

Well, this year was a big year for me.

I saw it snow for the first time in my life.

It snowed on my head for the first time.

My wife and I were on our honeymoon in New Zealand, in Lake Tekapo, and it was 10:30 p.m.

at night, freezing cold, sub-zero, and I looked outside and it was actually snowing, like that white stuff that you see in the movies was actually falling from the sky.

So, in my pajamas, I put a hoodie on, put my Ugg boots on, and went outside and frolicked in the snow for half an hour.

And the freezing cold, I did all the things.

I didn't do angels on the floor, but I caught them in my mouth, and it was honestly one of the highlights of my honeymoon, was seeing snow.

One of the highlights.

I find snow enchanting, the muddy, gross stuff on the side of the road in the Blue Mountains, but to have it actually snow from the sky was something totally out of my normal world.

It was like my world was being touched by another world.

Snow feels miraculous to me, because it is another world touching my world.

Well, Christmas is miraculous, because when God was born as a baby in the Lord Jesus, another world touched our world.

Heaven touched Earth in the crisis that we're looking at, the story that we're spending some time in.

So if you've got your Bibles, open to Luke chapter 1.

Luke 1 verse 5 introduces us to the character Zechariah.

He's one of the minor characters in Luke's telling of the Christmas story.

Zechariah in Luke chapter 1 has a miraculous encounter with God.

We read in Luke 1 verse 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.

That is to say, they were Levites, which is a special family within Israel, and of the line of Aaron, which is an even more narrow, quite esteemed and respected line.

Verse 6, both of them, Zechariah and Elizabeth, both of them were righteous in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's commands and decrees blamelessly, but they were childless, because Elizabeth was not able to conceive, and they were both very old.

If you know the Bible well, this is quite a familiar setting.

It's a familiar setup that Luke has given us for Zechariah and Elizabeth.

We've seen childless couples many times in the Bible.

Abraham and Sarah, Jacob and Rachel, Isaac and Rebecca, Hannah, in 1 Samuel 1.

There's this sense of, we've seen this before.

This is a story that fits a mold that we have seen before in the Bible.

And notice the way that the character Zechariah is characterized by the author Luke in this passage.

He's old, he's a man, a Levite priest, he's righteous, the text says, and he lives in Judea, which is pretty close to the political and religious center of Israel at the time.

In almost every way, Luke is emphasizing this is a respected man.

He is on the right side of every threshold.

He's a man, old, respected, righteous, lives in Judea, and he's a priest.

But for all these good qualities, these respectable qualities about Zechariah, he and his wife Elizabeth are childless.

And in the Bible, that is always a source of pain, of shame, and of grief.

And so the story introduces us to two characters who are at the end of their road.

They are desperate for a child.

No doubt they've been praying and praying and praying their whole life, looking at stories like Abraham and Sarah, and praying that God might do that for them, that they might receive a child.

They are desperate for God.

Luke 1 verse 8 continues the story.

Once, when Zechariah's division was on duty, and he was serving as priest before God, he was chosen by Lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to go into the temple of the Lord and burn incense.

And when the time for the burning of incense came, all the assembled worshipers were praying outside.

God is presiding, he is sovereign over chance, and Zechariah, by chance and by the choice of God, is chosen to be the one, the one priest to enter into the temple on that special day.

This is a big deal, that he was chosen by chance.

I think in the moment, he wasn't necessarily thinking that this was going to be a life-changing experience, but certainly it is a once-in-a-lifetime experience.

And yet, as we come to this story, familiar as we are with the wider story of the Bible, the stage is being set for something miraculous to happen.

We've seen old childless couples before, who have prayed and prayed and prayed, and now Zechariah is chosen by Lot to walk into the temple of God, into his presence.

As we read this story, we're almost primed to think something could happen.

Zechariah is walking into the presence of God.

That's the set up.

Zechariah and Elizabeth are at Earth's end, and they need a miracle.

And then Luke 1, verse 11.

An angel of the Lord appeared to Zechariah, standing at the right side of the altar of incense.

When Zechariah saw him, he was startled, and he was gripped with fear.

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 appearance of this angel, who later verses say is Gabriel, the appearance of Gabriel comes with the message that Zechariah's desperate prayer has been heard, his prayer for a child.

Angels don't appear to people very often in the Bible, which is why when they do appear, the response is always fear.

I think there's something quite freaky looking about the appearance of a supernatural being that makes people scared.

But Zechariah has no reason to be scared because the message that the angel Gabriel brings is very, very good news.

The impossible has happened.

God has touched their lives in the way that he had touched so many lives before.

Elizabeth will have a son.

It is a miracle.

Into that situation in Zechariah's life that was utterly hopeless and desperate, God stepped in.

Heaven touched earth in that moment.

Zechariah and Elizabeth, though they found themselves at earth's end, desperate for a miracle, God gave them one.

And it was the miraculous in the very moment of need.

The miraculous in the moment of need.

Christmas is miraculous, because in the Christmas story, God meets people when they find themselves at earth's end, desperate for a miracle.

In the Christmas story, God meets these.

The miraculous in the moment of need.

