



“Preparing for the Savior”
 Luke 1:5-25

Idea: Are you prepared for the Savior?

Intro: In 1963 pop singer Andy Williams recorded and released his first Christmas album, simply entitled The Andy Williams Christmas Album. It was and is a phenomenal album with songs like “White Christmas,” “Chestnuts Roasting on an Open Fire,” “The First Noël,” and “Away in a Manger.” He also recorded on that album a favorite song of many, “It’s the Most Wonderful Time of the Year.” This song is one that always helps get me in the Christmas spirit.

Let’s be honest, sometimes we need a little help getting in the spirit. Now before you write me off as a scrooge, I want you to know that I love Christmas. It truly is the most wonderful time of the year for me personally. The only problem I have is that the *season* keeps getting bumped up. Stores are putting out their Christmas goods in September now. Radio stations and stores start playing Christmas songs right after Halloween. I got in my truck at 3:30am on a Monday morning the first week of November, and there on the radio as I’m driving to

Kentucky was Christmas music. It was three weeks away from Thanksgiving!

I like to observe one holiday at a time. I like to savor the holiday before going on to the next. It's part of the prepping process. And prepping for Christmas is a big deal. We all go about it a little different, but there are some similarities. For many, preparing for Christmas begins with dragging out the décor. Dad has the high privilege of putting up the Christmas tree and stringing lights on the house, playing Clark Griswold while trying not to spend the evening in the ER. Mom and the kids decorate the tree and inside the house. Some love to play Christmas music, bake cookies, and sip hot chocolate. Then there's the Christmas shopping, the wrapping of presents, sending out Christmas cards, and all the Christmas parties to attend. There truly is a lot of prep to be done before Christmas.

What is Christmas all about?

“Christmas is when God came down the stairs of heaven with a baby in His arms.” – R. Eugene Sterner

“The Son of God became man to enable men to become sons of God.” – C. S. Lewis

The angel Gabriel told the shepherds in the countryside outside of Bethlehem:

10 And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. 11 For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. – Luke 2:10-11

Gabriel revealed to those shepherds that God the Son had been born into the race of men so that they could become sons of God. This is good news! And this good news was for *all* the people!

What is Christmas all about? It is a season whereby we celebrate the birth of God. Therefore, as we prepare for

Christmas, we're not really preparing for the holiday as much as we are preparing for the Savior. Gabriel was sent to prepare those shepherds for the Savior. Gabriel was also sent to Mary to prepare her for the Savior. Likewise, he came first to a priest named Zechariah whose son would be the forerunner of Jesus to prepare the people for their Savior. Today, as we begin this Christmas season, I want to talk to you about preparing for the Savior.

This is the first message in this Christmas series I've entitled "Joy for All." Over the next four Sunday's we're going to work our way through Luke 1 & 2 and see what the coming of the Savior does for us. Jesus brings joy to all.

Read Luke 1:5-25.

Inquiry: A man named Luke wrote this gospel book. He was a physician, and he traveled a great deal with the apostle Paul. He wrote his Gospel and the book of Acts for a man named Theophilus who was probably a Roman official and a recent convert to Christ. Luke's desire was to establish Theophilus' faith in the gospel he had heard and believed. In this Gospel Luke's emphasis is on the universality of Jesus Christ and His salvation...the *good news of great joy that will be for all the people.*

When Gabriel visited Zechariah there in the temple in Jerusalem, it was a dark period in the history of Israel. The people had heard no prophetic word from God for over 400 years. They had heard nothing since Malachi had promised that Elijah would come to prepare the way for the Messiah (Mal 4:5-6). The spiritual leaders were shackled by tradition and, in some instances, corruption. Their king, Herod the Great, was a tyrant. He had nine or ten wives, one of whom he had executed for no apparent reason. The sentiment was that the Holy Spirit had ceased to move in Israel. Therefore, there was a deep longing for the coming of the promised Messiah.

Luke introduces us to a priest named Zechariah who was married to a woman named Elizabeth. He informs us that both of them were righteous before God (vs. 6). They were righteous in the sight of God and not just in appearance before men. In other words, this was a couple that loved and obeyed God. They were unlike the Pharisees we see later in the Gospel of Luke.

Elizabeth was barren/sterile, and both of them were past the age of childbearing (vs. 7). By pointing this out, Luke stresses the human impossibility of the coming events and heightens God's miraculous intervention.

As a priest, Zechariah's duty was to serve in the temple two weeks out of the year. The priests were divided into twenty-four divisions. There were about 18,000 priests in Israel, so having the opportunity to enter the holy place to clean the altar of incense and offer fresh bread usually only occurred once in a lifetime. On this particular day, the lot *sovereignly* fell on Zechariah (vs. 9). There in the sanctuary Gabriel appeared, and as you would expect Zechariah was scared stiff (vs. 11-12).

He believed in God; he longed for God to move once again. He even expected God to move, but because God had been silent for so long, he didn't expect God to answer on this particular day. We do this too. We believe in God, but there are times when we don't really expect Him to do much.

