

**A Sermon for Dayspring Baptist Church**  
**By Chris Fillingham**  
**“Preparing Your Home”**  
**Luke 1:5-25**  
**November 29, 2015**

**Part 1: Preparing Your Home.**

You could say that the whole gospel story is a story of things getting turned upside down. The way things are “supposed to” work is derailed... and sometime even exposed for the lie that “supposed to” is.

It’s part of what makes the gospels so beautiful and so life changing. You’re living your life with a set of assumptions about what can and cannot happen, about where God is and God isn’t. And along comes this story that says, **“You just might be wrong!”**

If the gospels tell us anything at all, they tell us that...***the world you live in is more mysterious and beautiful than you know. The God you serve is more mysterious and active than you realize.***

Of course, in the middle of the grind of life all that seems... well it seems unlikely at best... but mostly just a fairy tale. And so you keep your head down. Your nose to the grind. And up on the top shelf of some dark closet where you keep those things you never look at anymore but can’t quite bring yourself to throw away, you store away your hopes and dreams.

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I imagine that’s where Zechariah kept any idea of becoming a father. And it’s been up there for years now collecting dust. Which has been helpful for him. The dream of becoming a parent has faded, but so has the pain of their barrenness. It’s not nearly as acute as it used to be. So, keeping it stored away has been a kind of survival mechanism.

He and Elizabeth have accepted their lot, and sure it still hurts some, but it’s more like the dull buzz of the traffic in the background, rather than the piercing fire alarm that it once was.

So, you can imagine that day in the temple was disorienting in all kinds of ways. Only one person was to enter that sacred space to burn incense. They rolled the dice. The lot fell to Zechariah, and his blood pressure starts to climb.

This is one duty you don’t want to mess up. Entering into the Divine presence is a great honor, but it’s all together unnerving. You have no idea what might await you, but the one thing you can count on is that it will be both wonderful and dangerous all at the same time.

So, he takes a deep breath, begins to mumble the Shema to himself, **“Here O Israel, the Lord your God. The Lord is One.”** He says it again and again to center his heart and mind as he goes in... trying as best as he can to be pure of heart.

Once he's in there, he lights the incenses next to the alter. At first it wouldn't catch. It took him a few tries, which only took about a minute but it felt like hours. Finally there is a drift of smoke coming up from the incense.

His job is done.

He takes a deep breath, turns back toward the door, and he jumps.

Someone's there. Panic seizes his body.

And then he gets the message. **“You're prayers have been answered. You and Elizabeth will have a son. He will be a delight to you and will be filled with the Spirit of Elijah. He will prepare the people for the coming of the Lord.”**

I imagine Zechariah's head is spinning. He's not sure what is happening: if he's dreaming or imagining things. The only thing he knows for sure is that what he's being told is impossible.

Of course part of him wants to believe it. But another part is afraid of dusting off those old hopes again. They were put up in the closet for a reason. He remembers the disappointment, and doesn't want to go back down that road.

Not to mention that a baby at this point, would up-leave their lives. He and Elizabeth have gotten used to the way things are.

So, of course he asks, **“How can I be sure?”** It just comes out of him in the moment. This question. This disbelief. And there it is: the one misstep in the holy place he was afraid he might make.

But he's lucky.

Instead of losing his life, he just loses his voice.

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Just imagine what it must have been like a few weeks later when he finally gets home from his time in Jerusalem. It's the first he's seen Elizabeth since this all happened and it's not like he could have texted her to tell her what's up. She has no idea.

He walks in and it doesn't take too long for her to realize that he's lost his voice. The hard part is figuring out how it happened. And so, they play a game of charades and she's finally able to figure out that the lot fell to him... and something happened in while he was at the alter, in the Holy Place... but what?

So, he goes and gets that old box that's been sitting up on the top shelf of their closet and dusts it off and opens it up. Now Elizabeth is nervous.

She knows what's in there. She hasn't forgotten: The baby blanket she'd started before her first miscarriage. The little goat-skin booties that Zechariah had made.

At the bottom was the family scroll. It traced their heritage. Zechariah's family tree went all the way back to Abijah. Elizabeth could trace hers back to Aaron, Moses' brother.

Zechariah unrolled the scroll, and began to draw a line that connected his name and Elizabeth's name. And under that line, he wrote a new name: John.

Elizabeth got choked up when she saw the name. Everything in her wanted to believe, but it felt so risky. She looked up at Zechariah, who was looking at her.

He nodded his head and smiled.

And she smiled.

Then she shook her head in disbelief and started to chuckle...

which made Zechariah laugh... and they remembered the ancient story of Sara's laughter and they both laughed some more.

Then Elizabeth looked around their home, and said, **"Zechariah, we are not ready for this at all..."**

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And so it began: going through old boxes, rearranging furniture, throwing some things out to make room for new things. After all, there's a lot to do when you find a baby is going to be on its way.

It's a bit like getting ready for a guest to come over. You clean things up you've been meaning to get to for a while now. You might even move some furniture around. You light a candle or two and get out the best dishes and try to take things up a notch.

