

The Parents Respond

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[0:00] Thank you, Alex. Before I jump into the message, we can see some candles here. Last week, we lit the first candle as we enter the season of Advent, and the first candle represented Love. And today, we will light the second one. I'm going to invite Megan to come up.

We'll give her a round of applause. That'll be great. And Megan's family is here as well, so we welcome you. Good to have you in Hong Kong. And you're going to light the second candle for us. And this one will represent joy today. Oh, we're good. Good job. Would you say a prayer for us? Father God, we just come to you grateful for this opportunity to worship and to hear from you this morning. Yeah, we're just so grateful for the story of Advent, that the God of the universe, who placed the stars in the sky and who created every one of us, chose to come in this perfectly messy and beautiful story of Advent. Yeah, in the most humble way. And we are just so grateful for it. And as we approach Christmas, would you speak to us? Would you be at the center of all of our festivities? Would you bless our time together? And may we hear this story of Advent in a new way.

[1:16] May your Holy Spirit continue to work in each and every one of us. And we ask this in your name. Amen. Amen. Thank you. Thank you. So we've been going through the book of Luke. We started with the book last week and Johnny kicked us off. And we're going to continue on that because it's Christmas and the beginning of Luke really tells the Christmas story. But really, just the first question is, what do you think about when you think about Christmas? When you think about this season? The kids and I, as we got out of the house today and it was cold, walking to the bus stop, my kids were just so happy.

They're like, this reminds us of England. It's just so nice. And I'm like, actually, that's the very thing I was running away from, the cold. But here we are. What do you think about, Gracie, what do you think about when you think about Christmas? What's the first thing? Friends gathering.

Nice. Good. What else? You tell us. What comes to mind for you? Food. What kind of food? McDonald's. This is kind of like the Japanese thing that they have KFC on Christmas Day, right? That's a real thing. I think I saw J1 hiding around the corner there, so I'm going to embarrass him. J1, can you pop your head around with all that hair? There we go. Look at you, all that hair. Everyone give a round of applause to J1.

Just Christmas. Time with family, friends, family, friends, food. Just a beautiful time.

[2:47] So nothing about Jesus then, guys. Just we're okay. Thank you, J. You can go and sit back down over there if you want to. What if I asked you, what do you think about when you think about the Holy Spirit? Do you think that's tied with Christmas? Or what do you think about every day when you think about the Holy Spirit? Yeah.

It's like my connection with God. Your connection with God. I like that. I like that. It's something that's hard to describe, but it is there, right, for sure. What else is there? Let's pick on one more person, Kelly.

The person sitting next to Kelly, Jamie. Jamie, what do you think about when you think about the Holy Spirit? Sense of direction. The guide. Wow, that's good. But you see, we don't always think about the Holy Spirit, especially not with the Christmas story, but as I've even been looking through this book here, you just see the Holy Spirit's fingerprints everywhere. And from the very beginning, I mean, Johnny shared about this. From the very beginning, Genesis chapter one, verse two, the Spirit of God is hovering above the waters and seeking to give life. And then, of course, throughout the Old Testament, you see all these prophecies, over 300 about Jesus. And where do they come from? They come from the Holy Spirit revealing to people that, hey, there's a Messiah coming. There is sin in this world. There is brokenness in this world. And because you've been living by the flesh, you're going to experience death and decay. But with the Spirit, there is life.

And of course, there was a 400-year gap between the Old Testament and the New Testament. And then suddenly, the New Testament kicks off, and the Holy Spirit comes back and says, I'm here. In fact, I've always been here. And I'm here to give life once again. And then so you see Zechariah and his wife Elizabeth, these two righteous people who were serving in the temple, who have been waiting for a baby for years and years. And suddenly, this is the moment the Holy Spirit starts to work again. And you see the angel visit them. And then the angel, Gabriel goes and visits Mary as well. And you see this thing happening. And it's all documented by Luke, who actually I find is fascinating. Because if you look at the Gospel of Luke, it's probably the one that mentions the Holy Spirit the most. And it's really interesting because Luke was a doctor. Luke was a doctor who believed in science, and who believed in evidence, and who believed in looking at things and observing and deducing what should be happening here. And yet, he's the one who talks about the supernatural realm the most. If you look at the Book of Acts, which is his sequel to Luke, you'll see that he's still talking about the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is everywhere. And at least for me, maybe as a former biology teacher that wasn't quite smart enough to become a doctor like Dr. Trevor over here, was science can tell you how things work, but they don't really tell you why they work in the first place. It doesn't tell you the reason behind it. And I reckon maybe it was you're thinking for me, Dr. Luke was like, hey, look, I'm a doctor, and I'm used to scientific observation. But I want to show you that actually, the Holy Spirit is moving. There is, in fact, the supernatural realm is probably more real. It is more real than even what we're experiencing right here. The question is, do we truly acknowledge it? Do we recognize it? And do we respond to it?

