

# A Sermon for DaySpring

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“The Prescription”

Luke 1: 5-25; 57-80

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Elizabeth and Zechariah were PKs (priest's kids)... They both were legacies, spiritually speaking. You can imagine their childhoods... both were at the temple every time the doors were open.

Their dads had chaired every committee.

And their moms never missed the auxiliary meeting.

They were raised in church... and it took.

Luke says, “**they observed all the Lord's commandments and regulations, blamelessly.**” So, they were pretty much like all of us... uh... hummm.

Bottom line, they were great and God-fearing folks...

But they were childless, Luke tells us... And he's written a New story. Folks reading Luke's gospel in the first century knew that this was a new story about something new God was doing. But even as they read these first paragraphs, there was something familiar about it. Even as it was new, it was old.

A barren woman??? Where had they heard that before??? There was a familiar, “**Once upon a time, once in a barren womb**” kind of ring to this story.

And they caught Luke's subtle theologizing as well. Elizabeth and Zechariah were blameless and childless and that was an oxymoron. Couldn't be. No kids in the nursery meant skeletons in the closet, for sure. But it just wasn't true... Elizabeth was good.

And so was Zechariah... he'd stuck with her all those barren years. They were old so they'd turned the nursery into his study a long time ago. And for the most part, they'd stopped asking God to change things.

Except on occasion... it would slip into their prayers and out of their mouths. You know it did the day when Zechariah was burning incense in the Holy of Holies, as Luke told the story on page one.

This was the chance of a lifetime. It was his group's turn to work the holy days and one priest would get to go in and offer prayers. So this is huge...It's like a quarterback starting in the Super Bowl. He's dreamed of this moment. A climber on Everest... A singer at Carnegie...A priest in the Holy of Holies. And the priest was chosen by casting lots...rolling dice.

So, this is like determining God's will by doing “paper, rock, scissors...” Zechariah got lucky, we'd say. They wouldn't have... they would say that what was in God's mind was in the stars and in the straws they drew... or the paper, rock, scissors they played.

Zechariah... beat Zebediah... by switching to scissors at the last minute and the next thing he knew he was all gowned up in the Holy of Holies, spreading incense, and praying for Israel...

And he got one in for Elizabeth too. “**God... if you could see fit...**”

And right in the middle of his prayer, Gabriel shows up... and after scaring the sheol out of him... tells him that God had heard his prayers. “**You're going to have a son, named John, who's going to be the “apple of your eye.” And God is going to do something very special with him... The spirit will be with him like it was with Elijah and he's going to prepare the people for the coming of the Lord.**”

Then Zechariah... stutters out, despite his prayers...he stutters out... “**How.... How... I'm really old... plumbing isn't working so well... and Liz was last month's cover girl for AARP.**”

Wrong answer!!!! If an angel ever announces to you in the middle of church... or anywhere else... If God sends Gabriel to you and tells you a miracle is about to take place in your life... just nod your head yes.

Zechariah is in the Holy of Holies... staring at Gabriel hovering above the altar and he's saying, “**Ummm, are you sure you got the message right?**”

He's a realist, like most of us.

A rationalist, like a lot of us.

Or, worse, a cynic like some of us.

We see the world through really tight parameters. Our experience is the rule. Old women don't have babies... that's what we know.

And the world is limited to what we know...

What we expect...

What we can predict.

That's just who we are... and yet on the first page of the story that defines us as Christians, Luke's saying, **"This is an impossible possibility."**

Right up front, the story of Christmas wants to challenge your mind and imagination. And though you know what it's like to be Zechariah and live with doubts even in the middle of church... something in you, deep within, longs for Luke's world.

Something not so bound by your own small thinking and abilities.

That's what we want and why we flock to movies like Harry Potter or the Lord of the Rings or the Chronicles of Narnia. It's the world we wish for where there is a Creator who can bend or accelerate the laws of nature that he created. Which is the case.

God doesn't break the rules...

he just knows them better than we do.

God is like a master composer who knows music theory up one side and down the other... it's in him and he's in it... and so when he composes, he composes beyond what seems right to those with lesser knowledge and awareness. A musical genius puts the rules beautifully to work beyond what most of us can imagine.