So, who wants to see a miracle?

Keep your hand up.

Keep your hand up, if you would like to put yourself in a situation where you need a miracle.

Every hand.

Pretty much.

Only those with real faith among us keep their hands up.

We love miracles.

We love a story of God touching earth, but not one of us, apart from the holy ones, wants to put ourselves in that position where we have no option apart from a miracle from God.

No one wants to put themselves in that place.

And yet, whether we want to or not, and we don't, many of us find ourselves in that place.

We find ourselves at earth's end.

At the point where earth can't give you the miracle that you need.

You're desperate for heaven, for a touch of heaven, praying to God, desperate for him to touch your life.

You probably wouldn't choose to be there, but that's where you find yourself.

The Christmas story reminds us, miracles do happen.

It happened.

God came down to earth.

He touched Zechariah and Elizabeth's lives.

She who was childless and old, with no hope of having a child, conceived.

And she gave birth to a boy who would become John the Baptist.

Jesus said, no one has been born who is greater than him on earth.

Miracles do happen.

Christmas gives us hope that the miraculous does happen and that in the Lord's will, it could happen in your life.

Grace's story is testament to that fact.

God touched her life in her moment of great need.

The miraculous happened.

Zechariah and Elizabeth experienced the miraculous in the moment of need when heaven touched earth in Gabriel's message.

As the story goes on in Luke's Gospel, Gabriel appears again a few verses later.

Luke 1 verse 26.

In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel once again to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David.

The virgin's name was Mary.

God sends the angel Gabriel a second time with another message, a similar sort of message, but it's different this time.

This time, Gabriel doesn't show up to a man who is old, righteous, a Levite and living in Judea, but the exact opposite in every way.

He shows up not to a man, but to a woman, a girl in fact, not to someone who is old and respected and esteemed, but to a 13, 14-year-old girl, not to a Levitical priest, but to an obscure

nobody, not to someone called righteous, but to someone called a virgin, which means not even old enough to be married yet, and not to someone living in the hotspot of Judea, near the center of the political and religious action, but someone from Nazareth, in far-off Galilee.

Mary is on the opposite end of Zechariah, on almost every single spectrum, and Luke deliberately paints these two characters in that way that we might compare the two.

Zechariah is esteemed, respected, well thought of in the culture, and Mary is not.

People don't look up when she walks into the room.

She's a nobody from Nazareth.

But God touched both.

God showed up for Mary as well.

And this is what he said, Luke 1, 28.

The angel Gabriel went to Mary and said, Greetings, you who are highly favored.

The Lord is with you.

Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this must be.

But the angel said to her, Do not be afraid, Mary.

You have found favor with God.

Once again, the appearance of a supernatural being is freaky.

She is scared, firstly.

But again, Gabriel brings a message that is comforting beyond measure.

She is highly favored by God Almighty.

The Lord is with her.

With her.

Mary.

13-year-old Mary, someone so from Nazareth.

God is with her.

Luke 1, verse 31.

Gabriel goes on to say, This is the promise that God gives.

You will conceive, Mary, and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus.

Jesus is the Greek version of the Hebrew name Joshua, which means the Lord saves.

He will be great and will be called the son of the Most High.

The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever.

His kingdom will never end.

This is an unbelievable promise coming to Mary.

In that moment and in the nine months of pregnancy which followed, and probably the 30 years of Jesus' life that followed, I wonder if she was beginning to connect the dots and thinking that the entire Old Testament, the entire hope of the Old Testament, of that figure, that prophet like Moses, the messiah like David and the deliverer like Joshua, that figure is coming to the earth in her womb.

That's what Mary is coming to terms with in that moment.

God has from heaven touched earth through a 14-year-old girl.

This is unfathomably miraculous.

Not only that a virgin would conceive, but that God would become a human through a 14-year-old girl.

That's what has come into the earth through the teenager Mary.

Christmas is miraculous.



And it's the miraculous in the mundane.

Mary was not anyone special, apart from the fact that the Lord was with her, which makes her very special.

But she was just living in Nazareth, in far-off Galilee.

But the miraculous came into her mundane, when heaven touched earth.

And so, I think Luke is presenting these two stories for us to hold them up next to each other, the angel encounter of Zechariah and of Mary.

He's inviting us to compare the two.

And as we compare them, we see these two types of miraculous encounters.

The miraculous in the moment of need to Zechariah, and the miraculous in the mundane to Mary.

The Christmas story presents two types of miraculous encounters.

Zechariah was this Levite priest, old, male, respected, righteous, who in his desperation, prayed for a child, and walked into the temple of God, had an encounter with God that changed everything.

He received the miraculous in the moment of need.

But also, in this same Christmas story, a teenage girl in Nazareth that no one even knew the name of, living everyday life, mundane, the miraculous came to her as well.

The miraculous in the mundane.

And every single one of us today finds oneself in one of those two situations.

Some of us are painfully, desperately aware of our need for the miracle.

We find ourselves at Earth's end, crying out to God to bring a miracle in the moment of need.

But if that's not you, then you're in the mundane.

I would put myself right now in the mundane.