[6:01] You see Zechariah and Mary both, understandably so, respond in doubt. Zechariah has this great thing that actually last week when I was reading when Johnny was leading us in it, because he's old, right?

And so then you can imagine, you're doing your work in the temple, you're old, you've been waiting for a baby for years, and then an angel appears out of nowhere and says, hey, you're going to have a baby. And then he's like, verse 18 in chapter 1, oh, actually, I'll do that in a minute. How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years. That tells me Zechariah is a smart man. He calls himself old, but he calls his wife advanced. So he knows what he's doing there. But he's doubting. And then Mary, of course, even more reason to doubt, because the very way that you have a baby, she hasn't done yet. And she's like, how is that even possible? And of course, you're imagining all the repercussions that would have on a teenage girl like Mary.

Once my mum finds out, I'm going to get kicked out of my house. I'm going to get kicked out of my community. So both of them respond in doubt, young and old, but then eventually they're filled with faith. And we're going to move into the second half of chapter 1, where we're going to look at actually how the Holy Spirit is working through all of that. If you look at the Gospel of Luke, yes, you've got the main character, which is Jesus, but the Holy Spirit is everywhere.

And we're going to try and go on this journey as we look at the Gospel of Luke and see if we can find what he's doing there and see how we can apply that to our own lives. So I'm going to invite Damien to come up and read. But before we do that, you can come up, Damien. He's going to read us the Word of God.

[7:34] I keep talking about this paper contraption that is the Bible, that is the real way to the truth. Today, I realize I can't kind of guilt trip you in not having a Bible, when there's actually Bibles that we have in our church here that actually our dear friend Gabriel feels very strongly about and actually gifted to the church. So I picked the smartly dressed man, which is Juju, for this very purpose, to come and hand out some Bibles first before we do it. Can I do that?

Can you be brave and confess if you don't have a Bible that you'd like to use a Bible today? Only to borrow, by the way. Oh, JP's making you all. He's just going to keep handing them out as we go. Come on. Oh, Brayden, look at that. He's got one. He's got one. Just keep handing them out, Juju, and just pass them around. And if you were going to use your phone, then I encourage you today to use the paper Bible, because it is so much easier to follow. And so we're going to go through the Word of God. Whilst Juju does that, can I invite us to stand for the Word of God?

By the way, those Bibles are actually still remain to be church property. So once you finish using them, please do, don't take them away. Unless you really want to take one and steal it, that's okay, but that's on you. You can decide with God what that means. But there's a black cupboard there, if you're part of the family. There's a cupboard there at the end. Feel free to just drop it back off over there, because Juju can't reach that top shelf. Nice suit, though. H&M; kids' collection is getting

good. Okay, God, forgive me. Forgive us. We come and we focus on you, Lord. Your words, not mine. Your words are the gift of life. Your words give us purpose, give us meaning. And so we lean on your words today. And so we thank you, and we receive these words with reverence and awe and gratitude. Thank you, Lord.

Today's scripture reading goes from Luke chapter 1, verse 39 to 56. In those days, Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judea. And she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby lived in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. And she exclaimed with a loud voice of her, and she said, Now, she cried, Blessed are you among women. And blessed is the fruit of your womb.

[10:05] And why is this granted to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold, when the sound of your greeting come to my ears, the baby in my womb lived for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord. And Mary said, My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God, my Savior. For he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed. For he who is mighty has done great things for me. And holy is his name. And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm. He has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate.

He has filled the hungry with good things and the rich he has sent away empty. He has helped his servant Israel in the remembrance of his mercy as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever.

And Mary remained with her about three months and returned to their home, through her home. This is God's word. Thank you, Damien. Please take a seat. Thank you. Thank you.

So as we're highlighting this, and actually, I'm going to go further beyond. We're going to finish the whole of chapter one, actually. So if you can see this, if you're looking and you're struggling, it's page 804. And we're going to be doing the whole thing. And through it, there is yes, there is Mary. Yes, there is Elizabeth. Yes, there is Zechariah. But the Holy Spirit is just everywhere.

