

Gracious Intervention: Luke 1v5-38

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[0 : 00] Okay, so Luke chapter 1, verse 5. The birth of John the Baptist foretold.

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 of 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 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 burn incense.

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.

[1 : 13] 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.

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 other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even before he is 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.

Zechariah asked the angel, How can I be sure of this? I'm 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.

[2 : 38] 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 time 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. The birth of Jesus foretold. In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin 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.

[3 : 54] He will be great and 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 over Jacob's descendants forever.

His kingdom will never end. How will this be, Mary asked the angel, since I'm a virgin. 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 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. Then the angel left her.

Thank you so much, Joy, for reading.

[5 : 07] These are big sections that we'll be going through in Luke. So we don't get to cover every little detail. So if there's questions afterwards or you want to follow up on anything, please do.

And if you haven't yet picked up your copy of Surprising Salvation, which is a little overview of Luke's Gospel, there are plenty on the table. Pick up your copy and have a read.

It'll help you as you go through this book. And we're going to pray because we need God's help.

Father, thank you for Luke's Gospel, for this account of the life, the birth of Jesus Christ.

we pray that this true account would impact us deeply this morning.

That it wouldn't be just mere information and historical fact, but truth that changes each and every heart.

[6 : 21] Father, we want to be those who surrender and listen to your word and believe every promise of your word.

So give us faith that we might do so. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. You're going to have a baby.

Well, that's really exciting news for the parents, isn't it? Friends and family will be told. Pictures of scans will appear on Facebook. The baby room decorated.

Clothes and buggies bought. Baby showers organised. And with all the hype and chat that goes on, you would think that this is the first baby to arrive on planet Earth.

But it's really quite normal. In fact, about, according to the statistics anyway, 360,000 babies are born every single day in the world.

[7 : 35] That works out at 3.5, I know that's not possible, but you know what I mean. 4.5 babies a second. It's incredible, isn't it? So being told you're going to have a baby is a really normal experience.

It may change your life, but on the world scale of things, it's really not that special. So when we're introduced, as Luke does, to Elizabeth and Mary and tells them, you're going to have a baby.

It appears to be the most normal, natural thing in the world. But these birth announcements are anything but normal. They are extraordinary because they change the course of history.

In fact, although they happened 2,000 years ago, they have a continuing impact on my life and your life right now.

The birth announcement of John and of Jesus means a new, radical life for you.

[8 : 52] So let's together see how these birth announcements impact our lives today. First, God intervenes by his grace.

We're introduced at the very beginning of Luke's account to a couple named Zachariah and his wife Elizabeth. Zachariah, well, he worked in the temple.

And we're told, verse 6, that both of them were upright in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's commandments and regulations blamelessly. They were godly people.

But, verse 7, they had no children. Now, all that was going to change. Suddenly, during a normal day's work in the temple as Zachariah's division is called to service, verse 11, an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing right at the side of the altar of incense where he was working.

Now, I don't know about you, but I'm not sure when was the last time you ever met an angel. Let's say it's not part of our normal experience, is it?

[10 : 16] Verse 12, for when Zachariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear. You see, angels don't show up very often unless God is about to do something.

When we read about angels appearing in the Bible, it's because God is intervening. God has something to say. God has an announcement to make.

And here it is, verse 13. The angel said to Zachariah, do not be afraid. Your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son and you are to give him the name John. He will be a joy and delight to you. Of course he would be. After all these years, they would have a child.

What a joy. But it ain't going to stop there. Verse 14. He will be a joy and delight to you and many will rejoice because of his birth.

[11 : 29] This is a birth that will have an impact not just on one family but across the world and through centuries and in our life today.

so what's so special about John? What's he going to do? Well, we're told in verse 15.

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's born.
So this will be no ordinary child. He is set apart from God and he is empowered by God even before he is born.

but what should make us sit up and listen is what he will do. He will be God's prophet speaking God's very word to the people.

[12:37] Turn with me please back to Malachi which is the last book of the Old Testament. So going backwards you're in Luke you've got to go through Mark and then you go through Matthew and then we come to Malachi.

So keep working back Mark Matthew and then Malachi to chapter four and verse one.

