

“In Time and Time Again.”

Our gospel reading from Luke is the traditional Christmas story we hear year after year. It’s a great story and I love it. But what you may not know, is that we’ve heard only a small portion of the Gospel of Luke’s Christmas story.

You see, Luke doesn’t begin his Christmas story with the birth of Jesus, but a full 75 verses before that, with his description of an encounter between the angel Gabriel and a man named Zechariah. And then, Luke’s Christmas story continues on for another 20 or so verses after our reading this evening ended.

The reason I think Luke’s Gospel included so much more material than Matthew’s Gospel— which has the only other birth narrative in the New Testament— was because Luke wanted to do more than simply record the birth of Jesus; Luke wanted to talk about what that birth meant, by describing the impact it had on people we don’t often hear about on a typical Sunday morning, let alone think about.

Now, I’m not going to read those extra 95 verses or so verses— fortunately, that’s not necessary— but I am going to briefly visit a couple of events that take place in them; and when I’m done I think you’ll understand why.

So, as I said before, Luke begins his Christmas story something like this: One day, the angel Gabriel appeared to an old man named Zechariah, and said:

“I know that you and your wife, Elizabeth, have been longing for a child for so many years. And I also know that, because of your great age, you’ve given up hope. But I have some very good news for you, Zechariah: You and Elizabeth are going to have a son, and his name will be John. And John will

prepare the way for another child who will be the Messiah, who will save the world.”

However, and for obvious reasons, Zechariah is reluctant to believe the angel. And so, the angel then says to Zechariah:

“Because you have not believed me, you will not be able to speak until everything I’ve said comes to pass. But mark my words, they will all take place at their appointed time.”

Now, I want you to keep this exchange in mind, and especially that phrase “at their appointed time,” because we’ll come back to it in a few minutes.

Next, in Luke’s Christmas story, is the birth of John the Baptist—that’s who Gabriel was talking about with Zechariah. And then, we get to hear the familiar story of Mary and Joseph, of their journey to Bethlehem, and the birth of Jesus.

Throughout all of Luke’s narrative, he’s been weaving this one theme:

That God has *not* abandoned the world, but rather is acting in it to save it, redeem it, and restore it through this child, Jesus.

And then, Luke describes how, when Jesus is 8 days old, Mary and Joseph take him to the Temple, and how the people they run into have this powerful reaction when they meet this baby.

For example, one person they run into is an old man named Simeon. Many years earlier, God had promised Simeon that he would not die before he had seen the Messiah. And so, when Simeon sees the baby Jesus, he takes him into his arms and he says to God:

“Ahhh, now I can finally die in peace. Year after year, I have waited, and longed, and desired to see God’s salvation, and now I have. Thank you, Lord.”

Another person that Mary and Joseph run into is an old woman named Anna. She became a widow at a very young age, and, ever since then, has spent all her time in the Temple, worshiping, praying, and

fasting, waiting for the one whom God would send to redeem his people. And when she lays eyes on Jesus, she begins to run around and tell everybody that their redeemer has finally come.

And though Luke only describes the encounters with Simeon and Anna, the implication is clear: A lot of people have been waiting, and longing, and desiring, year after year after year, for this very child to be born. And now it's happened.

Now, let's go back and revisit that exchange between the angel Gabriel and Zechariah, when Gabriel said that all of the things he predicted would take place at "their appointed time." I asked you to keep that phrase in mind, and now I'm going to tell you why.

There is a Greek word in the Bible which gets translated into English as "time," and it's the word *chronos*. It's where we get the word chronograph, or chronology. *Chronos* refers to time which moves in a linear, sequential fashion. With *chronos*, you have yesterday, and today, and tomorrow, and so on. However, when the angel Gabriel tells Zechariah that certain things will take place at "their appointed time," he does *not* use the word *chronos*. Rather, he used a different Greek word— it's a word for which we have no exact English equivalent— and it's the word *kairos*. *Kairos* refers simply to an undetermined period of time, but it's a time in which something special happens. *Kairos* is what we might refer to as an opportune moment.

We humans live in good old ordinary *chronos*, but when God shows up, when God intervenes in our lives, time ceases to be ordinary. For God doesn't move in *chronos*, as much as he moves in *kairos*. And in all of these stories that make up Luke's fuller Christmas story, the author is reminding us that God is about to invade our *chronos* with some of his *kairos*.

It's probably true to say that, like so many of the characters in Luke's Christmas story, that many of us have been waiting, and longing, and desiring for something to take place. Maybe, like Zechariah and Elizabeth, we're waiting and longing for a child. But maybe we're waiting for something like a job, or a healing. Or, maybe we're simply waiting for a reason for hope, or for assurance, or for peace.

And so, here we are, gathered together on Christmas eve, and we're celebrating; but we're also waiting, and longing, and desiring. And that

tension reminds us that, while we live in *chronos*, we long for *kairos*. And the challenge we face, while we're waiting for the *kairos*, is to somehow avoid getting bitter or disillusioned; but, rather, to use this time to allow God to shape and form us, so when the *kairos* hits— and it will— that we're ready for it, and so that we can really celebrate when it does.