And I want to be able to highlight that to you today. So Elizabeth, older lady, advanced in years lady, finally gets pregnant. Her and her husband Zechariah have been just righteous and holy and hardworking, following, devoted to the Lord. But yet the Lord chose not to give them baby until this point. She's got a relative, which is Mary, who they believe to be somewhere between 13 to 16. So very, very young, who didn't even ask for a baby, and now gets a baby. Both of them get visited by angel Gabriel. And then Mary, both of them have doubt, but both of them get over it and go, okay, well, if this is really happening, then okay, Lord, your will be done. And so we see here in verse 39, in those days, Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country to a town in Judah. So immediately she goes, as quick as she possibly can, she heads. She's like, whoa, if this is happening to my relative Elizabeth, then I want to go and see her. And so she travels and it's a long journey and she gets there. And then there's this most fascinating encounter, which I think is just, can only be the Holy Spirit. Because what happens here is this, she goes and she enters the house, so she knocks on the door and Zechariah opens the door and greets her. And then she greets Elizabeth and verse 41. And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. And she exclaimed with loud cry, blessed are you among women.

[13:22] And blessed is the fruit of your womb. Joy. And I actually talked a little bit about this last year, but no one remembers what I preached last week. So you won't remember what I preached last year. Joy. And it made me think, actually, if I'm Elizabeth at that moment, I'm probably not feeling joy were it not for the Holy Spirit. Have a think, all the years that she's been waiting for God, all the years she's been asking God, why won't you give us a, what have Zechariah and I, have I done wrong? Why are we still here without a baby? These years of diligence, these years of being righteous.

And that, and she's probably given up five times at this point. And finally, finally, it happens. Meanwhile, her young teenage relative gets knocked up without even trying, without even trying to get knocked up. If I just imagine if you were Elizabeth in that moment, I'd be like, you and I are not the same. I've been waiting for years for this. And you're just going to have, you're just going to be pregnant too. You're just going to steal my thunder too. Just like that. You're just going to enjoy this time with me. No, you're not allowed to. I've waited 50 years for this. And yet you're here sharing joy

with me because I think that's how I would feel. Isn't that how you would feel? And it brings me to the first point, which is this, the Holy Spirit, when he comes, he will fill us with joy. And you see Elizabeth is just filled with joy to the point where actually the baby in her womb jumps and leaps for joy, which tells me this thing, which is when it comes to the Holy Spirit, you will know the Holy Spirit that is there when there is joy in you. Paul talks about the fruit of the Spirit, one of them being joy. But the only problem is so many of us lack joy because we look around and we see so many things. If we were Elizabeth, we look at Mary and go, well, you're going to, you're stealing my joy right now because you're sharing this with me. That's, that's not cool. It really is comparison, the spirit of comparison that actually takes away that joy. Have we all been there before? When you do something well, when you get an A minus at school and you're like, oh, that is so good. I worked so hard for that until the person next to you who barely studied gets an A plus and you're like, oh, you've just stolen my joy. I tried really hard for this. That's when Theodore Roosevelt said, the enemy, the thief of joy is comparison. Do we have this? Do we have this when we look across at someone? Maybe, maybe this is something that we feel all the time is that when we see our friends who were at the same stage of life where then they take the next step and they, they start dating and then they start getting married and then they start to have kids and then they do this and then they get this and then they get this car and then they get this flat and you're like, I was quite happy with my life until I saw your life and now I'm not happy anymore. Have we been there? When we invite the Holy Spirit into our hearts, into our lives, he fills us with joy because we stop comparing, because we stop looking at the other person. You see, Elizabeth here, the way she talks about this is just incredible. She's like, blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. This was prophetic in a way. This was the Holy Spirit revealing to Elizabeth because remember at that point there was no social media, there was no WhatsApp. So she may not have even known that Elizabeth, that Mary was pregnant. She didn't receive the social updates.

So she walks in and she's like, okay, by that point, Mary's about six months. She's like, whoa, you're pregnant too. But it's the Holy Spirit that reveals. And when the Holy Spirit reveals, she's just filled with joy. Does comparison steal your joy?

And I've shared this time and time again. I literally just shared it again this morning with my accountability group. As I sit and as I scroll on social media, I try not to do it anymore because it's not on my phone. But every now and again, I'll check and two, three minutes in, I'll be like, this doesn't feel good. I don't like this. Why does everyone have so much hair?

[17:39] Why does everyone have so many good things that they're doing in life? Why are they hanging out there? What are they doing? Why aren't I invited? And a few minutes in, I'm just like, you know what?

I don't like what this is doing to me. I'm just going to stop looking at it. Because comparison is the thief of joy. And you see here, the spirit-filled encounter. This is only the Holy Spirit.

You can see here in verse 41 at the end, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit, when he comes, fills us with this kind of joy. And it's up to us to invite, look, a lot of us know who the Holy Spirit is and really have welcomed the Lord into our lives.

