

WELCOME

Alright, if you've got your Bibles, and I hope you do, please open them up to the Gospel of Luke chapter 1. Luke 1. That's where we're going to be.

We want every person to have a hand on their Bible. You can open your phone or tablet to Luke 1. If you open one of the hard-backed black bibles under your seat, Luke 1 will be on page **855**.

INTRODUCTION: PERFECT CHRISTMAS

More than any other time of the year, Christmas is the time when we're sold false realities. Right?

- We are just constantly being sold...
- that if you could just break the Christmas code...
- you could have it all!
- The PERFECT CHRISTMAS!

This is the year when it'll all come together.

- This is the year that we get the red-rider BB gun.
- This is the year that we're gonna get
 - the bonus check from our boss
 - that will allow us to put the pool in the backyard!
- This is the year
 - that dad's finally gonna stop neglecting me...
 - to sell bad children's books...
 - and instead turn his affections to me...
 - even though I've been in the North Pole for 40 years.

Right! This is what's being fed to us.

- Those misfits just need to be given a chance.
- The green guy's heart just needs to grow three sizes.
- That ghetto little tree just needs a blankie around its base.
 - And all will be calm...
 - And all will be bright...
 - And everyone will be happy
 - And it'll start snowing...
 - at midnight...
 - on Christmas Eve...
 - Except this year...
 - when it'll be a balmy 60 degrees.

ILLUSTRATION: HALLMARK

And nothing paints this picture for us quite like Hallmark Christmas movies.

Now, in a moment of honesty: who watches these things? Ok?

- This is a safe place to admit.
- Ok, that was a lie,
- we're making a list for church discipline.

But I've watched a bunch of them...and they're all the same!

- The main character is a woman named
 - Noel or Holly or Carol...you following?
 - And she's an executive from the big city.

- But she ends up in a small, town two-weeks before Christmas.
- Now, Carol has a boyfriend back in the city
 - who's also well-put-together and career-oriented.
 - And he tries to convince her to return to the city
 - from the irrelevance of the hick town she's in.
- Enter Nick. Or Joseph. Or Rudolph.
 - The hunky, small-town guy
 - who works at the Christmas Tree lot,
 - is a volunteer fire-fighter on the side,
 - and helps with the town's Christmas pageant...
 - plus he's incredibly good with kids,
 - and must work out A LOT cause bro's shredded!
- Rudy is also the grandson of the town mail man:
 - a rather short,
 - heavy-set man,
 - with a white beard,
 - who's seemingly magical...
 - and suspiciously jolly.
- Well, Carol ends up helping Rudy with the pageant.
 - And after a series of events
 - where she finds herself thinking, *"He just gets me!"*
- They are staring at the huge Christmas tree
- in the town square
- on Christmas Eve.

- And in a magical moment...
 - With a really bad instrumental version
 - of Deck the Halls playing in the background.
- And it starts snowing...
- And they kiss...
- And they flash to mail-man grandpa...
 - And he winks...
- And Rudy says, “You really are my Christmas Carol.”

Cut to credits!

They’re all the same!

TRANSITION

But all these things point to a longing for a PERFECT CHRISTMAS.

And while I don’t think that’s all bad...I do think it leads to some pretty unrealistic expectations.

But today, in our text, I want to look at the start of the whole Christmas story in the Gospel of Luke...

And I want to propose:

- that our aim shouldn’t be for the perfect Christmas,
- but rather, for an **SLIDE ORDINARY CHRISTMAS**

So, let’s dig into our text. Luke chapter 1, starting in verse 5.

LUKE 1:5-7

[5] In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, of the division of Abijah. And he had a wife from the daughters

of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. [6] And they were both righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord. [7] But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were advanced in years.

EXPLAIN: ORDINARY PEOPLE

So, this ORDINARY CHRISTMAS begins with **SLIDE ORDINARY PEOPLE**. We are introduced to Zechariah and Elizabeth. And they are ordinary! There are a couple of things to note about Zechariah and Elizabeth.

First, Zechariah was an ordinary country priest,

- one of an estimated eight thousand living in Palestine.

Second, Elizabeth was barren.

- She would have born children had she been able,
 - especially in this culture.

And third, we're just told they were advanced in years.

- More than being barren,
- Elizabeth is now PAST the childbearing years.
- And we don't know exactly how old they are...
- Because even in the Bible, it was inappropriate to ask a woman
- "How old are you?"

But this shows us something really important church:

the Lord works through long, ordinary lives of ORDINARY PEOPLE!

Look at verse 8:

LUKE 1:8-10

[8] Now while he was serving as priest before God when his division was on duty, [9] according to the custom of the priesthood, he was chosen by lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense. [10] And the whole multitude of the people were praying outside at the hour of incense.