Zechariah was also gripped with fear by the fact that an angel of the Lord stood in front of him. This holy creature that bore some resemblance to the glory of God was awesome and overwhelming. Gabriel reassured him (vs. 13). God had heard Zechariah's prayer. What prayer? Surely, he and Elizabeth's prayer had been for a son...for a daughter. As godly Jews, we must also believe they prayed often for God to send the Messiah and deliver Israel. They longed for the redemption of their people. The beauty of Gabriel's message was that both prayers would be answered. They were going to have a son, and that son would be the forerunner to usher in the Messiah in

the spirit and power of Elijah (vs. 17). The son's name was to be John (Yahweh has been gracious). The grace of God was going to usher in the Savior.

Zechariah's response was disbelief (vs. 18); he needed a sign. He couldn't understand how two sterile senior adults could possibly have a child. Gabriel's response was that Zechariah would be mute and probably deaf until John was born. His muteness was both punitive because of his lack of faith and gracious because it was the sign he requested.

Not long after Zechariah got home, Elizabeth was overwhelmed with joy because the test came back positive.

Zechariah and Elizabeth were given a son on purpose for a purpose. What was that purpose? John would turn many in Israel back to God. He would prepare the people for the Savior.

As we prepare for Christmas, how can we prepare for the Savior? In this passage we see five spiritual markers that should be evident in the life of the believer who is preparing for the Savior.

1. Vibrant Prayer (vs. 10)

It is a Lukan characteristic to point out that major events are associated with prayer. God's activity runs on the rails of the prayers of His people. God rarely acts outside the prayers of His people. Instead, we see in Scripture and in church history that major movements of God take place when God's people pray.

As we prepare our families, our church, and ourselves for the Savior, let us be found in vibrant prayer.

“In my experience, the deeper one's prayer life is, the deeper one's commitment to Christ and the deeper one's love for others.” – Sheila Manchester

We prepare ourselves for Jesus; we deepen our commitment to Him when we pray.

2. Genuine Conversion (vs 16)

The Greek verb translated “turn” (ἐπιστρέψει) is used as a technical term for conversion in the NT. John’s mission was to preach the gospel to Jews...God’s people. There were a few faithful Jews like Zachariah and Elizabeth in Israel, but the vast majority of the people, including the religious elite, were lost. John was to prepare the people for the Savior by calling them to repentance and faith.

Appl: How tragic it would be to make all your preparations for Christmas (decorations, presents, parties, caroling, and Christmas Eve service) yet miss the very point of Christmas? As we prepare for the Savior, let us make sure we are in relationship with the Savior.

3. Compassionate Love (vs. 17)

Christmas is a special time to gather with family and friends. Unfortunately, too many families will celebrate Christmas splintered and separated. Something has happened between mom and dad, between dad and son, mom and daughter, or between brother and sister that has ripped the family apart. A family that once loved one another can’t stand being in the same room together. It is heart breaking.

There are other families who are mourning as they prepare for Christmas. This year has brought death and disease to their family. Christmas celebrations will be very different this year, and it is heart breaking.

But there is hope. Gabriel said that through John’s ministry fathers would turn compassionately and

lovingly toward their children. Christian, as you prepare for the Savior, make sure you model the compassionate love of Jesus. If your family is fractured, work to put it back together. Humble yourself if you've hurt someone. Seek forgiveness. If someone has hurt you, humble yourself. Forgive the one who has hurt you and seek reconciliation. Show love to those who have lost loved ones. As we prepare for the Savior, let's love others like Jesus.

4. Complete Obedience (vs. 17)

The message of Christmas is that God has come to save people from their sins. How then can we hold onto sin while celebrating the fact that we are free from sin? You can't!

Gabriel said John's ministry would be to turn the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous. They would become obedient to the Word of God.

Appl: As we prepare for the Savior, is there an area of your life that is disobedient? Is there something God has called you to that you have refused to do? Is it your finances? Is it your marital fidelity? Is it your devotional life? Is it some besetting sin?

This leads us to a fifth marker.

5. Simple Faith (vs. 20)

We ought not be a bunch of simpletons, but we ought to be disciples who possess a simple faith that believes God's Word.

Zechariah asked, "How shall I know this" (vs. 18)? What he had heard was beyond his belief. He couldn't grasp it even though he knew and believed the stories of Abraham and Sara, Samson, and Elkanah and Hannah.

He believed that God could do anything; he just didn't believe that God could do it in his life.

The gospel message is simple yet profound. It is so simple a child can believe. It is so profound that you'll never reach its depths. As we prepare for the Savior, let's be a people who simply believe every word on every page of God's Word. Simple faith is all God ever asks of us. It is all that's required for salvation. We confess our sin and believe that God raised Jesus from the dead (Rom 10:9-10). We put our faith in His work on the cross for us.

Again, what a tragedy it would be to go through Christmas and celebrate Jesus without ever coming in simple faith to the foot of the cross and receiving His gift of salvation.

Conclusion: Christmas is the most wonderful time of the year. It is a season of ceremony and pageantry. It is a season of great celebration. We gather together with family and friends. We feast together. We exchange presents and bless one another. We focus on those who are less fortunate. We even spend more time in corporate worship than usual. And we do all of this to celebrate and commemorate the coming of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Gabriel told Zechariah that John's purpose was to make ready a people prepared for the Lord (vs. 17). Today, are you prepared for the Savior? Are you in relationship with Him? Is your relationship intimate or distant? Is your Christian life marked by love, obedience, and faith? It can be. The good news of the gospel is that no matter where you are, Jesus will accept you. If you will turn to Him, He will change your life. He will give you joy.