**Embrace the role the Lord desires you to have in his plan**

*Luke 1:5-45; December 1, 2024*

I hope you had a delightful Thanksgiving day with friends and family thanking the Lord for his blessings and faithfulness to you.

The Lord was so kind to us to give us an amazing weekend last week.

* A team put up all these Christmas decorations to remind us of the beauty of this season.
* Two Living Nativities were safely set up. We concluded our stewardship messages in the morning and then …
* Stewardship Celebration was a delightful time praising the Lord and reminding ourselves that we are living stones designed to proclaim the excellencies of him who called us out of darkness into his marvelous light.
* Then, Monday night was a perfect illustration of that proclamation as our women’s ministry presented the Taste of Christmas.
  + Thank you so much for lifting high the name of Jesus and desiring to make your lives about “Only Jesus.”

Have you noticed that the Lord orchestrates events according to his desires and purposes?

* While it is not always clear in the middle of it, you can look back and see the Lord’s sovereign hand behind it all.

The OT Joseph was the favored son of his father Jacob. His father gave him a special coat and God gave him some unusual dreams. His brother’s jealousy resulted in the first known example of human trafficking.

* As a slave in a foreign land required to learn a foreign language, Joseph rises to prominence only to be propositioned by the master’s wife. When he refuses her advances in order to honor God, she lies about him and he is imprisoned.
* Doing his best, he attains prominence only to be forgotten by the cupbearer. He cannot win for losing!
  + Thirteen years filled with separation from family, betrayal, slavery, forgotten, and being treated like a sexual object. These are prime years … 17-30.
* Amid Pharoah’s desperation God exalts Joseph. Joseph becomes the human savior of the nation during their greatest threat to survival.
  + It is then, and only then, that Joseph connects all the dots. All he could do was be a steward of the chaos while he waited for God’s sovereign plan to play out.
  + It turned out to be a glorious plan.

The concept of the circle of stewardship and the circle of sovereignty does not end when stewardship month ends. It even occurs in the birth story of our savior. This year our Christmas series focuses on the presentation in Luke’s gospel.

With that in mind, please turn in your Bibles to Luke 1:5. That is on page \_\_\_\_\_ of the back section of the Bible under the chair in front of you.

As you turning there, our annual theme has been **Building on our Heritage**. God has given us an amazing 60 years. If he so chooses to allow Faith Church to lift high the name of Jesus, then we want to do so. Our 4 part Christmas series is called **Motivated by our Savior’s Heritage.** As we study the birth of Christ, may we be properly motivated to faithfully live for him.

Please follow along as I read the Lord’s Word in Luke 1:5-45. Read the text.

The title of our message is **Embrace the role the Lord desires you to have in his plan.**

This is a long passage with many important truths. I want us to concentrate on **2 truths from this passage that help us embrace the role God has given us**.

**I. God fulfilled his promises to send Jesus the Messiah**

Most Bible scholars believe that there was roughly 400 years between the end of the last book of the OT and the birth of Jesus, the Messiah.

* During those years, many attitudes developed about the nation of Israel, Messiah, and the events that lead to Messiah.
* Those attitudes were partially driven by the hardships the nation experienced during those 400 years.
  + By the time John and Jesus came, there were distorted views.
  + They viewed the nation of Israel as Isaiah’s suffering servant. Thus, they longed for the political Messiah to deliver them.
  + Coupled with the desire for deliverance, the nation was unwilling to read the Scripture with the correct lens.

Thankfully, you and I are not clouded by that history. We can see that Luke presents John and Jesus as God fulfilling promises. After years of waiting, the plan to bring Messiah has arrived.

1. **John fulfilled the promises of the forerunner**

**Luke 1:14-17 “You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth. 15 “For he will be great in the sight of the Lord; and he will drink no wine or liquor, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit while yet in his mother’s womb.16 “And he will turn many of the sons of Israel back to the Lord their God. 17 “It is he who will go *as a forerunner* before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers back to the children, and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous, so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.**

I think we can all understand why Zacharias was troubled. If an angel appeared while I was writing this sermon … I too, might have needed a moment [hold that thought while I recover].