That's the incarnation. It's a wider world breaking into a small one. It's a Mozart universe and we're playing "Chop-Sticks," most of the time. And Christmas invites us to listen to a more heavenly music.

To mix the holiday metaphors, we're like kids invited to an amazing Christmas feast. You name it, it's on the table. But all we have appetites for is PB&J. **"No dressing for me... no cranberry sauce... no wine. Just cold milk and Peter Pan on sliced white for me."**

**"No Mozart for me... but can you play "Heart and Soul?"**

Most of us don't have ears for something so advanced... Zechariah, as good and groomed as he was, didn't either. He was a religious expert but wasn't quite ready for this imaginal, wider realm... so Gabriel has a prescription. Remember???? He won't be able to speak until John is born and it's a prescription.

That's right... his inability to speak is more of a treatment than a punishment. **"You don't get to talk... not for nine-long months."** Solitude is what the doctor ordered.

If Gabriel had wanted to punish him for being such a Scrooge, he could have just whipped up some pestilence or skin rash like angels did in the old days. Shame on you Zechariah... And as your punishment you will smell of dirty sandals for forty days. Punishment isn't the aim... salvation is. Wholeness is the point... not damnation. Wish we could get that.

God wants Zechariah to grow... not grovel. So... he removes his ability to talk. He shuts him up... for nine long months. It seems solitude was the prerequisite for what was coming.

What do you imagine it was like for him? What would it tell us and show us to be in his silent sandals?

### **Day One**

Thought since I couldn't talk that it would be good to do some journaling. What a day... first, I get to go into the Holy of Holies. Then, I see an angel. Then, I hear that I'm going to be a dad. Then I have to try and explain the whole thing to E without being able to talk. Which was a real challenge... explaining to her in sign language that God wanted us to make love. When I wrote, **"It's Yahweh's will"** on the tablet, she just rolled her eyes and said, **"Now I've heard it all."**

### **Day Two**

I keep trying to talk... It's just instinct. I'm a talker, always have been. But nothing comes out and everyone just stares at me like I've got a demon or something. I tried to tell or show an old friend over at the temple what I'd heard, but it came across like craziness. What a deep irony this is. I've wanted to be able to share this good news all my life. **"I'm going to have a son."** And I can't tell a soul. No cigars to pass out.

### **Day Seven**

Elizabeth was nauseous this morning.

### **Day Eight**

E feels awful... and awe struck all at the same time. She grins from ear to ear between trips out back to be sick. She said she was ready to leave Jerusalem and go back home to the country place... that being secluded would make more sense. She didn't want her pregnancy to be some sort of spiritual sideshow. I packed and tomorrow we head home.

### **Day 13**

The trip was hard but we're back and settled. And now, the silence is really starting to bug me. Was my mind always this stirred up? I'm thinking constantly and it seems to never slow down. It's like some crazy

monkey swinging back and forth and here and there, with no apparent purpose or control. Has it always been like this? Am I just now seeing this constant craziness?

**Day 20**

We had a fight today. I tried to tell E with sign language that I wanted barbecued goat for dinner. She thought I was saying that she was stubborn as an old goat. We were mad for a while... then we just laughed at ourselves.

**Day 30**

My mind is still very active... will it ever slow down?

**Day 35**

Thoughts... thoughts... thoughts... They're everywhere and I hear them. Today, I found myself fussing internally with Old Simeon about the Passover traditions. He's always such a stickler for doing it the same old way. Why was I mad at him in my imagination? And why couldn't I let it go?

**Day 36**

Thoughts... thoughts... thoughts... Today it hit me that E is too old to be doing this. I see the toll on her already. I'm anxious. I know I'm not supposed to be. Yahweh is clearly doing something, but truth is, I'm afraid. I obsessed all day about what it might be like to be without her. I'm afraid.

**Day 37**

Thoughts... thoughts... thoughts... I feel crazy. I couldn't get the fantasy out of my mind of being special. I'm having a special son and he's going to be famous. He'll be a someone... I'll be a someone. I kept picturing him as a Teacher of Teachers... As a leader in the Sanhedrin. I was so proud.