But I know that sometimes there isn't that joy, but we can ask for it from him because he is the one who gives it. But it starts with us releasing and surrendering that need for comparison, that need for looking at the other. When we are content in what the Lord has given us, that's when we are filled with joy. Of course, there's two words that are often used interchangeably, and that is jealousy and envy. Is there a difference? What do you think? There is a difference.

What do you think? What do you think the difference is? Jealousy is more like, envy is more like you wanting to have what the other person has, and jealousy is more like you don't want the other person to have something, like just simply because they have that.

[19:09] Yeah. There's an element of, hey, I want what you have, but if I can't have what you have, then I'd rather you don't have it either. And then of course, you look at someone else who has that joy and who has that thing, you're like, oh, I want that. But if I don't get it, then no.

And we know we all do this when we look on the news and we see people who we're jealous of, who suffer and who have some kind of trouble. You're like, ah, you deserve it. There's something in us, sin, the flesh that causes us to look at the other people and go, oh, that's envy. That's why God said, don't do that. You know what that is? That's a bad look for my children because my children

will have trust in me that I give them everything that they need and everything that will satisfy them. And so we have to be careful of that. And we have to invite the Holy Spirit in to help us there, because when there is jealousy, there is no joy. Maybe just remember that for the first point. Where there is jealousy, there is no joy. So that when you're thinking, oh, I have no joy, well, then surrender the jealousy. Surrender looking at the other people and going what they have.

Elizabeth could have easily, easily done that, but she didn't. She was just filled, filled with joy in meeting Mary. The second point is this, which is tied.

When the Holy Spirit comes, he points you to other people. He points you to everything but yourself. Why? Because the Holy Spirit is selfless. You see, she's not saying, oh, come, come and join my house.

[20:28] Look at me. I'm pregnant. I'm a bit ahead of you. My baby's going to be great. What's your baby's CV? Let's look at Luke chapter one and compare CVs for our children. No, no, no. She said, blessed are you, mother of my Lord. If there's a humility that comes when the Holy Spirit comes into your life.

If you want to find out if someone is really filled with the Spirit and is loving the Lord, just look how humble they are, honestly. You just look for humility. Humility is the key trait that I've learned as I look at leaders, as I look for people. I'm like, does this person have humility? And what is humility? Of course, C.S. Lewis talks about humility, which is, it's not thinking any less of yourself. We're not talking about people who have low self-confidence, who have low self-esteem, who are constantly self-deprecating. But we're talking about, C.S. Lewis says, people with humility, true humility, are ones who think about themselves less. My favorite quote for humility is, humility is just being as close to the truth as possible. So not any bigger, don't inflate yourself any more or any less than you should be, just being, just staying as close to the truth as possible. When we are filled with the Holy Spirit, we will have the humility that comes with it because we won't be looking at ourselves.

Verse 43, and why is it granted to me that the mother of my Lord, how did she know that? She sees Mary walk into her house. It's like, I'm pregnant, you're pregnant, but you're the mother of my Lord, my King. There's a humility there that's just like, I submit to you.

I look to you. And of course, she passes that on to her baby, John the Baptist. John the Baptist was this crazy character who went out to live in the wilderness, was filled with the Holy Spirit.

[22:12] But John chapter three, when he's grown up and he starts his ministry, what does he say? He says, my joy is now complete because this guy is here, because I'm the bridegroom. I'm not the main character. I am so happy to be standing on the side here because Jesus is now here. And then what does he say? He must become greater. I must become less. And that's how you get that joy.

So I wonder whether we struggle with joy as a, as, as a nation, as a group of people in this living in this planet at this time, we struggle with joy because we are so encouraged to focus on ourselves. Hey, work on yourself, do what's best for you. Do what you feel like you are, what you feel like. And yet somehow we are just completely deprived of joy because that's not the way to get joy.

The Holy Spirit here gives joy. When you look away from yourself, joyfulness comes with selflessness. There is a humility that is involved going, it's not all about me. And in some ways that is where your joy really starts coming out. Actually, Mary has the same thing. So if we carry on. So after this, they have this wonderful interaction that's filled with the Holy Spirit. I can, I can imagine loud screeches and high pitched noises and big hugs. And after that, Mary then breaks into song and she sings this song, which of course is very one. And it starts with this, my soul magnifies the Lord.

She's just been told by her relative that, Hey, the person in your womb is going to be the savior of the world. It's going to be Lord. And yet she says, my soul magnifies the Lord. But so many of us, when we get praised about anything, we're like, may we be magnified. May we be glorified. And you realize that there is no joy in that. Have you think of the most prideful person? And I've asked you this before. Think of the most prideful person, you know, or just prideful people. Do you sense joy there?