EXPLAIN: PRIESTS

- So, the 8000 priests,
- were divided into 24 divisions,
- with about 300 priests in each division.
- And each division served at the temple in Jerusalem
 - for two one-week periods each year.
- And then each day 56 priests were chosen by lot to participate.
- And before each of the two daily services, lots were cast again
 - to determine the four service participants.

And all of this was ordinary stuff for priests.

They're ordinary people doing their ordinary jobs.

ILLUSTRATION: TUESDAY

When talking about ordinary, I like to say it like this: that most of life is lived on Tuesday. Let me explain:

- Monday is a low day...
 - *"How you doing?"*
 - *"Well, it's Monday."*
 - *"Say no more!"*

- Wednesday is hump day,
 - There's that camel...
 - We're halfway to the weekend.
- On Thursday, there is hope. Inertia is picking us up.
- Friday is pretty much the weekend.
- Saturday is a day off,
 - to recreate
 - or do projects
 - or whatever.
- And Sunday most of us sabbath and worship together.
 - It's like the mountain top of our soul's week.

But Tuesday...Tuesday is the normal day.

- It isn't a high.
- It isn't a low.
- It's just ordinary.
- It's just Tuesday.

And church, **most of our lives are lived on Tuesdays.**

- We aren't always in the pit of Monday.
- Nor do we always have the spiritual highs of Sundays.
- Nor the fun of a Friday or Saturday.
- But most of life is ordinary...Tuesdays.

EXPLAIN: INCENSE

But on this ordinary Tuesday, the incense lot fell to Zechariah.

And one thing to note:

- this would have been the greatest moment...
 - of Zechariah's priestly career.

The honor of offering incense

- was the grandest event in their ministry.
- Many priests never had the privilege,
- and no priest was allowed to offer it more than once.

This means it had never happened before in his life...

and it would never happen again!

- So, Zechariah makes his way through the outer court,
 - past a multitude of worshippers who were praying.
- Into the inner court.

And when the time comes for him to enter the Holy Place,

here's what he would've seen:

- He would see the curtain of the Holy of Holies!
 - He'd never go in there!
 - Only the high priest...once a year would dare to.
 - That was where God's presence dwelt
 - hovering over the mercy seat of the Arc of the Covenant.
- To his left would be the table of showbread.
- To his right stood the golden candlestick.
- And in front of him was the horned golden altar of incense.

Zechariah would have purified the altar,

- and waited for the signal to offer the incense
- so that as the sacrifices went up to God
- they were wrapped in the sweet incense of prayer.

But then something unexpected happened on this ordinary day! Verse 11:

LUKE 1:11-17

[11] And there appeared to him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. [12] And Zechariah was troubled when he saw him, and fear fell upon him. [13] But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. [14] And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, [15] for he will be great before the Lord. And he must not drink wine or strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. [16] And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, [17] and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared."

EXPLAIN: ANGEL

In the very moment of the pinnacle of his career as a priest,

- an angel of the Lord appeared to him,
- standing on the right side of the altar of incense.

And Zechariah was troubled when he saw him, and fear fell upon him.

And the angel comforts Zechariah by saying, *“Do not be afraid, for your prayer has been heard.”*

Now, the question is:

What prayer is being answered?

- Because the set-up concerning Elizabeth’s barrenness
- could mean Zechariah was praying for a child.

OR...

- it could be a reference to what Zechariah was praying for
- in his priestly duties as he lit the incense:
- the redemption of Israel.

But I think it seems to refer to the priestly prayer Zechariah had just uttered as he offered incense.

- So, Zechariah is asking God to redeem Israel...
- to cast off the occupying Romans...
- to help in the oppression of his people...
- to fix things...

But how many of you know that
God, very often, doesn’t fix things...
he forms things.

APPLICATION: FIX OR FORM

I talked about fruit a couple weeks ago,

- and said that very often we ask God for fruit...
- and he gives us seeds.

This is the same thing.

- Zechariah is asking God to restore Israel.
 - He's asking for fruit.
 - He's asking for God to fix everything.
- But instead of fixing everything.
- He promises a baby.

And never in Zechariah's wildest dreams would he have thought

- that his having a son
- would be the beginning of the answer to his prayer
- for the redemption of Israel.

And what is Zechariah's response to such an angelic prophecy?

Look at verse 18:

LUKE 1:18

[18] And Zechariah said to the angel, "How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years."

EXPLAIN: ORDINARY DOUBTS

And this brings me to the second part of this ORDINARY CHRISTMAS:

- Zechariah is an ordinary man,
- with an ordinary life,
- doing his ordinary job...
- when God shows up!

God regularly works through ORDINARY PEOPLE.

BUT they often respond with **SLIDE ORDINARY DOUBTS**.

