be here, isn't it?

It's going to be here in the temple. It's going to be here where God is represented. And yet, of course, Zechariah is startled, isn't he? Here's the angel and bang, we're told he was afraid, gripped with fear.

Many people want to hear from God. Many people talk about God, say, if only God would speak to me, if only God would show himself to me, if only God was there, if only I could know God in some way.

[28 : 48] But the trouble is that those people who say those sort of things and talk about those sort of things are not the people who seek God in the place we expect to find him. They want to find God where they are rather than going to where they should expect to meet with God.

In other words, coming to meet with his people, coming to meet in a church fellowship, finding God in his word, the Bible, coming to God in prayer and seeking him. You see, the reality is that God has said and declared, if you seek me, you will find me, if you seek after me with all your hearts.

For many people, because we live in the instantaneous society we live, because we can phone up and order a pizza or do it on an app on our phone, we think that somehow we can just do that with God.

He's just going to sort of fall out the sky to us. He's just going to come and speak to us. He's just going to, we can sort of instantaneously message him. People aren't willing anymore, if I can put it that way, to do the hard graft.

They aren't willing to show their seriousness with God. They aren't willing to go to where they might find him. They aren't willing to pick up the Bible and say, look God, I really want to know if this is true. I really want to know if you exist and I'm going to start reading this.

[30 : 06] Now show yourself to me. Or they'll pray before they come to church. I wonder if that's the case with us even as Christians. We may have had a rough week, a difficult time and we're thinking, well, I'm going to go to church this morning.

But do we come with a prayerfulness? Do we come with a sense of, Lord, I really need to meet with you. I really need you to speak with me. I really need you to help me. I'm coming here, Lord, because I want and expect that you should speak with me.

Are we coming like that? In all honesty, are we simply coming because it's the end of the week? It's Sunday morning. It's what we do.

So many people fail to meet with God because they do not look for Him where they can expect to find Him. Now we know that God is everywhere.

Of course He is. We know that He fills the heavens and the universe. Of course He does. Yet God has especially revealed Himself to us in His Word, especially revealed Himself to His people when they meet together, and especially encouraged us and called upon us to ask, seek, knock.

[31 : 15] And if you're one of those people even this morning who says, well, I don't know if I can believe in this God. I don't know if I can accept this Jesus as my Savior. I don't know whether I can truly trust in Him.

Well, let me ask you. Have you asked Him? Have you sought Him? Are you seeking Him? And where are you seeking Him? Again, we're living in a society, aren't we, sadly, where people are seeking all sorts of spiritual enlightenment.

But they're looking in all the wrong places. They're looking to mysticism. They're looking to the New Age. And they're looking to horoscopes. And they're looking to tarot card readers.

And they're looking to all sorts of circumstances. They're looking anywhere they can to find the answers to life, but they will not look in the right place. Is it because within us we know that really if we are serious with God and we begin to read His Word, then actually He's going to be serious with us.

And He's going to demand things of us that we don't like. We prefer the pick-and-mix approach to religion. I'll take that bit of Islam. And I'll take that bit of Hinduism.

[32 : 26] And I'll take that bit of pseudo-Christianity. And I'll take that bit of whatever it may be. Dear friends, Zachariah met with God in the place where God was.

God wants to meet with us. Yes, He does. He desperately, earnestly wants us to meet with Him. He came from heaven into this world to meet with us.

He took on humanity and frailty to meet with us, to meet with you. And if you haven't met with Him, it's not because of His lack of trying.

What is it that God says to him? What is it that God says to Zachariah when he meets with him? And what does it say that relates to our question, our question of why don't good things happen to good people?

Well, he meets with Gabriel, the angel, doesn't he? And the first thing he says after he calms his fears, do not be afraid, he immediately says to him, Zachariah, your prayer has been heard.

[33 : 34] Your prayer has been heard. And so we realise that no prayer that we bring before God is forgotten by Him. You'll forget that sort of people say things like, oh, I don't pray because God's got so much on His plate, He's got so much to do, there's all these wars and things going on.

That's rubbish, isn't it? He's God, it's no problem to Him. Every single prayer that you have prayed, God has registered and remembered. And here he says, God has heard your prayer or your prayer has been heard.