[24:01] No, for some reason, people who are prideful just don't have joy, but the ones who are selfless, the ones who don't think about themselves, they are filled with joy because they are filled with the Holy Spirit. And so then Mary, we won't go through verse by verse for this. My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God, my savior. Verse 48, for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. She's saying, I have no business being here. I have no business

doing this.

I have no business carrying the savior of the world in my womb. And yet here I am. My soul magnifies the Lord. She's filled with the spirit and she's not looking at herself. She's filled of joy because she's not looking at herself. There's a humility that's involved when it comes to anything that God is involved with. And she carries on and she talks about that in verse, let me look for it. Verse 51, he has shown strength with his arm. He has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the mighty from their thrones. The proud, the mighty, they have no business being here.

The kingdom of God has no business for people who are proud and mighty because that's the very nature of the kingdom of God that you can only get in. It's when you recognize that you need a savior. And it certainly carries on. It talks about the hungry in verse 53 and the rich he sends away empty.

So she talks about the poor, talks about the helpless, talks about the oppressed. This is the same later in Luke chapter four, when Jesus starts his ministry, he will say the spirit of the Lord is upon me in Isaiah 61 to proclaim goodness to the poor, the broken, the captives, the oppressed.

[25:36] The kingdom of God is for those who are truly humble. The Holy Spirit brings that joyfulness through selflessness. And again, none of us have achieved this. None of us can achieve this on our own, in fact. But when was the last time when we were tempted to compare, when we were tempted to envy, when we were tempted to think about ourselves, when we go, Holy Spirit, can you just help me?

I can't do this. I can't do this because if it's me, I'm going to want to do this. But if it's you, I want to do this. It's Romans 8 where he says, to set your mind on the flesh leads to death, but to set your mind on the spirit leads to life and peace. When do we just go, Holy Spirit, actually, I need your help. I am just constantly comparing myself to everyone else. Anyone, everyone.

And we all have moments like that. People that we don't need to compare, there is nothing to compare. Sometimes I'll sit and I'll watch my son's basketball games with fellow 12-year-olds, catch me on the back, I can take that guy. Like me, grown man, taking the 12-year-old.

But if we would just be content as children of God going, God, you have given me everything that I need. Holy Spirit, help me not think about myself. I want the joy that comes from you. I want the joy of Elizabeth, where she doesn't compare with her teenage relative, but she's just filled with joy.

The third point is this, the Holy Spirit fills you with faith. You see, both of them are just filled with this faith. And actually, that's part of Elizabeth's compliment to Elizabeth. Verse 45, and blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord. She's saying, Mary, you are so blessed. Why? Because you have faith. Why do I know you have faith? Because you believe that God is good for his promise. That when God sent angel Gabriel to tell you that this would happen, you were just filled with faith and you came to find me to celebrate this faith, you believe that God will come through. See, faith is a gift. I've met people in my life who have this gift of faith, and it is unshakable, and it is, and I just look at them, I'm like, that gift is so beautiful, because whatever circumstance you're going through, whatever kind of suffering you're going through, you just have faith that you know God will come through for you. And where does that faith come from? That faith comes from the Holy Spirit.

[28:07] And Mary has that, because even towards the end of her song, she says, he has helped his servant Israel in remembrance of his mercy as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and his offspring forever.

She's like, God, you have been coming through time and time again for our people. Now you've been away for 400 years, and we've not known where you were, and it's been pretty bad, but now you're coming through again. And Mary continued to keep that faith. The Holy Spirit fills you with faith.

It reminds me, the sequel to the book of Luke is Acts. And actually Luke describes people who have faith as people who are filled with the Holy Spirit. The first deacon in Acts chapter 6, Stephen, is described as someone who is a man of faith and is filled with the Holy Spirit. You go further along in Acts chapter 11, you see Barnabas, and same thing, man of faith, filled with the Holy Spirit.

Do you want to be a man of faith? Do you want to be a woman of faith? Well, then if you do, then ask the Holy Spirit. That's where he comes from. The Holy Spirit is God on the move.

The Holy Spirit is God in the now. Sometimes we neglect to think that. We neglect to acknowledge that he's actually here, and he's the giver of these good gifts. So can we be that kind of people?

[29 : 24] And it's not just the ladies. Zechariah has it too. So he's doubting, and he's like, oh, I don't know. I don't know if we're going to be able to have kids. We're pretty old, and my wife's pretty advanced. But yet then, he has this fascinating encounter that I think is really funny too. So then, after this encounter with Mary and Elizabeth, and then Mary breaks into song, and then the film, as if it was a film, moves over to... So actually, Mary then hangs out and stays at their house for three months. So you've just got two pregnant ladies just waddling around the house for three months, until the baby John the Baptist comes. And when John the Baptist comes, bear in mind, at this point, Zechariah, because of his lack of faith, has still got his mouth shut, zipped. So lots of peace in the house, and also lots of time just to reflect, I'm sure. Do you remember that? Do you remember that, Kelly, when you were unable to speak to us? Like, there was just this, just this, well, ample opportunity just to reflect, just to listen. And so I can imagine Zechariah is just mulling this, oh my goodness, why did I doubt? There was literally an angel in front of me. I should have just said, okay, that's all I needed to say. And now I can't speak.