Zechariah responds with disbelief.

- He doubts.
- He questions.
- He takes offense.

And why does Zechariah doubt?

- BECAUSE THIS IS THE RAWEST,
- SOFTEST,
- MOST DIFFICULT PART OF HIS LIFE.

The angel answers the prayer for Israel, with a promise of a son.

- How long do you think Zechariah prayed for a child?
- **How long has it been since he's given up on that prayer?**

You see, that's why I don't think he's praying for a child...

- his wife is barren AND too old to have kids!
- Oh, he used to pray that prayer.
 - But he prayed, and he prayed, and he prayed...
 - to no avail, and it hurts.
 - And now the angel brings up that hurt...
 - And Zechariah doubts.

So basically, what happened here,

- is this man who historically has had a great deal of faith,
- when pressed by God on the most sensitive place in his life,
- he is vocal about his doubts that God could pull this thing off,
- and so, God rebukes him.

Verse 19:

LUKE 1:19-20

[19] And the angel answered him, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I was sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news. [20] And behold, you will be silent and unable to speak until the day that these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time."

EXPLAIN: SILENCE

Only now does the angel give his name...and it is none other than Gabriel.

- Gabriel, the revealer of visions in Daniel.
- Gabriel, the destroyer of Jerusalem in Ezekiel.

Zechariah would have known who Gabriel was!

And the penalty for Zechariah's unbelief was well fitted to the offence,

- for his tongue,
- which had uttered unbelief,
- was struck speechless.
 - We'll actually see that he loses his hearing as well.
- So, he's mute and deaf.

He would be confined to his own silent world, and for the nine months of silence he would have plenty of time to reflect on the situation.

APPLICATION

Now, here's the application for us: please note that Zechariah's doubt doesn't disqualify him from God's plan.

- Many of us came from Christian upbringings
- where doubts and questioning...
- were something of a taboo...
- something to be ashamed of.

But I want to offer the perspective that part of an ORDINARY CHRISTMAS is having ORDINARY DOUBTS.

ILLUSTRATION: DOUBTERS

So, I often point out the apostle Thomas. You know what Thomas's nickname is? Yeah! Doubting Thomas.

But you know why Thomas doubted?

- It was because he didn't believe his friends
- when they told him that Jesus was alive.
- After he had witnessed him being crucified.

He gets the nickname of Doubting Thomas...for all of eternity...

- when he doesn't believe
- that a guy came back from the dead.
- Which...listen to me...DOESN'T HAPPEN VERY OFTEN.

This seems like a rational doubt to me! It's ordinary to doubt.

Plus, lots of other disciples had doubts as well. One of my favorites comes in Matthew's Gospel.

- Jesus has resurrected,
- appeared to his guys a number of times,
 - including Thomas,

- and Jesus is going to meet up with them one last time,
- and then he's going to ascend back into heaven.

So, as he starts ascending it says this

SLIDE MATTHEW 28:17

[17] And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted.

TRANSITION

How crazy is that? He's floating through the air! And some are like,

- "Umm...I don't know."
- "I saw David Blaine do something like this on YouTube."

Listen, if you have doubts, you could make a great disciple of Jesus.

There are **SLIDE ORDINARY DOUBTS**.

But it's what you do with your doubts that determines so much!

So, what will Zechariah do with his doubts?

Well, let's finish our text out. Look at verse 21:

LUKE 1:21-25

[21] And the people were waiting for Zechariah, and they were wondering at his delay in the temple. [22] And when he came out, he was unable to speak to them, and they realized that he had seen a vision in the temple. And he kept making signs to them and remained mute. [23] And when his time of service was ended, he went to his home.

[24] After these days his wife Elizabeth conceived, and for five months she kept herself hidden, saying, [25] "Thus the Lord has done for

me in the days when he looked on me, to take away my reproach among people.”

EXPLAIN: ORDINARY OBEDIENCE

In this ORDINARY CHRISTMAS,

- God is working through ORDINARY PEOPLE
- and their ORDINARY DOUBTS...
- but their response is **SLIDE** ORDINARY OBEDIENCE

Zechariah doesn't allow his doubts to derail his faith...but rather, he practices ORDINARY OBEDIENCE that changed the course of history.

In the passage read over us, later in Luke 1, Elizabeth will give birth.

- And all the friends and family are hanging out around,
- rejoicing because it's a miracle.
 - Not only was she barren in her early life...
 - but she is aged well past childbearing years.
- And when Grandma has a baby, we gonna party!

And when it comes time to name the kid,

- they would've all assumed Elizabeth
- would name the child Zechariah, after his father.
- That would have fit with tradition.
- But she says, *“no, he's gonna be called John.”*

And all of Elizabeth's crew are like,

- “Um, yeah Liz, you know that no one in your family
- is named John, right?”