So the time difference between Malachi the end of Malachi the end of the Old Testament and the beginning of Luke the birth announcement of John is about 400 years.

And God hasn't said anything at least nothing has been recorded about what God has said so there's been silence for 400 years. This was one of the last things God had said to the people. Malachi chapter four verse one. God makes this promise. He says surely the day is coming. The day is referring here to God's judgment.

[13:47] The coming again of God in judgment. And he says it will burn like a furnace and all the arrogant and every evil doer will be stubble and that day that is coming will set them on fire says the Lord Almighty.

It's a terrifying picture of God's promised judgment to come upon all the evil and injustice in the world. world. But there's also another promise.

Look down at verse five. See I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes.

So there's hope. Verse six. He will turn the hearts of the fathers or the parents to their children and the hearts of the children to their parents or else I will come and strike the land with a curse.

Rather than destruction and division God promises that there will be renewal and reconciliation.

Pictured in families coming back together God will send his prophet who will lead his people back to God so that they might escape God's judgment.

[15:18] The promise of hope. Now back to Luke chapter one. Four hundred years pass and there's not a whisper, not a sound, not a voice until the announcement of John who is to be born.

And what do we read about in verse sixteen? Chapter one. Many of the people of Israel he will bring back to the Lord their God.

Sound familiar? And he will go before the Lord in the spirit and the power of Elijah. Is this the promise that God had made all those hundreds of years before?

He will turn the hearts of the fathers or the parents to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.

The announcement of John's birth is not just another ordinary baby. This is God graciously intervening into the world and into my life and into your life.

[16:34] John may have since died, but the promises of God and the Word of God still stand today. God's promised judgment in the future is still to come.

And God will punish all who live in rebellion against him. But through the message of John we are called to get our lives in order, to turn back in repentance to God, to experience forgiveness of our sins so that we can be ready and prepared to meet the Lord.

this is God's gracious intervention into the world, into my life and into your life. And I want us to think about that for a minute.

If you could ask God to intervene into your life right now, what would you want him to do in your life?

life. Maybe you would be just like Elizabeth. Look at verse 7, go back to verse 7. Remember Elizabeth?

[17:49] They had no children. Elizabeth was barren, past the age, wasn't able to conceive, they were both well on in years, couldn't have children. And not to have a baby at that time was a real social stigma.

you were a disgrace to the community. Not to have a child, you were an outsider. But God intervenes in her life and gives her a child and look how Elizabeth responds, verse 25.

It's a celebration of God's grace. The Lord has done this for me. In these days he has shown his favour, literally, God has shown her grace and taken away my disgrace from among the people. Elizabeth is so thankful for her new son. But let's not miss the point. She has discovered something even greater. You see, Elizabeth's son, John, was to lead people back to God, people just like Elizabeth.

And God has graciously intervened into her life and taken away her disgrace, not just socially, but relationally with God.

[19 : 17] Now, what is your disgrace? What is it that you carry in your life that you long that God would intervene and take it away?

Could be unemployment. It could be the loneliness of being single. It could be an illness or an impediment that you carry.

It might be that you don't have a child. And all of these in some way can be that social disgrace where you feel outside and you long for God to intervene.

Well, the message is that God has graciously intervened in our life through the coming of John who has this message to say that through repentance we can be covered in grace so that we never ever face disgrace before God again, not just socially with others, but relationally with God.

God is going to change your circumstances completely, but the promise here in verse 25 is that God will shower and pour out his grace upon you so that you are no longer burdened by the guilt of our disgrace of sin and no longer burdened or judged by the expectations of other people on how you feel.

[20 : 57] God intervenes in your life, radically changing you, giving you a new identity, a new person, that you belong to God.

You no longer are judged by what other people think about you, but what God thinks about you. God has graciously intervened by his grace.

Second, God enables a new beginning. So God has intervened. What will this intervention look like?

Well, this time, an angel appears to Mary. Here's the second verse announcement, verse 30. The angel said to Mary, do not be afraid.

You have found favour. Again, literally, God has shown grace to you. You will be with child and give birth to a son and you are to give him the name Jesus.