* Once we get over the fact that an angel shows up while he is offering incense to the Lord in the temple, verse 14 seems normal. If you were trying to have a baby for 20 years to no avail and suddenly you were pregnant.
* We would all be going crazy with excitement for you too.

But the angel is not just talking about a normal child. Notice the descriptions that follow.

1. **He will be great in the sight of the Lord**

Luke would later say that there was no one born of a woman greater than John. That is relatively high praise.

* Again, an angel is telling you that your child will be great in the Lord’s sight.

1. **He will not drink alcoholic beverages**

This is an odd comment. Even Jesus did not completely abstain from all alcohol.

* The Nazarite vow, which was normally voluntary included no alcohol and no hair cutting. On occasion, God assigned a person to the vow. God did that for the OT Samson and Hannah also did so for her son Samuel.

There is no consistent parallel. Our conclusion: God set John apart from his other servants by placing a special restriction on him to highlight his uniqueness.

1. **He will be filled with the Spirit in the womb**

The OT prophets were filled with the Spirit. Luke continues to emphasize John’s unique calling by saying he will be filled in the womb.

* This is the explanation for John leaping at Mary’s voice.
* This description nails John as a prophet.
* In typical prophetic fashion, he will call the nation to repentance.

1. **He will turn many sons of Israel to the Lord**

Prophets did not just command people to repent, they called them to life faithfully for the Lord.

* That is John’s ministry. We know from the gospels that God used John to do that.
* In fact, the people believed that John was a prophet. It was a barrier to the religious leaders’ opposition to Jesus.

John’s baptism was to prepare hearts and minds for Messiah’s coming.

1. **He will organize Messiah’s welcoming party**

Luke does not quote Isaiah 40 or Malachi 3, but the overtones are here.

* John is an Elijah like figure promised in the OT who would prepare hearts for the coming Messiah.
* It is right and true to focus on the opposition to Jesus. However, it is wrong to assume that the NT presents everyone against Jesus at all times.

The truth is that there were a band of Christ followers even at the crucifixion. It did not take long for the band of about 120 after the resurrection to become thousands a few months later.

God’s plan in the birth story of Jesus was to fulfill the promises of the Elijah-like forerunner.

* Zacharias and Elizabeth have the honor of fulfilling the role of parents to the one who will boldly proclaim Jesus as the Messiah.

We also see …

1. **Jesus fulfilled the promises of the coming Messiah**

We know that Mary did not earn this position nor did her character obligate God to anything.

* She has found favor with God because acted on her behalf rather than required God to act.
* He is clearly the one in control.

When the angel speaks to Mary, he provides a few descriptions of Jesus reminding us that he is the promised Messiah—King.

1. **He will be called the Son of the Most High**

**Luke 1:32a “He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High;**

Even Mary would not come to fully understand the angel’s message for many years. She would have understood that he was calling Jesus a king.

* Being a virgin, she also understood the uniqueness of Jesus.
* But you and I know that whether Mary grasped it all fully initially, these passages remind us that Jesus is the Son of God and thus divine.

Ultimately, the Jews would use this charge to execute Jesus.

* He claimed to be the Son of God – which was, of course, the truth.

1. **He will reign forever**

**Luke 1:32b-33 and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; 33 and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end.”**

The OT promised a ruler from the line of David that would rule forever.

* In her line of thinking, he is the promised king that will rule in Jerusalem forever. Being under Roman authority would make that particularly exciting.

But we know there was more to it. There is a suffering servant that must come first and we are waiting for the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

1. **The Holy Spirit will come upon you and he will be called the Son of God**

**Luke 1:35 The angel answered and said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy Child shall be called the Son of God.**

I am not sure that Mary had Isaiah 7:14 in her mind at this moment, but she understood and accepted that Jesus was unique.

* He was not conceived in a normal fashion. He was the ultimate fulfillment of a prophecy given 700 years before about a virgin conceiving and giving birth.

We will learn more about Jesus, the messiah, in later Christmas messages. That he is the savior come to rescue his people from their sins.

* If you do not have a personal, saving relationship with Jesus then there is no better time than the present.
  + [Give the gospel here]

God’s plan in Luke 1 involved the arrival of John, the forerunner, and Jesus the long awaited Messiah.

* Those involved in the story were not asked whether they wanted a role.
* God chose one for them. It was part of his circle of sovereignty.