Now it's almost certain, isn't it, that here are a couple, they're followers of God, they believed in seeking to do His will and they were people of prayer. Zachariah and Elizabeth prayed. In fact, I'm almost certain of the fact that they prayed even before they were married and when they were married they began to pray.

As many Christian couples do, even before children are born or conceived, you begin to pray for them, don't you? Lord, do pray that you bless us with the family, pray for the children you're going to give us, pray that they would come to know you.

But even before, and I'm sure they did that. And as they went on through the early years of their marriage, I'm sure that they prayed regularly, Lord bless us with children.

[34 : 53] They saw relatives and friends who had babies and families. Poor Elizabeth would see her neighbours pushing the New Testament equivalent of her pram, a silver cross pram across the streets.

Lord, please give us a child. And as the years went on, surely their prayers got more intense. Surely their prayers got more desperate, more earnest, more passionate.

For years, it seemed as if God had not heard them, as if the sky was brass, as if all their prayers just bounced off. Lord, we've been praying. Why aren't you hearing? Why aren't you listening? Why aren't you doing something about it?

And of course, eventually, Elizabeth reached that age where she knew there was a change taking place in her body. She knew that any hope of having a child now was gone. Her body was far too old.

There was nothing there. It's possible, and I'm only surmising, I think it's possible they stopped praying for a child. Because they knew that they couldn't.

[35 : 58] They knew it was impossible now. They're far too old. They prayed about many other things, I'm sure, but I think that prayer for a child stopped. Maybe ten years before. Who knows?

But now, God says, your prayer's been heard. Your prayer's been heard. And let me, again, encourage you, dear friends, perhaps you've prayed and prayed and prayed, and maybe as long as Zachariah and Elizabeth, you've prayed about a certain person in the family you longed to see them saved.

You've prayed about a situation which has been a cause of great concern to you for many years and your prayer seems as if it's not been heard. Let me encourage you not to stop praying.

Don't ever stop praying for that loved one to be saved. Don't ever stop praying for that situation which seems still to be so hopeless and helpless. This, if anything it teaches us is this, it's don't stop praying because God has heard your prayer.

And perhaps you've prayed and you prayed years ago about a situation and you thought and you prayed and prayed and nothing happened and so you stopped praying. You said, look, it's worth, it's no point me praying.

[37 : 10] God has still heard that prayer. Let me encourage you to take up that prayer again to God. See, Jesus taught many parables about the matter of prayer.

One of my favourites is the widow and the judge. But he says this, Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them they should always pray and not give up.

Why? Because God hears prayer. Because we haven't had that prayer answered does not mean that God has not heard it nor does it mean that God has forgotten it nor does it mean that God has even refused it necessarily.

It may be not this time, not just yet. Because here, after all these years, when all hope had gone, when all trust in themselves or their natural ability to have children had finished, when they, we can almost say, had lost faith in ever having children, now, at this time, God answers prayer.

God has no idea that God has no idea of God. There's a warning as well here about what we ask for. Be careful what you ask for.

[38 : 26] Zachariah is given this wonderful promise by Gabriel that you will have a son and you'll have to name him John and all these sort of things and then poor old Zachariah, how does he respond to this? Verse 18, how can I be sure of this?

I'm an old man and my wife is well on in years. Gabriel is actually asking for proof, isn't he? How can I be sure?

Give me a sign. Show me that what you've said is true, that I can trust it, that I can believe you. Now, it's not that sort of disbelief that you get when something astonishing has happened.

You know, sometimes something wonderful happens to you and you go, wow, I just can't believe this has happened. It's not that, is it? This is the unbelief of I can't believe that can happen.

I don't really take you at your word. His response is very difficult to Mary's.

[39 : 28] Remember when Mary said, how can this be since I'm a virgin? She got an explanation, didn't she, in simple terms about how the child would be born to her.

This isn't the same response of Mary, this is a response of unbelief and of doubt. In other words, what will you do to make me trust you? Is what he's saying.

And there's a certain indignation, isn't there, in Gabriel's tone of voice. I am Gabriel. I stand before the presence of God. I've been sent to speak to you and tell you this good news.

What are you doing doubting my word? And then he concedes to the request of Zachariah. Now you will have a sign. You're going to be dumb for the next nine months.