[22 : 03] God is intervening in grace through the person of Jesus. And we're told what he will be like. Look at verse 32.

He will be great. He will be called Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne over his father David and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever.

His kingdom will never end. Now, that is some character reference. But these are more than just grand titles.

This being called Great and Son of the Most High and having this throne where he reigns over all things and a kingdom that will never end.

These are not just titles and roles that are just kind of out there. These are titles and roles that belong to God. But are now being applied to Jesus.

[23 : 02] So Luke is making the extraordinary claim that Jesus who is going to be born is nothing less than God in human flesh. It's what we call the incarnation.

God, the Most High, the Creator, the Ruler of the Universe, who sits on the throne, who rules over all things, who has an eternal kingdom that will never come to an end.

This God takes on humanity and comes down to people like us. You see, in religions, gods do not come near.

They remain distant. They are a threat and they must be appeased. They are impersonal and angry. But the one true God, the only God, comes to us in the person of Jesus.

Look at the end of verse 35. So the Holy One to be born will be called the Son of God. Jesus is not like God or a combination of half God and half man.

[24 : 19] Jesus is God in the flesh. So as we read through Luke's Gospel, as we listen to what Jesus says, as we watch him act, we see the beauty and the greatness and the holiness and the magnificence of God on display.

This is not just another baby being born. This is God coming down to us, intervening by grace into our lives.

But why has he come? Sorry, I missed up there. Why has he come? Look at verse 34. How will this be as Mary comes to terms with this shock that she's going to have a baby?

How can this be, Mary asked the angel, since I'm a virgin, I'm not even married yet, I haven't slept with anyone, how can I have a baby? The angel answered, the Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.

Mary will become pregnant supernaturally, not through the seed of a man, but through the creating life-giving work of the power of the Holy Spirit.

[25 : 54] Now this not only begins to explain the birth of Jesus, but it begins to hint and show us what this Jesus will do.

Keep your finger in Luke and let's jump all the way back to the very beginning of the Bible to Genesis chapter 1. Genesis 1 verse 1.

Because I think Luke here is wanting us to make a connection. Genesis chapter 1.

In the beginning, before time began, before anything existed, God, eternal God, in the beginning God created the heavens, everything above us, and the earth, all things here.

Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering, or overshadowing, the waters.

[27 : 21] It's the exact same phrase that we have in Luke about the birth of Jesus. The Spirit overshadows, or hovers, over.

So in Genesis, the Spirit of God is at work in the creation of the world. Verse 2, we're told, chapter 1, verse 2, that the world was formless and empty.

Literally, there was disorder, there was darkness. Things were not the way they should be. So the Spirit is hovering, is overshadowing, and God, by His power, through His Spirit, brings about a creation, brings about beauty, brings about order, and God looks at His creation and says, this is good.

Now back to Luke. And in the same way as the angel announces the birth of Jesus, he says, the Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will hover, overshadow you.

Bringing about a new creation through the birth of Jesus, the coming of Jesus Christ into the world will be like that day, the day of the first creation, as God brought about a new beginning and a new life and said, all this is good, and He says, now through my Son, I will bring a new creation in the lives of many people.

[28 : 58] He will bring a beauty and an order out of the chaos and disorder of our broken lives, a messed up world. In this Jesus, you will find a new creation, as God by His power, through His Spirit and through His Son, bring about a new beginning, a fresh start in your life.

Now let's think about that. If you were to ask God to change anything in your life, what would you want Him to change?

Maybe you would ask Him, change where I live, change where I work. Perhaps you would ask God, change how I look, I don't like the way I look, nobody fancies me.

You might ask God to change the relationship that you're in. God is saying, through Jesus and the power of my Holy Spirit, I have come to change you.

I have come to redeem your life from the disorder and chaos that has been caused by our own sin and the sin of others. I have come to bring about a new beginning and a fresh start.

[30 : 32] You see, so often what we want from God is, God, change my circumstances. Would you change that person? But God's priority says, I want to change you.

I want you to change my life. You see, God who brought about the creation of the world by this same power as he brought about the supernatural birth of Jesus, that same power will enable you you to start life afresh, to live God's way, not our own way.