Life as usual, business as usual, everyday life.

Christmas is miraculous, because the miraculous comes into the mundane as well.

God shows up in both stories.

That's why the scripture puts these stories together.

Because our God is the God of the miraculous in the moment of need, and He is equally the God of the miraculous in the mundane.

And we all find ourselves in one of those two places.

So, where are you right now?

Are you in the moment of need or in the mundane?

What is God saying to you through His word this morning?

Christmas is miraculous, because He comes into both situations.

Christmas is miraculous.

What if we were to depict heaven and earth like this?

Often we think of heaven and earth in this kind of visual.

And that's actually not wrong.

The Bible depicts heaven and earth are separate realms.

The realm of God, the kingdom of God, and the kingdom of earth are separate.

But if we think of heaven and earth like this, if you're at earth's end, and I've said that a few times, that's what I mean.

You've come to the edge of earth.

You are desperate for heaven.

You know that earth can't give you the miracle that you need.

You might find yourself there.

But if you're not there, then you're here in Middle Earth, in the mundane.

Not particularly desperate for heaven, because life is not too bad.

Thank you very much.

Every one of us is in one of those two places.

So where are you?

From the beginning of the story of the Bible, we see this is not the way that it was meant to be.

In Genesis, the vision is not of heaven and earth separated by a chasmic divide, but heaven and earth woven together, and the children of God living in the overlap.

But our sin, our brokenness, has separated, has divorced heaven and earth apart from each other.

Christmas is miraculous because heaven came down to earth like this.

Jesus, God, came down to earth in order that heaven and earth might be brought together in the ministry and the life and the death and the resurrection of Jesus.

He brings heaven and earth together in his very person.

Jesus is the overlap.

He is God and man at the same time perfectly woven together.

And in his ministry, the ministry of Jesus, every teaching, every deliverance, every word, every sign brings heaven to earth.

And so the invitation now for followers of Jesus is to live in the overlap, to be filled with the spirit of God, and to partner with God in bringing heaven to earth, to your earth, to your social context, your work, home, family.

And that's good news.

It is good news that heaven came down to earth in Jesus.

It's good news if you find yourself at earth's end, desperate for a miracle, because the miraculous has happened.

Jesus has come to earth.

The miraculous in the moment of need means that God is able to do the miraculous in your life.

He hears your prayers.

He sees your situation.

And He is the God of the miraculous.

And it might just be in the sovereign will of God that He has a miracle coming for your life.

And there's no way we can bend His arm behind His back and squeeze out the miracle.

But we know that He's good, as Grace said.

We rely on what the scripture says about who our Father is.

He is the God of the miraculous.

And if you find yourself at earth's end, desperate for a miracle, heaven came down to earth.

So the miraculous does happen for you.

And it's good news if you find yourself in middle earth.

If you find yourself in the middle of the mundane.

Life is just life, business as usual.

It's good news because Jesus came to bring life and life to the full.

That's the other part of John 10 verse 10 that Grace was quoting.

John 10 says, The thief has come to kill, steal and destroy, but Jesus came to bring life and life to the full.

So the invitation for every one of us living in middle earth is receive the Spirit of God, step into the kingdom.

Ephesians 2 says that we have been made alive if we have faith in Christ, made alive.

Christmas is miraculous because Jesus can make us alive again into his kingdom.

We might be alive in Christ and living in middle earth and life is just life.

Feel a bit like that's where I am, but I've been challenged by the scripture this week.

The life is meant to be so much more than that.

The Gospel of Matthew describes Jesus as Emmanuel.

That means God with us.

God came down to earth to be with us so that we could step into the overlap of heaven and earth, so that we could live and work and study and converse and do everything in the overlap between heaven and earth.

That is good news for all of us living in the mundane, because the miraculous has happened.

God has stepped into the mundane.

So I'll ask you one more time, where are you?

Can we go to the earth's end, middle earth slide, thanks, Ned.

Where do you find yourself?

That's the question I'll leave you with.

Christmas is miraculous, because like snow falling from another world, heaven came down to earth.

The miraculous happened in history.

The miraculous in the moment of need and in the mundane.

So that now, we don't have to go to New Zealand to see its snow.

It's snowing here in Sydney, because heaven came down to earth.

Another world touched our world right here in Hornsby, in this church, in your heart.

Jesus wants to bring the kingdom of heaven into your life.

So will you let him?

I'm going to pray.

And then we'll take communion together at the table.

Lord Jesus, we thank you that you came to earth.

You stripped yourself of the full glory you had before creation with the Father, and you became one of us.

We praise you, and we know Christmas is miraculous because God became a man.

He lived a perfect life.

He died the death that we deserve to die, to make us alive.

And every one of us that has faith in Christ, we believe has been made alive.

But there are some of us living in the mundane, and we would love you to do a work, a miraculous work to revive us again, to let us know what it is to live in the kingdom, here on earth.

And for those who find themselves at earth's end here in this room, or listening online, you are the God of the miraculous, and we know you are good.

You hear prayers.

We invite you to do a miraculous work in the places where we need it, for your glory.

In Jesus' name, Amen.