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The Characters of Christmas, Part 2

Luke 12:48

But the one who did not know, and did what deserved a beating, will receive a light beating. Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required, and from him to whom they entrusted much, they will demand the more.

The angel told Zechariah he was going to have a son, and then he gave some details about this son. He must not drink wine or strong drink. Zechariah, you're going to be the father of a special, unique child. He must not drink wine or strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb.

He will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people for the Lord. This is going to be a great child, Zechariah, and I am entrusting you with the responsibility of being his father.

And Zechariah asked the angel, how can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years. The angel said to him, I am Gabriel. We hear of specific angels in the scriptures. Michael is the only one specifically named as an archangel, but there is reason to believe that Gabriel, and also one known as Lucifer, were also high ranking angels.

Zechariah responded with a timidity of heart and a bit of disbelief to what God was entrusting him. And this angel didn't like it. So the angel said to him, I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God. I have been sent to speak to you and tell you this good news.

And now you will be silent and not able to speak until the day this happens, because you did not believe my words, which will come true at their appointed time. To whom much is given, much is expected. When God entrusts us with the responsibility, he expects us to move into it with faith and confidence. Certainly he has grace, but he also is a righteous God.

And I don't know if this Gabriel had the power to do this himself, or if he called upon the Lord to shut the mouth of Zechariah. But here we have the first angelic being. After 400 years of silence, Gabriel showed up at the temple, entrusting Zechariah with a massive responsibility of raising the child who would prepare the way for the coming Savior.

Other angels will show up in the story. One will visit Mary and announce to her some grand news and a massive responsibility for her. This particular angel will show up to Joseph two, if not three times, to encourage him and call him to a specific role in God's initiative. Other angelic beings, a whole host of angels, will be sent by God to some unlikely shepherds out in the fields, announcing the grand news of a Savior. They will sing a grand song together. These angelic beings, these messengers, come at that time in history to enlist people, to call people into a purpose in God's plan.

My question today is what does this mean for us? What does this mean for you and I? Is God still calling people to be a part of what he is initiating in our time, in our day? Because right now, you and I are the characters of Christmas. We're the ones who've been given the trust of the greatest news that humanity has ever known. The arrival of the Messiah, the Christ child.

I have shared in here before about my first calling into God's work. I was called into his family at age eight, but then when I was graduating from college, I was looking to go into the business world and I got a letter. It wasn't an angelic being, but it was a letter. And as I read the letter inviting me to go to the Okoboji Lutheran Bible Camp and be a camp counselor for the summer because they needed some more male leadership, as I read the letter, I didn't see an angel, but I felt the Holy Spirit inside of me calling me to go do this.

Tim, I know you got a college degree, but I want you to go into ministry, not into the use of your business degree. And I had a little argument with God, and I came down to the point, and I said, well, I'm going to go there for a summer and be a camp counselor. And I said, I'll give you three months, Scott, June, July, and August.

Then I'm going to get back to my own business after that. Well, it just so happened that during my time there at Okoboji Lutheran Bible Camp, one morning in the last month of summer, I had a dream. As I was waking up in the morning, and in this dream, I was standing before a group of people opening the Bible and expounding on the Bible to them, and it felt like an absolute nightmare to me.

Sweat broke out on my face, and I went immediately to the dining room and started eating cereal to try and flush out the memory of this dream. This was a dream just between God and I, and I wasn't going to tell anyone else about it because I didn't necessarily like the idea of getting in front of people and speaking.

Three weeks after that, the camp director called me into his office, and he said, Tim, the Lutheran pastor that was going to come speak here at the camp has had an interruption. He can't make it. And he said, I wonder if you would fill the pulpit that Sunday. And I said, I didn't tell you about that dream, did I? You want me to do what? Go in front of the people there and teach the Bible.

I'll never forget it. Matthew chapter six was my text, and I spoke on not worrying about your life. I've never been more worried in my life than I was when I went to give that first message in front of a congregation of people there.

But God carried me through, and then he started to open more and more opportunities. I wasn't sure I wanted to be enlisted in this work. I didn't feel qualified for this work. But I know this. God called me to this work.

My daughter was recruited to play basketball for the Wartburg female basketball team. When she got there as a freshman, you know, they tell you these things of how good you are when you get there. But when you get there, you see how good the competition is. And so as a freshman, she was on the junior varsity team, and she played on the junior varsity team and had a lot of fun.

And then by her sophomore year, she'd earned a spot to have a jersey on the varsity team. But she didn't get much playing time. And what she would do, as this team and the skill ahead of her was so good, they would often get ahead by many points. And then the coach would start to look down the bench and see who should I call on next to put in the game.

And I don't know if my wife and I have ever seen my daughter get so thin on the bench, hiding behind other players on the bench, crouching down, hoping the coach wouldn't see her and call her name. Because all of a sudden you're on the varsity team, and you get in there and you're a little insecure. She didn't feel qualified, but the coach started to call on her. Adrienne, you're in. Adrienne, you're in. Adrienne, you're in.