But I believe that reality should motivate us. If God wants us to fulfill a role in his plan then he will equip us to do that role—whatever it is. Truth #2 is …

**II. God used surprisingly different people to accomplish his purposes**

Let’s dive into the people described in this passage.

1. **Zacharias – The doubting priest turned evangelist**

Zacharias was a priest from the line of Aaron. Unlike some of his ancestors, he followed the Lord faithfully. He carried out his responsibilities as instructed. There was a rotation (much like our preaching rotation) and Zacharias was on it. We are told …

1. **He was blameless but childless**

**Luke 1:6 They were both righteous in the sight of God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and requirements of the Lord. 7 But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and they were both advanced in years.**

Blameless is a biblical category for a person who keeps the commandments. It does not mean that they are sinless. It means that as you examine their life, there is no obvious flaw.

* You ask them about their marriage, and it is solid.
* You check on their work and they are a faithful steward of their job.
* If they are a parent, they are faithful to the task.
* Zacharias was a good man fully qualified to serve in this way.

While all looked well from the outside, there was an inner grief they carried for many years. They wanted to have children and could not. In v. 25 she describes her condition as a disgrace. That is powerful language.

* Elizabeth believes that others view her as a failure. She has failed to give her husband children and continue the family line. One can only imagine that pain.

But one commentator made an interesting observation. When God allows a woman to be barren in the Bible, he often has something special in mind for her. That was certainly true in this case.

1. **His prayer was answered in surprising ways**

**Luke 1:13 But the angel said to him, “Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your petition has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will give him the name John.**

This reminds us that infertility powerfully affects both men and women. Zacharias prayed for a child. He prayed that God would provide what they had long desired – a little baby.

The angel’s description of John was not just any boy.

* Zacharias’ boy would not only be an answer to a person prayer for their family, but the fulfillment of a promise to the nation!
* Don’t you love it when you pray for something and God decides to answer with “Yes, and more!”?

Yes, Zacharias, I will give you and Elizabeth a son. While I do that, let me give you the one who is the forerunner to the Messiah. “Yes, and more” is my favorite answer to prayer by God in the Bible.

1. **Zacharias struggled to believe**

**Luke 1:18-20 Zacharias said to the angel, “How will I know this *for certain?* For I am an old man and my wife is advanced in years.” 19 The angel answered and said to him, “I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news. 20 “And behold, you shall be silent and unable to speak until the day when these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their proper time.”**

I cannot be too hard on Zacharias. He was faithfully obeying the Lord’s commands. He served when expected.

* He sees an angel who announces that his prayer request has been answered. But he abandoned that answer long ago and had all but forgotten the prayer itself.
  + Been there? You pray and pray and pray. You think, well, I guess the answer is no. I might as well move on.
  + Then to discover that God is not only giving your request, but your son will be a big deal! That is a lot to process.

Yet, for his disbelief he receives a little discipline from the Lord.

* This is not the main thrust of the message but there might be a helpful point of application right here – It seems like a rather small offense to not have the opportunity to speak for the next year.
* But God holds those who know better to greater accountability.
* Zacharias would have known his Bible and thus would have known that God has done many amazing things in the past.

I love how Luke tells us the rest of that story. While technically not in our assigned text this morning. We find Zacharias learned and his character showed that he was committed to the Lord.

1. **Zacharias learns and shows why the Bible calls him blameless**

**Luke 1:59 And it happened that on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to call him Zacharias, after his father. 60 But his mother answered and said, “No indeed; but he shall be called John.” 61 And they said to her, “There is no one among your relatives who is called by that name.” 62 And they made signs to his father, as to what he wanted him called. 63 And he asked for a tablet and wrote as follows, “His name is John.” And they were all astonished. 64 And at once his mouth was opened and his tongue *loosed,* and he *began* to speak in praise of God. 65 Fear came on all those living around them; and all these matters were being talked about in all the hill country of Judea. 66 All who heard them kept them in mind, saying, “What then will this child *turn out to* be?” For the hand of the Lord was certainly with him.**

Zacharias doubted and received the Lord’s discipline for about a year.

* But he also learned and showed that the description of him in v. 6 … that he walked blamelessly in all the commandments of the Lord was his true character.

