

Joke: One day, Einstein has to speak on science at a university.

On the way there, he tells his driver who happens to look a bit like him:

"I'm sick of all these conferences. I use the same speech and cover the same things over and over!"

The driver agrees: "You're right. I attended all of them, and even though I don't know anything about science, I could give that speech just as well maybe even better than you."

"Think so" says Einstein. "Let's switch places then!"

So, the driver pulls over in a rest area, they switch clothes and as soon as they arrive, the driver dressed as Einstein goes on stage and starts giving the speech, while the real Einstein, dressed as the car driver, sets in the crowd and he does a great job giving it to.

But in the crowd, there is one scientist who wants to impress his classmates and thinks of a difficult question to ask Einstein, hoping he won't be able to answer. So this guy stands up interrupts the speech and yells out his question. The whole room goes silent, holding their breath, waiting for the response.

The driver looks at him, dead in the eye, and says :

"Sir, your question is so easy, I'm surprised they let someone like you in this university, just to show you how easy that question is I'm going to let my driver answer it for me."

Today we are starting our Christmas series Songs of the Season with Mary and Elizabeth whose lives were disrupted. Watch this. . .

Show video: SOTS Mary and Elizabeth

In the video we just saw two women and a man whose lives have had quite a turn. The term “disrupted” definitely fits the life they are facing. No one would have expected these events to unfold in the way that did.

Maybe you can relate? Have you ever run headlong into an unseen disruption in your life? You probably have. If you haven’t, well, just wait because you probably will.

Let’s look back at how this all started.

Luke 1:26–28 (NIV): In the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, 27 to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. 28 The angel went to her and said, “Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.”

This all sounds so sweet and exciting until we understand that this young likely teenage girl, who is engaged to be married, now has some explaining to do. How could she begin to explain this to her parents. To the one she’s engaged to. With, well honestly, everybody she knows and loves. It’s here in this story that Mary enters a “Life Disrupted.”

And it begins with. . .

1. Untimely Timing

You likely know at least some of Mary’s story. But what about Zechariah and Elizabeth? Elizabeth, who our passage says is in her sixth month of pregnancy?

If we back up a few verses we hear this about them.

Luke 1:5–7 (NIV): 5 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. 6 Both of them were righteous in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's commands and decrees blamelessly. 7 But they were childless because Elizabeth was not able to conceive, and they were both very old.

Luke describes an older couple beyond child-bearing age. He describes them as good people, righteous people, living a life of faith. We learn Zechariah was a priest. Yet, something was missing. In a culture that placed value on a couple having children, they had none.

Maybe you can relate to them. You had some expectations in your life that have gone unmet.

The story continues:

Luke 1:11–13 (NIV): Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. 12 When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear. 13 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.

The angel's encounter with Elizabeth and Zechariah reminds us that God's timing is always perfect, even when it seems untimely.

Just as Elizabeth (who was thought to be beyond her childbearing years) conceives a child in her old age, we can trust God in the good times as well as the untimely, challenging events of our lives.

Hear this church, there will be surprises along life's way. There will be blessings beyond our imagination and there will be struggles that may bring us to our knees. But in the midst of all of that we have this promise from God's word:

Isaiah 41:10 (NIV): So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

I can imagine Zechariah, this well-schooled priest, quoting this verse from Isaiah to a shocked Elizabeth as she realizes she will be giving birth in what we understand to be her twilight years. “How can this be?” she may have asked possibly even screamed? Yet, God was working in her life and, simultaneously, preparing her to be a significant voice in the ear of a young, likely worried, teenage girl.

The words, “do not fear, for I am with you,” would have been appropriate for her and Zechariah.

And friends. . .If you are experiencing an “untimely time” today, please hear this: God is for you. God is with you. Amid life’s disruptions, you can place your trust in Him.