And so this fascinating encounter happens here. So they're very happy. The baby comes, I'm in verse 58 now, and her neighbors and her relatives heard that the Lord had shown great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her. And on the eighth day, they came to circumcise the child, which is not a joyous occasion, but they carried on. And they would have called him Zechariah. So it's interesting.

So the baby actually comes, and then the relatives and the friends and the family are like, he's going to be called Zechariah Junior. Because that's how things are, and that's how things always will be.

But you just get named after your father, and that's just tradition. That's just what we do. And then, but actually, Elizabeth says, no, he shall be called John. Well, that's different.

Zechariah is very, very far from John. And they said to her, wait, none of your relatives is called by this name. I love that. Have you ever had that moment where you hear from God that you should be doing something? Oh, it's dripping. That's why this is here. It might be my spit. So have you had that moment where you hear from God and you say, hey, I should do this. And then everyone else around you, where are we dripping from? Do you think it's the candle? It's water.

[31 : 52] What is it? Oh, it's on my phone. No.

There is one. Let me keep the phone out. This is Holy Spirit. Okay, we're just going to move this here. Oh, this is interesting. This is like a, should we blow the candle out? Do you think that's going to make a difference?

Okay, we're just going to keep going. Thank you so much, Megan. Have you been there where you know that God is telling you to do something and you know other people who hear it will be like, that's a crazy idea. That's not what we do here.

This is just different. You're not supposed to be doing that. Zechariah knew that this baby would have to be called John. And then the relatives are like, what? That's not how things work here.

See, what it tells me is when we are filled with the Holy Spirit, when we hear from the Holy Spirit, when we get the guidance and the direction from the Holy Spirit, it is often, my own personal experience, it is often to what the world tells us to do.

[33 : 05] It is often different because we are called to not conform to the patterns of this world, but to be transformed by the renewing of our mind. So we'll have to be able to follow the good and perfect will of God that is different from this world.

The Holy Spirit, when he fills us, sometimes tells us to do things that we're just simply not comfortable with, simply not familiar with. It goes against the trend of society. And yet we should still do it.

And we don't do it by our own mind. We do it because of the faith that we are filled with by the Holy Spirit. And I wonder whether we have any of those circumstances happening where you're like, everyone tells me, everything tells me that I should be going for this promotion because that's what, but for some reason, God, I just feel as though God's telling me not to.

Do you have the obedience to follow in that moment? I guess one way that's helpful for me is every decision that I make in my life, I'd be like, actually, if I wasn't a follower of God, would I be making this decision in the exact same way?

Because if we're honest with ourselves, actually, so many of the things that we do in our lives, so many of the things that we pursue, it really doesn't, God doesn't really make that big an impact.

[34:12] Because we're trying to do well in our jobs, so we're trying to get promoted, and then we're trying to find a spouse, and we're trying to have a kid, and then we hope the kid is going to be healthy, and then we hope the kid is going to be happy, and then we hope the kid is going to go into a good school. Like, all these things seem to be, if we're honest, the same as the rest of the world.

But if we are to be people who are filled with the Holy Spirit, then there will come moments where the Holy Spirit will say, hey, it makes sense to do this by worldly standards, but I want you to do this today.

Are we, one, receptive enough to even hear that voice? And two, do we then have the obedience to actually follow it? Because none of your relatives do that. None of your friends do that.

None of your co-workers do that. Even as I'm talking here, I see people who have made decisions to follow the Holy Spirit when everyone else is saying, hey, that's just dumb.

But the Holy Spirit gives you faith. It gives you faith to do the thing that isn't what you think it is. And I personally think that's how Christine and I, we ended up here in Hong Kong. Because we had everything that we needed back in the UK, the life that we had.

[35:23] But yeah, when God knocks and when God calls, you're like, that doesn't seem to make sense. That's a bad career move. That's a bad move. I mean, I remember landing here, and some of you have heard me say this.

I remember landing in Hong Kong before the protests, before COVID, bringing my young family. Alicia was just a little bit younger than EJ is now. And we had two kids, and the people were like, what on earth? Why did you come to Hong Kong?

Everyone else is going the opposite direction. Why are you coming here? And I said, I don't know. Because God asks us to. When the Holy Spirit calls you, it may not look like what the world is calling you to do.