That's how it is for a guest. But when a baby is coming and the preparation gears go in overdrive. The entire house has to be rearranged. The office has to get turned into a nursery. It gets a new coat of paint, new furniture... that's nicer than your own bedroom furniture.

Cabinet locks need to be installed along with outlet covers, baby gates, night lights, changing stations, car seats. Not only that, but there are classes you suddenly have to take and books to read because there's a lot to know if you're going to be ready for this.

Of course, Zechariah and Elisabeth couldn't go register at Babies-R-Us, but they had their own preparation to make. The ritual is the same. They had to get things ready. He started working on making the crib. She got out that half finished baby blanket and started again.

***Because when there is a baby coming, you're world is going to get turned up side down. And your old hopes are going to get stirred up again. And even though you have no idea what awaits you, you're pretty sure this can be both wonderful and dangerous for you...***

The only thing you do know, is you'd better get ready.  
You'd better get your house in order.

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That's exactly what we're going to do this morning.  
I'm here to tell you, there's a baby on it's way, and it's going to turn your world upside down.

I know some of you have had enough disappointments along the way, that you're not really up for believing it again this year. Dusting off those hopes you've been storing away up in your closet for so long now sounds naive at best, and painful at worst.

But let me invite you to believe again, because ***the world you live in is more mysterious and beautiful than you know. And the God you serve is more mysterious and active than you realize.***

**"How can I be sure?"** you ask? Well you can't. The life of faith doesn't work with guarantees and assurances. But it doesn't matter whether you're sure or not. It is going to happen. As the angel Gabriel put it, **"Know this: what I've spoken will come true at the proper time"**

So, believe it or not.

Be silent or sing for joy. That's up to you.

But as a church, we're going to dust things off, and get ready. Because there's a baby coming that will turn our world upside down.

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So here's what we're going to do today. In just a minute, everyone is going to be invited to get up and help us get ready. There are some folks that know where things belong that will be guiding us: Laura, Cathy, Mike and Anita Hale: They're going to be directing you.

I want to ask all the kids to join Hannah. You're going to be decorating the Christmon tree and the tree in the Narthex.

The adults are all invited to go to the Narthex, and help us bring things in. If you're more comfortable, sit and enjoy watching the festivities take place, then you are certainly welcome to do that.

When we're all done, we're going to sing **"We want to be ready"** the way we do with our greeting song. That will be your cue to make your way back to your seat for the remainder of the service.

Got it? Ok, let's turn this place upside down. A baby's coming. It's time to get ready.

## Part 2: A Home for the Homeless One

This advent, as we prepare to welcome Christ into our homes, we remembering that he said we'd find him in some of the most surprising of places. And when we do, there's a good chance we won't recognize him, because he has a way of showing up in the most unexpected faces.

If you've been a Christian very long, then you know that Christ can be a bit elusive at times. But the gospels do leave us a few clues on how to find him. Here's what we do know:

1) When he was about 2 or 3 years old, he and his mother Mary and father Joseph had to flee a violent dictator. This Middle-Eastern family became refugees, fleeing their home, looking for the safety of a new home.

2) We do know that when Jesus was grown and teaching he described himself as the Homeless One, **"Foxes have dens and the birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head."**

3) And we know that in one of his last parables before his crucifixion he said that when we feed the hungry, give a drink to the thirsty, welcome the stranger, clothe the naked, visit the prisoner, that we are doing those things to him.

So, if we want to make room for the coming of the Christ child, then it might just mean we have to make room in our lives for the homeless ones in our midst, because there's a pretty good chance that's where we'll find him.

That's not an easy task, I know. The truth is, we're not going to solve homelessness this Christmas. But we can start to learn about the homeless, who they are, how they got there. And we're going to try to do that.

For the next three Sundays we're going to have an all-adult Sunday School to help learn more about the complexities of homelessness. Next Sunday, we'll have some folks from Gateway 180 leading that Sunday School and then sharing in worship. The following week Hannah Allee will be talking about education and homelessness. And finally on the 20<sup>th</sup>, Mat Hartig will be talking about the issues surrounding affordable housing.

We can also try to help the homeless, and we're going to try to do that with our benefit Holiday Event on Dec 6. We're going to be supporting the work of Gateway 180.

But more than all that, I hope that we can shift from seeing the homeless as a statistic or a **"problem to be solved"** to real people, to families, and individuals with hopes and dreams and wounds... who want the same thing in life you and I want.

And maybe, maybe if we start to see the homeless as real people, some new calling, some dream will be born in us.

And rather than averting our eyes from the guy on the street with a sign, we'll be able to look them in the eyes and try to offer them the love of Christ in a more profound way.

And who knows, if we do that, we just be surprised to find that their eyes, not ours, are the eyes of Christ. And in their face, God is looking back at us.

You never know. Christ has been known to show up in stranger places.

For today, we're going to watch this short video as a way of entering into their world.