The angel came to Zechariah and said, Zechariah, you're in. What is he saying to us today about our time as the characters of the Christ Child, carrying the story here? Maybe he's saying you're in. Many of you have been in for a long time.

I'm sharing this with you today because I don't know exactly what God has in mind for me in the days ahead. I've been recommended to be a called pastor here at Nazareth. It's been the recommendation by the call committee, but I don't make that decision. You all make that decision.

They cast lots for Zechariah's calling. The angel called him into the work of God. But in the Lutheran tradition, the congregation votes on who gets called to be the called pastors in the community. And so that is in your hands.

And what I want to encourage you to do is prayerfully consider whether you think that, by prayerfully, I mean seek the wisdom of God. Is God calling me here to that or not? Because it's it's a vote that you all make. And quite frankly, if he's not calling me here, I'm like, Moses, I don't want to be here. I know what he's called me to in life, and I want to go where he leads me to.

Too. And if he isn't calling me here, he'll call me somewhere else. But if he is calling me here, I want you to know a few things about me. First of all, I want you to know this. I do understand that this would

be a big leadership entrustment to me if you call me here. I understand that I would be standing on the shoulders of many who have gone before me.

We could go back to the likes of Martin Luther, who was in the Catholic Church and was irritated by the works that he was called upon to perform, to be right with God. And as he returned to the Word of God, and he read through the book of Romans and studied it, he came into Romans chapter one, verses 15-17, in that range. And he started to realize, it's not by works of righteousness that anyone gets right with God, but by his grace through faith the just shall live by faith.

All of a sudden he was set free from the tyranny of works before God. And he was sort of this kingpin in starting this reformation when he said, here I stand on the Word of God. I understand that in a Lutheran church, you stand on the shoulders of Martin Luther and all the reformers who returned to the solas of the scriptures by grace alone, through faith, alone in Christ, alone in the word alone to the glory of God alone.

But then I also understand that here at Nazareth, there's a long history of spiritual leaders that have had this church flourishing at times in its history. And I understand that by God's sovereignty, this is a church that has been graced by God with a marvelous property, located right here in the center of Cedar Falls at the corner of University and Main. And this is a phenomenal facility that God has entrusted to us at this time, to to this congregation at this time, to be stewarded well.

And there's massive opportunities with this facility. I understand that even more than all of this, that wherever I'm called to serve, that we stand on the shoulders of the first apostles who stand on the cornerstone of the church. The entire church in the world is founded on the cornerstone of Jesus. And so I do understand that if you entrust me with pastoral leadership here, it is a big leadership entrust.

And I want you to know that if you call me to be your pastor here, empowered by God's grace, I'll do my best to seek the Lord's wisdom and strength, the counsel of his people, to lead here in the very best way I possibly could. By God's grace, I am what I am, and by his grace I'll give my best to lead. And I want you to know that I will also, as much as possible, remain true to the unchanging teachings of Scripture in all that I say and do.

Imperfect as I am, I know that I have been called by God to be a herald of these eternal truths that run like golden beams from eternity past to eternity future, that give light to a gray humanity, that give hope to all humanity. That the power of the scriptures is the power of God working in the hearts of people to turn the hearts of people back to the Lord for the salvation of their souls. And I will do everything I can to remain true, rightly divide the Word of God, and bring it to people as God gives me opportunity.

And then I want you to know this. That I would be praying, as Mike and I have for three years now. I would be praying continually for God to stir more than just my heart, but to stir in all of our hearts and many others, to be able to hear and respond to his callings for each of us. Even some who aren't listening now, who aren't hearing now, that he would be stirring not just in our hearts, but in other hearts.

So that there could be a great team effort in advancing the Kingdom of God here on the earth through Nazareth Church. I will be praying for that. For God to work in all of our hearts as a team.

I do believe that now we are the characters of Christmas, and God is still calling people to be a part of what he's initiating in the world right now.

Let's pray together, shall we? Father, I thank you for this chance to gather before you in this room again today and listen to the worship and praise that's due you, and sing from our hearts about your goodness and your greatness and your glory. And I thank you again today, father, for giving us your word. You could have left us here confused and unknowing. But you revealed to us so much of what is true about this world and this life and the unseen world.

Father, we ask that you would continue to bring it alive for us and strengthen us in it. And father, I want to pray now for those that aren't here this morning, some who are dealing with sickness and disease, some who couldn't get out of their homes. Want to pray for our community? Those that aren't seeking you. That somehow you would be drawing people to yourself through this Christmas season.

You would be healing people that have hurts and challenges. Families that have dynamics that need addressed. I ask that you would minister to us all through this Christmas and Advent season. Strengthen us in you and give us ears to hear what you're calling us to as the characters of Christmas in your story, now, here in this time in history.