**Day 38**

Thoughts... thoughts...

**Day 39**

Thoughts...

**Day 40**

Nothing... stillness... finally.

**Day 68**

She's showing... and feeling better. We went for a long walk along the hillside today. I've never been so "with" my wife. She's very smart and I'm not sure I've ever told her so. I did today... at the end of the walk while the sun was setting. I pointed to my head and then at her and mouthed the words, "You're so smart." She cried.

**Day 94**

I'm seeing things now and seeing things I'd rather not see. Or is it that I'm seeing things I've always avoided seeing. So much of my life has been about me. I'm selfish. So often, even the good I do is motivated by the desire for reward. ... people's praise or God's favor. How could I have never seen this? Me, me, all me. "God forgive me... God cleanse me... make me whole and in whatever time I have left, teach me to truly love."

**Day 137**

The sparrows are everywhere. I watched one of them build a nest for hours. All day, I just paid attention to this one bird. This one little sparrow. Such meaning and purpose in every motion... focused... She was and I was. And I didn't have to try. I was just there.

**Day 150**

Today I purposed only to be present to Elizabeth. I thought, "What would it be like to focus on her the way I did that sparrow last week." It wasn't easy... It was work. At the end of the day, I was tired... good tired, though.

**Day 163**

We're over half way... and my thoughts are being drawn to John. It hit me like a flash today... what if this forced silence was God's way of preparing me to be John's dad. Every day, I'm seeing new things. Every day, I'm sensing connections. Every day, I feel flooded by something. I'm learning faster. I know things. None of this would have happened apart from what God did to my tongue. Perhaps what I'm experiencing will be the most important thing I can impart to my son.

**Day 176**

Mary, Elizabeth's young cousin made her annual trip out to see us. She's growing up, it seems. She seems so much more mature. The two of them have always been close but the bond seems even stronger now. They're spending hours out in the garden talking about heaven knows what. Occasionally, they just burst out singing.

**Day 198**

I saw a Samaritan today... I did not pull back. I didn't mean not to pull back. I just didn't. I turned towards him and was open.

**Day 200**

Today I saw a foreigner... I saw a leper... I saw a woman. I saw them.

**Day 210**

The midwife has put E to bed. Her lower body has been raised above the rest and she isn't exactly comfortable. I went down to the synagogue and brought home some scrolls. A neighbor comes by to read her stories and you know which ones: Sarah... Rachel... Hannah... We also have passed the time by listening to the house boy singing the sacred words. I've pulled together some words from the prophets and he sings them.

**"Praise be to the Lord,**

**because he has come to his people and redeemed them.**

**He has raised up a horn of salvation for us as deliverance from our enemies  
and mercy to our fathers."**

And E's made up some songs too... It's interesting how we're hearing these old scriptures in new ways now. Poetry is a must for this moment... something that speaks at the heart level.

**Day 237**

Quiet... painfully quiet. After all these months of feeling so near to God... God seems gone. "Where are you?"

**Day 240**

"Have I done something, Lord? What am I missing? Why have you forsaken me?"

**Day 241**

Anger!!!!!!!!!! To put me through this and withdraw his spirit....

**Day 242**

Nothing...just dull silence.

**Day 243**

Still nothing. Was all the other imagination?

**Day 245**

Nothing...

**Day 247**

Nothing...

**Day 248**

Nothing... or is this nothing the most important something. Nothing but God... no feelings... no sense... no consolations... no confirmations... just me in God.

**Day 250**

Nothing... but empty joy... no more words.

**Day 270**

John is here... Today was wonderful... today was horrible. Such suffering, such joy. Thanks be to God for it all. But... I still can't talk. Everything is always a gift. Peace.

**Day 277**

Tomorrow I will take him to see the community, my friends... and he will be circumcised. Tomorrow, in joyful obedience, I will name him John.

**And this, our son, will be called a prophet of the most high for he will go on before the Lord to prepare his way...**

**That he might give them knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the DaySpring will come to us from heaven.**

**...To shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, and to guide our feet into the way of peace. Amen.**