Not only do we see untimely timing but we also see an:

2. Unexpected Encouragement

Let’s return to Mary’s story. She’s been informed by the angel that she, a virgin, will conceive a son who is to be called Jesus. Also, that her much older relative, Elizabeth, will give birth. Luke continues in verses 39-45 of chapter one.

Luke 1:39–45 (NIV): At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, 40 where she entered Zechariah’s home and greeted Elizabeth. 41 When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. 42 In a loud voice she exclaimed: “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! 43 But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? 44 As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in

my womb leaped for joy. 45 Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!”

Mary and Elizabeth's joyful greeting reminds us of the power of community and encouragement. Elizabeth's exclamation of “Blessed are you. . .” may have been the first positive words she'd heard in days or even weeks.

In a world (not unlike ours) often obsessed with judging others, their relationship shows us the strength that comes from supporting and uplifting one another. I love how what Paul tells the church in Thessalonica.

1 Thessalonians 5:11 (NIV): Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.

And then the author of Hebrews tells us. . .

Hebrews 10:24–25 (TPT): Discover creative ways to encourage others and to motivate them toward acts of compassion, doing beautiful works as expressions of love. 25 This is not the time to pull away and neglect meeting together, as some have formed the habit of doing, because we need each other! In fact, we should come together even more frequently, eager to encourage and urge each other onward as we anticipate that day dawning.

But even more so, it shows us the strength that comes in trusting God's word.

2 Corinthians 1:20 (NLT): For all of God's promises have been fulfilled in Christ with a resounding “Yes!” And through Christ, our “Amen” (which means “Yes”) ascends to God for his glory.

And reading again from Isaiah, we have these words concerning God:

Isaiah 40:29–31 (NIV): He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. 30 Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; 31 but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.

Zechariah could have turned to this passage to encourage Elizabeth, Mary, or both. We'll never know for sure. But what is evident is this:

During this season, as we exchange gifts and share time with our loved ones, may we recall the importance of being a source of encouragement in each other's lives. And may we not overlook the words from Isaiah: In our weakness, God is our strength. Whether young or old, may we run and not grow weary; may we walk and not be faint; as we follow where God leads.

Not only did we witness untimely timing and unexpected encouragement but lastly we have an. . .

3. Unmatched Miracle

In our ever-disrupted lives, may we pause this Christmas season to embrace the untimely timing that life brings our way. May we look for opportunities to be that source of unexpected encouragement among those we encounter.

And in all the trappings that so often cloud the reason for this season, may we not miss the unmatched miracle that unfolded in the lives of those two babies born six months apart all those years ago.

One, a voice crying in the wilderness, “Prepare the way.” The other, the one for whom the way was prepared. We read this from the gospel of the apostle John:

John 1:24–26 (NIV): Now the Pharisees who had been sent 25 questioned him, “Why then do you baptize if you are not the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the

Prophet?” 26 “I baptize with water,” John replied, “but among you stands one you do not know.

And then in verse 29 we read. . .

John 1:29 (NIV): The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!

The unmatched miracle is this:

John 3:16 (NIV): For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

Jesus, “The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”

Do you know him? If not, please know this: Even in the middle of life’s disruptions, as the video told us earlier, “There is JOY in saying YES to God!

During the message, we didn’t say much about Zechariah.

Truth is dads sometimes get lost in the telling of birth stories, don’t they? But they are important just the same. Luke lets us know that Zechariah was a righteous priest who served God and His people. In Luke’s account, we see that Zechariah was in the temple burning incense as a fragrant offering to God.

Little could he have known then what big plans God had for him and Elizabeth. They would have a son, John. And John would prepare the way for the coming messiah, Jesus. A messiah about whom Paul would later write...

Ephesians 5:1–2 (NIV): Follow God’s example, therefore, as dearly loved children 2 and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

A fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. Zechariah in the temple sending up a fragrant offering to God as the Angel comes to him and then Jesus who loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

As we leave this place today, may we do so as “imitators of God as dearly loved children,” covered in HIS fragrance! Being a pleasing aroma to God in all we do.