With all that in mind, I want to tell you the story of a young couple named Jaime and Becky. This is a true story. When they got married, they wanted to start a family. But for several years, they struggled with issues of infertility. Month after month they hoped, and month after month they were disappointed. And yet, they were still able to be thankful for their wonderful marriage, and that God had worked through each of them to provide comfort and support for the other during that difficult time.

Finally, and miraculously, Becky became pregnant. The first trimester passed with no problems. However, at the twelve-week checkup, no heartbeat was heard. They were stunned and devastated by that loss, and they grieved deeply. But family and friends began pouring God's love into their lives, helping them to find peace, and helping them to begin healing.

About a year later, Becky was pregnant again. However, an ultrasound revealed that it was an ectopic pregnancy— which means the embryo was growing outside the uterus, probably in a Fallopian tube. They knew their baby wouldn't survive the pregnancy, and to prevent a potentially fatal outcome for Becky, the pregnancy had to be terminated. And so, Jaime and Becky grieved another loss, and another disappointment. But still, they found themselves experiencing the grace and mercy of God, not only through their love for each other, but also through the love that family members and friends poured out upon them, supporting and sustaining them.

The following year, they tried *in vitro* fertilization, which proved effective, and they were able to celebrate a successful first trimester with family and friends. Becky and Jaime enjoyed each moment of the experience, even the morning sickness and fatigue. And at five months, all indications were that the baby was growing normally, and the doctor told them to relax and enjoy the pregnancy.

But, at 22 weeks, during a routine ultrasound, the doctor saw that something was wrong with the baby. A specialist was brought in who determined that their baby had a condition that was extremely rare,

completely random, and totally unrelated to their previous losses— and that even if their baby survived the pregnancy, its life would most likely be measured only in minutes. When given the choice of either ending the pregnancy, or carrying the baby to term, Becky and Jaime chose to wait, and hope.

Throughout the remainder of the pregnancy, Jaime and Becky felt blessed by all of the prayers, and all of the expressions of love and concern that family and friends offered for them and their baby. Together, they hoped and prayed for a miracle.

Isaac was born right on time, and he lived exactly one hour. But Jaime and Becky looked back on that time as precious, as filled with love, and they felt blessed to be Isaac's parents, even if it was only for nine months and one hour.

Reflecting back on those days, Jaime wrote these words:

“For every new depth of sorrow we experienced, God provided grace and mercy sufficient to meet our sorrow. In many ways, this story is as much a story about [God's unending love for us] as it is about our desperate love for Isaac and our other babies. We have had glimpses of God's grace that can only be seen in very dark places, and found new levels of hope in [God's] promise of redemption for this broken world ... We are grateful for the glimpses of heaven that have sustained us, for the acts of love that we've experienced, and for the moments of peace we've found as we waited on the Lord. But the ultimate hope and joy that we found is in the confidence that we will one day go to ... Isaac, and our other babies, and most of all to our Father whose grace is sufficient in all things.”

But Jaime and Becky's story still wasn't over. God, in his mysterious way, and in his equally mysterious time— his *kairos*— chose to bless them with the very thing they had waited four years to have. After a second *in vitro* fertilization process, Elijah was born, and he's just fine.

Again, Jaime writes:

“We are grateful beyond words for the gift of that life. But we also realize that God did not have to give us a son in order to be good. [God] began healing us before he gave us Elijah. [God] has always been good, and we have never experienced his goodness on a deeper level than as we waited. We waited on him through sorrow and heartache, and we continue to wait on him to come and make our joy complete.”

And then, finally, a year later, as Becky and Jaime got ready to try their luck with another *in vitro* fertilization procedure, they discovered that— and without even trying— they were expecting another child.

In God’s time, God sent Jesus, and said, “I’m sending my boy to save the world. You’re going to be okay. Trust him. Listen to him. Do what he says.” And so Jesus came, and he opened for us a whole new world: a world of forgiveness, and hope; a world of liberation, of healing, and peace. And we can trust him.

This Christmas, we can trust him. We can trust him with our past, with our present, and with our future. We can trust him with our hopes, and with our sins. We can trust him with our sexuality, and with our checkbooks. We can trust him with our family members, and with those awkward relationships that we don’t know what to do with. We can trust him with our infertility, and we can trust him with the chaos of way too many kids.

We can trust this Jesus, because in the fullness of time, God said “I’m sending my son to heal the world, and he can be trusted.”

So, in the meantime, when everything still isn’t fixed, and when there still isn’t peace, and when the healing still hasn’t come— and we’re living *chronos* but we’re longing for *kairos*— we can trust him then, too, because God says, “Give it all to me. Give me your good, your bad, and your ugly. Give me your yesterdays and your tomorrows. I sent my son, and he’s going to clean up the whole mess. Trust him.”

Are you trudging along in *chronos*, and things aren’t going like they’re supposed to? Has your prayer has been, “Where have you been, God? You know, I could sure use some *kairos* in the midst of all this *chronos*!” Well, if that’s you, then the Christmas story we’ve just heard is

God's way of saying to you, "Hang in there. Be patient. I haven't forgotten about you. Lots of people waited lots of years for Jesus. I'll show up. Trust me. You can trust me with it. A baby's been born. We're all going to be okay. Trust me."

Amen.