What a powerful encouragement to you and me.

* Even if we blow it, there is a way back. The Lord is gracious, compassionate, he loves mercy, and forgives enormous debts. That is our King. When Zacharias regains the ability to speak … fear came and these matters were talked about all over.
* He may have doubted at the beginning, but he was an evangelist at the end because the Lord did not write him off.

Instead, he brought conviction and change.

May we also be humble enough and blameless enough, even if our own sin or foolishness leads to the Lord’s discipline, that we learn and then proclaim Jesus boldly – especially that he uses us in our weakness and gives us a glorious place in his plan.

1. **Mary – The trusting young girl ready to accept her role**

Mary was not famous nor important in the world’s eyes. She was a young girl engaged to Joseph. First century weddings occurred in two stages.

* The engagement or bethrothal period. This was legally binding, but they were often waiting a year or so before the man would come to claim his bride.
* Girls were often in their teens.
* We know that Joseph and Mary were poor and there is little that would have naturally drawn anyone to either of them.

Yet, in God’s sovereign plan and design Mary was given a significant role.

1. **Mary’s task – bear a son named Jesus**

**Luke 1:28 And coming in, he said to her, “Greetings, favored one! The Lord *is* with you.” 29 But she was very perplexed at *this* statement, and kept pondering what kind of salutation this was. 30 The angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary; for you have found favor with God. 31 “And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus.**

It is not surprising that Mary is perplexed.

* If a angel (maybe what looked like a ghost) appeared to your 16 year old daughter, she would be perplexed too. All others might be looking for an explanation.
  + Maybe she is hallucinating.
  + Maybe she is making up stories.
  + Maybe someone drugged her.

1. **Mary’s question – How is this possible?**

**Luke 1:34 Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I am a virgin?”**

Whether Mary had 10th grade health class or not, she clearly understood that virginity and babies do not go together.

* Isn’t it interesting that her question was more innocent than Zacharias’? He cannot talk for a year and she gets a clear and lengthy answer. He knew better.
* In her case, it was an innocent girl asking an innocent question.

1. **Mary’s faith and trust**

**Luke 1:35 The angel answered and said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy Child shall be called the Son of God. 36 “And behold, even your relative Elizabeth has also conceived a son in her old age; and she who was called barren is now in her sixth month. 37 “For nothing will be impossible with God.” 38 And Mary said, “Behold, the bondslave of the Lord; may it be done to me according to your word.” And the angel departed from her.**

I find v. 38 inspiring. She receives a shocking answer. (1) God, through the Spirit, will overshadow you so that your son will be the Son of God; (2) Your cousin, who is much older than you, is pregnant right now because nothing is impossible for God.

She’s like, “Thank you. We’re good!” I am happy to submit to whatever place the Lord wants me to have in his world and kingdom.

* You provide the assignment Lord and I will do the obedience part.
* Here again is a gracious God working in a young girl’s life to help her worship him and accept his will for her life.

Are you ready for that? Am I ready for that? I used to love Isaiah 6 when I first heard about it. The Lord’s glory fills the temple. Wow! Isaiah responds to the Lord with “I am undone.” When the Lord asks, “Who will go for us?” Isaiah is like, “Ooh, pick me, pick me.”

* It was inspiring.
* Then one day I kept reading. Isaiah’s message was “Keep on listening but do not perceive’ Keep on looking, but do not understand. Render the hearts of this people insensitive, their ears dull, otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and return and be healed.”
  + Talk about winning friends and influencing people.
  + There is no church growth strategy that starts with those words.
  + Isaiah knows it. That is why he asks, “Lord, how long?”

I totally get that question. Lord, do I just have to deliver that message a few times and then we can move to revival and blessing? The answer is “Until the land and people are destroyed.”

* Lord, it sounds like I am the close the shop guy. Is that right?

Mary’s role would not be easy either.

* She would see her son rejected by the family, ridiculed, mocked, and ultimately crucified. She embraces it; all of it.

We sing a song called “Take my life” with these lyrics… “Here am I, All of me, Take my life, its all for thee.” That is essentially what Mary says.

That question is good for us too.