But he will also be the one that gives you the faith. And so it's interesting here. So Zechariah says, no, he writes on a tablet. So the relatives are going, what's he going to be called?

What's the name? And then Elizabeth says, it's going to be called John. And then everyone is just completely just filled with wonder is the word here used in verse 63. Because Zechariah asks for a tablet.

[36:27] So he gets an iPad, and then he writes, his name is John. And they all wondered. And they're like, what on earth is going on? He's supposed to be called ZJ, Zechariah Jr.

And yet you're calling him John. That's not what we do here, Zeke. And then in that moment where he takes that step of faith and says, no, he will be called this.

Because this is what the Holy Spirit told me that he will be called. Suddenly his mouth opens. And when he opens, what does he say? Oh, thank goodness I've got so many things I want to say. You, stop being so stupid.

You, do this. You do this. No, he just, he opens his mouth after all these months, and he starts blessing God. When you have just that moment, and maybe, I don't know the rest of our stories here, but I can imagine Kelly probably knows how that feels.

Just that moment where, you can ask her about it one day, where she finally gets to open her mouth, and Zechariah just blesses God. And fear came on all their neighbors. And all these things were talked about through all the hill country of Judea.

[37:27] And all who heard them laid them up in their hearts, saying, what then will this child be? For the hand of the Lord was with him. So they all wondered why he made this decision to begin with, because they were not sure about it.

But then they were filled with awe and wonder afterwards when they heard about it, when they saw what the Holy Spirit was actually doing. And so he then breaks into almost a song, but his one is a prophecy.

And so verse 67, And his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied. Just a word on that, in case you're not familiar with the word prophecy. The word prophecy really is more than just prediction. It is really more than just predicting what will happen in the future, or which sports team will win the NBA championship next year.

It's not that kind of prophecy necessarily. Prophecy is actually declaring the heart and the word of God. When someone is prophesying here in scripture, you see them, they're just declaring on behalf, they're just declaring the heart and word of God.

That is what they are doing here. And so Zechariah jumps into this prophecy and he starts, but he doesn't talk about his son. Again, you can see here, the Holy Spirit leads you to a place where you are not focused on yourself. And he just starts saying, Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people.

[38 : 33] He's talking about the big picture. The Holy Spirit has revealed to him the big picture of what is happening here. And so he reels through hundreds of years that we won't go through now. He talks about Abraham. He talks about David.

He talks about how God has been with the Israelites all this time and has delivered them and has been working. So even though he's only popped out now at 400 years later, the Holy Spirit, God has been working all the way through.

And so he gets to this point where he's just talking about the Israelites, talking about the big picture. And then finally, verse 76, so halfway through this prophecy, he looks and he talks to his child and he says, verse 36, And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High, for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways.

Again, the Holy Spirit reveals to him, hey, there is this big picture that what God is doing in the world, what God is doing through the Israelites. And then he looks at his baby, John, and goes, this you will be a prophet.

You, child, will be a prophet of the Most High. You will prepare the way. The Holy Spirit fills you with joy. The Holy Spirit fills you with this sense of just pointing you to other people.

[39 : 38] The Holy Spirit gives you faith and reveals to you the heart of God. Can you see the Holy Spirit just doing everything here? He's a busy guy. And then it finishes with this final thing.

After verse 36, he talks about his son. A new child will be called the prophet of the Most High, for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins.

If you're sat there listening to this prophecy, you'll be like, God, you're going to come and save us. Finally, from all the oppression. You're going to make Israel great again. You're going to save us again. And how are you going to save us?

Wait, you're going to save us in the forgiveness of our sins. That's weird. We were hoping the Messiah would come and strong arm the opponents and destroy the opponents for us.

Now you're saying that you will only be saved when our sins are forgiven. Zechariah, what are you talking about? How's your little baby John going to do that?

[40 : 40] Well, that is the point. And this is my final point here. The Holy Spirit gives you joy. The Holy Spirit points you to others. The Holy Spirit fills you with faith. But most importantly, the Holy Spirit points you to Jesus.

He finishes this prophecy. He starts from talking about Israel, the big picture, to talking about his son. But he finishes by talking about Jesus. And you will point people to Jesus.

For you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins. He's saying you need saving, first and foremost, from yourself.

From your sin. It's the same as what Mary was saying. That God would look upon her, this humble estate. She doesn't deserve to be here. That is the crux of Christianity.

If you sit here thinking that you deserve to be here, then you've got it wrong. Then you have missed the point. And I have met many, many Christians who I think have missed the point. And I pray to the Lord that I don't miss the point.

[41 : 38] That there is one day that I think that I deserve to be sat here. But the whole point of Christianity is every single person in this room does not deserve to be sat here. Because we are all sinners.