So God is graciously intervening by grace through his son, the Lord Jesus Christ, enabling a new beginning and a fresh start.

Well, how can we experience that for ourselves? God calls for trusting submission.

You see, if we are to experience God's intervening grace on a daily basis, if we are to know this enabling power to change the things in our lives so that we go God's way, we must submit to him.

[31 : 54] As we said at the beginning, the announcement of a birth is a very normal everyday experience.

People get pregnant every day. People give birth every day. It's really not unique. Unless, of course, you're an old barren woman like Elizabeth or a young virgin girl like Mary, that is not a

normal everyday experience.

Women past the age of childbearing can't get pregnant and girls who have not had sex can't get pregnant. In fact, we would say it's impossible.

But not with God. Look at verse 36. Mary is trying to work this through and the angel says to her verse 36, even Elizabeth, your relative, is going to have a child in her old age and she who was said to be barren, unable to have children, is in her sixth month.

For nothing is impossible with God. God is saying what is impossible for you is not impossible for me.

[33 : 15] And he's saying the same thing to us, not in terms of having children, but experiencing his grace and his change in our lives. It's not possible for you to do these things, but I can do it.

Have a look at Luke 18. Just jump forward a few chapters, Luke 18. Here we have the true account of a rich ruler, a very wealthy man, who comes asking Jesus a question.

Verse 18. Chapter 18, verse 18.

And here's the question. He says, good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life? How can I receive this salvation? how can I experience grace in my life and this transforming change?

How can I have that? Well, look at how Jesus responds. Here's part of his answer, down in verse 24. Jesus looked at him and said, how hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God.

[34 : 36] Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God. Now, think about that.

The eye of a needle, how do you fit an animal and a camel through the eye of a needle? Well, you can't, can you? It's impossible. And that's Jesus' point.

He's saying, you know, we can't do these things on our own. It's impossible. Verse 26. Those who heard him asked, well then who can be saved? How can I be changed?

Who can do this? Jesus replied, verse 27, what is impossible with men is possible with God. You see, we cannot save ourselves.

We can't change who we are. We can't change those habits. We can't change our behaviours. But God can. What's impossible for us is possible for God.

[35 : 38] God, by his grace, can save the most disinterested, hardened, reluctant person. God can save you. And God, by his power, can bring about a new beginning from the mess that has been caused by our own sin.

That tremble, continues on through our lives. What is impossible for us to change, God says, it is possible for me, because I am God.

But how do we experience this work? Well, look how Mary responds in verse 38, back in chapter 1. Chapter 1, verse 38. I am the Lord's servant, servant. Mary answered, may it be to me as you have said.

Then the angel left her. Mary responds in faith, trusting submission. Do you see those two things she says?

[36 : 54] First, I am the Lord's servant, literally I am the Lord's slave. I submit to you. I am willing to be used by God.

Your will be done in my life, not my will in my own life. I want you, God, to have your way in me.

Now, in a sense, that's how we too must respond. Maybe there's an area of your life that you have not yet surrendered to God. you're holding on to it in your life and you're saying, mine, this is my life, I want to live my way and do my thing.

But we will never experience God's grace in all its fullness until we say, I am the Lord's servant.

Your will, not my will.

God's will. But look at the second thing she says. May it be to me as you have said.

[38 : 08] Now, put yourself in Mary's shoes. This was something to take on board. You're going to have a baby. She's a teenage girl. How do you respond to that?

May it be to me as you have said. I am willing to trust you God. I don't understand what's going on right now. I can't work it all out, but I'm going to trust you.

And that's our response. Perhaps we are fighting God's word. We know what God is saying to us.

We know where we should obey. We know the sin that we must deal with.

But we refuse to obey. And we're never ever going to experience God's change in our life unless, like Mary, we turn and say, may it be to me as you have said.

I trust your word. I can't figure out everything. There's parts I disagree with and I can't comprehend, but I trust your word.

[39 : 19] God intervenes by his grace. God enables a new beginning.

And he calls us to submit, to trust, to have faith in God, and see him work through your life. faith. Let's stop, let's pause, and take a moment to reflect on that as we pray. Amen. Father, would you please forgive us for suffering