* If the Lord wanted you in ministry, would you go? I read a missionary letter the other day from older missionaries. They said when they entered the field they had a class of about 50 others doing the same. Today, the mission has a good year if 10 come.
  + If the Lord wanted you in seminary to serve somewhere in his church, would you do it?
* Parents, do you encourage your children to do what the Lord wants or what will make them successful in the world? Amy Baker’s testimony during the Celebration touched this point.
  + Do you support, even encourage, the possibility of doing something vocationally for the Lord?
* Will all of us hold out our hands like Mary and say to the Lord, “I am the Lord’s bondslave. May it be done according to your word and will?”

I don’t say those words lightly. They are meaningful. But they are worth it. Finally in this passage we see …

1. **Elizabeth – The excited older lady privileged to be a part**

Can you imagine what happens when Zacharias returns home? He travels to Jerusalem to fulfill his priestly duty and by the time he arrives home he cannot talk!

* She will have no problem getting her 50,000 words in each day.
* He cannot stop her if he wanted to.

The text tells us delightful things about her too again, because the Lord works mightily.

1. **Elizabeth is relieved that her reputation has changed**

**Luke 1:24 After these days Elizabeth his wife became pregnant, and she kept herself in seclusion for five months, saying, 25 “This is the way the Lord has dealt with me in the days when He looked *with favor* upon *me,* to take away my disgrace among men.”**

I think we can all understand this. It would be incredibly hard to live all those years waiting for a baby that never comes.

* She is thrilled that the Lord granted her favor. No reason is giving why she secludes herself.

1. **Elizabeth shows no jealousy or rivalry only admiration**

**Luke 1:41-45 When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the baby leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. 42 And she cried out with a loud voice and said, “Blessed *are* you among women, and blessed *is* the fruit of your womb! 43 “And how has it *happened* to me, that the mother of my Lord would come to me? 44 “For behold, when the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby leaped in my womb for joy. 45 “And blessed *is* she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what had been spoken to her by the Lord.”**

Here we learn why that Bible said that “both were righteous in the sight of God” (1:6).

* Elizabeth has been waiting for a child for a long time. He cousin is at the start of her child birthing years. She is pregnant and not even married yet!
  + Wouldn’t it have been easy for Elizabeth to be screaming her pregnancy from the roof tops, taking selfies of her baby bump, posting Instagram stories of the nursery, and wanting all the attention on her?
* Instead of jealousy, Elizabeth is full of joy. She is happy that she gets to have a part at all.

In fact, she even says to Mary … her much younger cousin … how wonderful that the mother of my Lord would visit me. That is a Spirit empowered amount of humility.

I love this too. Elizabeth is thrilled that she is part of the story. The Lord has prepared her for the role that she will play. Reading the gospels we know that the scene will shift from her to others soon. She will lose prominence quickly. That doesn’t matter.

* Elizabeth’s righteousness shows as she does not clamor for the spotlight when she learns she is pregnant --- she secludes herself.
  + She is not upset that her younger cousin is pregnant. She is not angry that her cousin’s son will be a much bigger deal than her son.
* Elizabeth is ready, willing, and joyfully ready to fulfill her role in God’s storyline.

We can be too. We can embrace our role happily allowing the Lord to determine his plan knowing that we have been equipped for it by a gracious and loving God.

The birth story of Jesus is rich in theology.

* We learned that John and Jesus are fulfillments of God’s plan.
  + John would be the Elijah like forerunner preparing the way for the Messiah.
  + Jesus is the suffering servant given the mission of being born of a virgin, living a sinless life, dying while suffering the wrath of God, and being raised from the dead.
* God desired that each person have a role in the birth and ministry of Messiah.
  + Zacharias was the blameless priest who doubted, but learned his lesson and was a powerful witness.
  + Mary was the innocent girl humble in service and trusting that the Lord would do exactly as he promised.
  + Elizabeth is the older woman excited to play a role at all.

God’s plan is not done. Jesus is still building his church and the great commission is still our task.

* Like Zacharias, let’s learn from the Lord’s discipline and change.
* Like Mary, let’s be that humble bondservant who takes God at his Word.
* Like Elizabeth, let’s be thrilled that we have any part at all to play in the grand story of giving Jesus all the glory, honor, and commitment he deserves.

Pray