And sinners can't save themselves. Einstein said the very same consciousness that created the problem can't be the one that solves it. We sit here in a pool of hurt, in a pool of death, in a pool of brokenness because of our flesh, because we've chosen to follow our flesh that has led to death. But the Holy Spirit arrives and points us to Jesus because that, when we focus on him, when we have his spirit living inside us, then we will have life and peace.

It is all about Jesus here. And he says, you need to know that you are a sinner and you need to seek forgiveness. You need to know that you need to say sorry.

Because afterwards it carries on because of the tender mercy of our God. Just when you think, man, this is a judgmental, harsh God. It is not. He is the tender hearted, the compassionate and

kind, the gracious God.

[42 : 50] Which completely flips who you think God is. Or at least who the world thinks God is. Because the world sees God as this creator from on high, who is ready to judge and who is ready to smite and send down wrath.

But you see, it is tender mercy. How do we know that? Whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death to guide our feet into the way of peace.

And that is it. John the Baptist comes to prepare the way. He himself isn't the truth. He is here to give you the knowledge of salvation. But there is one who is coming who is the truth himself. So John the Baptist gives you the knowledge of how you should be saved. But then Jesus comes and says, I am the way, the truth, and the life. I am the one who will save you. He says, to give light to those who sit in that darkness.

It reminds me of Isaiah 9-2. The Christmas passage that we kind of only read during Christmas. You know, the part that says, for to us a child is born, a son is given. But before that, in Isaiah 9-2, is there is a people who have been walking in darkness, a deep darkness, but they have seen a great light.

[43 : 58] John the Baptist came to give us knowledge of salvation, but Jesus himself was the truth. John the Baptist came to show us the way to peace. And Jesus was that peace. And he was that way.

That is the truth of the gospel. That is the truth of Christmas here. To those who sit in darkness are in the shadow of death. And I shared about this a few weeks ago.

It's Psalm 23. That even though we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, we shall fear no evil, for he is with us. We don't have to be afraid of the shadow of death anymore, because he walked straight through and defeated death and now carries us through too.

John the Baptist came to provide that for us. And even just this Christmas, as we light candles, as we think about Jesus coming as a baby in a manger with all his humility, with all his love, even that has nothing compared to his second coming.

We do all of this, not because he came the first time, but because we know he's coming back again. And when he comes back again, it won't be in that gentle baby in a manger format.

[45 : 10] It will be full of glory from the skies. And that is what gives us hope. And that is what we celebrate. And that is why we celebrate. And so may the words of the benediction from Romans 15 be true for us.

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit, you may abound in hope. The Holy Spirit gives us that hope because he fills us with joy. He gives us that hope because he fills us with faith. And that leads us to look not just to ourselves, but to other people. And so that our joy would be made complete, just like John the Baptist. Recognizing this Christmas and every Christmas and every day, we rejoice because the Lord is at hand. He is right here in the form of the Holy Spirit.

And because of that, we rejoice. Because of that, we are reasonable to everyone. Because of that, we are not anxious about anything. But in everything, with prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, we can make our requests to God and his guard our hearts and our minds in Christ Jesus.

[46 : 21] God is here. God is good. And God loves us. That is why we celebrate. That is why we celebrate just like Elizabeth.

That's why we celebrate just like Mary. That's why we celebrate just like Zechariah. Just like John the Baptist. The Holy Spirit ultimately points us to Jesus. If you, this is where I'm going to finish. So here's the application point. If you struggle with joy, can we have a time now for you to ask the Holy Spirit, hey, I'm really struggling with joy. If there's anything blocking me, can you help me release?

If you struggle with faith, then we ask the Holy Spirit, would you just give us faith? Would you give me faith? If you're just so caught up in your own thoughts and mind about just what you're doing and what you've achieved, and who you are and what you're trying to build and what you're trying to magnify, can you ask the Holy Spirit, can my soul just magnify you like Mary did?

Because I do believe that God is here. I do believe that the Holy Spirit is here. And he hears our prayers. So let us come to him and spend that time now in response.

[47:36] I'm going to invite Paul and the team to come up. But just maybe before that, can we just spend a few minutes where you speak to God yourself? And you ask him, hey, what are you trying to say to me today?

So Lord, in the same spirit of Elizabeth, Mary, Zechariah, and John, who are so filled with joy and faith and humility at your first coming, we sing that song with the same heart for your second coming.

May we here by your grace and by your spirit be a people of joy, humility, and faith.

And as we go forth from here and we seek to spread Christmas cheer, we ask that it would be focused fully on you and only you.

Thank you, Lord. It's in your name we pray. Amen.