So, they turn to Zechariah, who they probably assume would be offended for not being his own son's namesake.

- And the text says they made signs to Zechariah.
 - This is how we know he was made not only mute...
 - but also deaf.
- Cause you don't make signs for people who can hear, right?
 - I mean, if you do, it's insulting.
 - "Do you understand the words that are coming out of my mouth?"

And after nine months of silently reflecting

- on the decades and decades of disappointment...
- and his doubts...
- they ask him about the child's name,
- and look at what he says.

SLIDE LUKE 1:63-64

[63] And he asked for a writing tablet and wrote, "His name is John." And they all wondered. [64] And immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, blessing God.

SLIDE ORDINARY OBEDIENCE

EXPLAIN: OBEDIENCE

So, you've got Zechariah,

- who has walked through close to 100 years of difficulty...
- waiting and praying for a child.

- He believes that God is good,
- He believes that God is merciful,
- He believes that God can save,
- He believes all these things about God,

And for his whole life,

- he's taught these things,
- he's said these things,
- he's walked in these things...
- the text said that they were **righteous and blameless!**

And yet God never answered their prayer about a son.

God never answered their prayer about having children.

- And then finally, when God sends them an angel...
- when they're told it's possible...
- Zechariah doubts...
- and God rebukes him.

And now, he's had time to wrestle

- with the shame
- and the frustration
- and the feelings of stupidity
- and all the things that accompany
- when God busts you in the middle of your doubt.

But what is Zechariah's ultimate response. Obedience. **His name is John!**

CONCLUSION

- God works through ORDINARY PEOPLE
- Who have ORDINARY DOUBTS
- And are willing to trust him in ORDINARY OBEDIENCE.

So, this year, instead of hoping for that PERFECT CHRISTMAS,

- What if you found yourself content with
- an **SLIDE** ORDINARY CHRISTMAS

You see, the juxtaposition we must all live with is this:

- most of life is long, boring, hard days
- filled with normal work and the human experience,

AND THEN

- there are those amazing, high,
- supernatural days filled with God's power!

But if the goal is to always aim for the extraordinary, it will assure you of unmet expectations.

Don't miss this:

- The way God worked in Zechariah's life,
- is the very same way we need him to work in our lives.
- In our ordinary.

I need God to work in my ordinary.

- In my ordinary marriage.
- In my ordinary parenting.
- In my ordinary job.
- In my ordinary neighborhood.
- With my ordinary friends.

That's where I need God to show up...because that's where I live!

You say,

- *"Well, that's not how Jesus lived!"*

What are you talking about?

- 90% of his life was lived in total obscurity.
- He lived for 33 years,
- and for 30 of those years
- we know almost nothing about them.

For all the ups and downs. Successes and failures.

Most of our lives are lived in the ordinary.

This should be a lesson for us.

- **The successes of every day**
- **are the things that add up**
- **to the success of our entire lives.**

Or maybe we should put it this way:

ordinary and greatness are not opposites.

I think that the gift that Zechariah and Elizabeth give us this morning is a real, sobering whisper of what a gift an ORDINARY CHRISTMAS is.

- It's messy
- It's confusing
- It's miraculous
- It's mundane
- It's extraordinary
- It's ordinary
- But it's filled with beauty and wonder...it's a gift!

You see, that's the hope we have. God's probably not going to fix everything for you this Christmas and usher in a PERFECT CHRISTMAS.

- But he will give you himself.
- That's the promise.
- A son will be born.
- And that will be enough.

I want to end with this quote from Frederick Buechner. He says this:

SLIDE *"Listen to your life. See it for the fathomless mystery it is. In the boredom and pain of it, no less than in the excitement and gladness: touch, taste, smell your way to the holy and hidden heart of it, because in the last analysis all moments are key moments, and life itself is grace."*

There is a God who knows you,

- who loves you,
- who sees you,
- who is working,
- and who you can trust.

And so, I'm praying this Christmas be so unbelievably ordinary for you all.

Let's pray. **LYRICS SLIDE W/PADS**

RESPONSES:

Well, every week at Fathom we respond in 4 ways:

- COMMUNION – THE LORD’S SUPPER
- GIVING TITHES & OFFERINGS – fathomchurch.org/give
- PRAYER - fathomchurch.org/prayer
- SINGING

So, I’m going to read the Words of Institution from the Apostle Paul, we’ll take communion, and then we’ll sing:

1 CORINTHIANS 11:23–26 – WORDS OF INSTITUTION

[23] For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, [24] and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, “This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” **TAKE**

[25] In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” **TAKE**

[26] For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.

Love you church, let’s stand and sing together.

RESOURCES USED:

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