You're not going to be able to speak for the next. You want a sign? You want evidence? That's what I'm going to give you. And it wasn't until the very day of the circumcision and the naming, as it were, of John that his voice and his lips begin to speak again.

[40 : 30] Be careful how we pray, dear friends. It may be that the thing that we long for more than anything else is withheld from us by God. Now he might withhold it from us until the right time like this timing.

He had a purpose in it, a plan in it. It might be that he has to wait until we are ready ourselves to receive it. in one sense the opposite of dear Barry and his Tonka toy.

Sometimes we give, we might want to give our children a gift before they're ready for it. And God knows when we're ready for it.

We're not ready to receive it yet. We're not mature enough. We're not old enough. We're not, we have, we are, things aren't in place in our lives that we can receive that gift and use it for the benefit that it's given.

We know that of young people, don't they? Sometimes they get this incredible ability and gift when they're very, very young, whether it's a sportsman or intellectually, but they're too young for it. Their character isn't developed enough and so that gift becomes ruined or spoiled and it spoils them.

[41 : 48] It may be, of course, that in God's perfect wisdom and love of us that he knows that to withhold that gift completely, from us is the best thing. It may be the very dream and the desire and the longing of our hearts but it may not be what is best for us and God in his love doesn't give it to us because he knows better than us even though that's very hard for us to concede.

and so we see, dear friends, here in the events of Zechariah and Elizabeth that the Lord our God does give good gifts to good people and we see that everything that he gives us, whatever we receive, is a gift of his grace and that's what brings us really to the understanding of Christ coming into the world.

It's found in these last verses, these last words of verse 25, the words of Elizabeth, the Lord has done this for me, she said, in these days he has shown me his favour and many of us will know that that word favour is the same word as grace.

He has shown me his grace. Every gift that you and I receive from God and every dealing that he has with us is because of his grace.

If you're a Christian this morning, if you've put your faith in Jesus, then God never ever will deal with you in anger. He will never ever deal with you in punishment. He will never ever deal with you apart from grace, his undeserved loving favour towards you.

[43 : 33] So Zechariah returns home after his priestly duties are finished in Jerusalem and no doubt there's a lot of writing that takes place between Zachariah and Elizabeth explaining what had happened, explaining what was going on.

No doubt her excitement about him recording and recalling this story and then within weeks she's pregnant. What God has promised is taking shape. What God has said will happen is happening.

He's not slow in accomplishing his purposes as we understand it. He goes at his own speed but when he works he works and it's clear and it's definite and it's real. And so she says God you've shown me grace.

He didn't give John the Baptist because Elizabeth and Zachariah deserved to have a child. Nothing that we have from God we deserve. We are sinners who deserve God's wrath but every gift that he gives us every day, every moment is a gift of his grace and when we think of Christ coming into the world we have the gift of grace to a sinful world.

We have God showing mercy and favour to a people who do not seek him or know him or own him or love him. Undeserved, unmerited grace.

[44 : 56] And the only way we can understand Christmas, the only way we can understand the gift of Jesus in this world is to understand him as the gift of grace, the love of God to sinful people and only when we understand Jesus as the gift of grace are we ready to receive him as our saviour and our redeemer and receive the blessings that he gives.

I close with these words from Titus. Titus in chapter 3, just listen to these. At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures.

We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. But when the kindness and love of God our saviour appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy.

He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ, our saviour, so that having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.

For the kindness and love of God has appeared. yea it How deep the waters are for us, How fast beyond all measure, That he should give his own wisdom, To make the wretch his treasure, How great the pain of searing loss, The Father turns his face away, As wounds with other chosen ones, Bring many sons to glory.

[47 : 29] With all the men upon the cross, My sins upon his shoulders, Ashamed I hear my walking voice, Call out among the starved, It was my sin that held him there, Until it was accomplished, His dying breath has brought me life, I know that it is me.

I will not boast in anything, No gifts, no power, no wisdom, But I will boast in Jesus Christ, His death and resurrection, Why should I gain from his reward?

I cannot even answer, But this I know with all my heart, His wounds are pain my ransom.

God, the blessed and only ruler, The King of kings, The Lord of lords, Who alone is immortal, And who lives in unapproachable light, Whom no one can see, Or has been seen, To him be the honour, And might, Forever.

Amen.