

The Christmas Promise – Week 2 – Unexpected People – Bible Study Helps

Title: Unexpected People, Extraordinary Blessings: Lessons from the First Christmas

Sermon Summary: This sermon explores the often-overlooked characters in the Christmas narrative, revealing how God delights in using ordinary, elderly, faithful, and foreign people in His extraordinary plan. Through the stories of Zacharias and Elisabeth, Simeon and Anna, and the wise men from the East, we learn that God's timing is perfect, His promises are faithful, and He never forgets His people—even when prayers seem unanswered for years. The message emphasizes that waiting time is not wasted time, that faithfulness brings spiritual discernment, and that God has no age limits for those who serve Him. The sermon challenges believers to remain faithful, stay close to God, be present where He is working, and trust His perfect timing even when circumstances seem impossible.

Key Points:

- God's people do not always understand what God is doing, but He remains faithful despite our lack of clarity
- God hears long-standing prayers and answers them in His perfect timing, not ours
- Zacharias and Elisabeth were righteous and faithful despite years of barrenness, showing that God's delays are not denials
- Waiting time is not wasted time—God uses seasons of waiting to prepare us for His purposes
- God is never limited by age, physical limitations, or human circumstances
- Simeon and Anna were faithfully watching and praying, positioning themselves to witness the Messiah
- Faithfulness in old age brings glory to God—there are no age limits in God's kingdom
- Being close to God through prayer and obedience positions us to see what He is doing
- The wise men represent Gentiles seeking Christ, fulfilling prophecy that all nations would come to worship Him
- The gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh symbolize Christ's royalty, priesthood, and sacrificial death
- God uses unexpected people from all walks of life in His plan to reach the world
- Faithful believers who are watching and waiting receive God's greatest blessings

Scripture Reference:

- Luke 1:5-25, 57-80 (Zacharias and Elisabeth's story and the birth of John the Baptist)
- Luke 2:25-38 (Simeon and Anna encounter baby Jesus at the temple)
- Matthew 2:1-12 (The wise men visit Jesus)
- Numbers 24:17 (Prophecy of the Star out of Jacob)
- Micah 5:2 (Prophecy of Bethlehem as birthplace of the ruler)
- Isaiah 60 (Gentiles coming to the light)

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Stories:

- Zacharias and Elisabeth: An elderly, barren couple who faithfully served God for years, praying for a child. When Zacharias was performing his priestly duties, the angel Gabriel appeared announcing they would have a son (John the Baptist) who would be the forerunner of the Messiah. Zacharias doubted and was struck mute until the promise was fulfilled.
- Simeon: A righteous and devout man who was promised by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before seeing the Messiah. Led by the Spirit, he came to the temple at the exact moment Mary and Joseph brought baby Jesus, took Him in his arms, and prophesied about His mission.
- Anna: A widow of a great age and prophetess who served God day and night in the temple with fasting and prayer. She arrived at the precise instant Simeon was holding Jesus and immediately gave thanks and spoke of Him to all who were looking for redemption.
- The Wise Men: Learned men from the East (likely Persia) who studied ancient prophecies and astronomy. They followed a miraculous star to find the King of the Jews, traveled a great distance, and when they found the young child Jesus (approximately two years old), they fell down, worshiped Him, and presented gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.
- Contemporary testimony reference: a believer's story of conviction while walking in a park, surrendering to Christ, and returning to find people praying for his salvation at that exact moment—illustrating God's perfect timing.
- Levi's car situation: A practical example of answered prayer and life's frustrations that require patient trust in God's timing.
- Juanita's Christmas card: An elderly church member who sends joyful cards to the congregation, demonstrating that age doesn't limit one's impact for the kingdom.

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Discipleship Questions

Zacharias and Elisabeth prayed for years without an answer, yet remained faithful to God. What unanswered prayers in your life require you to trust God's timing rather than give up?

The sermon emphasizes that 'waiting time is not wasted' because God is preparing us. How might your current season of waiting actually be equipping you for what God has planned?

Simeon and Anna were in the temple faithfully serving when they encountered Jesus. What blessings might we miss when we pull back from church or fellowship during difficult times?

The wise men traveled great distances and gave their most valuable possessions to worship Jesus. What sacrifices is God calling you to make in order to seek and honor Christ?

God used elderly, barren, and foreign people in the Christmas story, defying human expectations. How does this challenge your assumptions about who God can use or what limitations you place on yourself?

Zacharias doubted the angel's message yet God still fulfilled His promise. How does God's faithfulness to us remain constant even when our faith wavers?

The sermon mentions that faithfulness brings spiritual discernment, as seen in Simeon immediately recognizing Jesus. How has your own spiritual maturity and closeness to God sharpened your ability to recognize His work?

Anna served God 'night and day' in the temple and was present at the exact moment Jesus arrived. What does it practically look like for you to 'pray and watch' for what God is doing?

The gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh symbolized Jesus as King, Priest, and the One who would die for us. How does understanding the full gospel story—not just the birth but also the death and resurrection—deepen your worship?

The sermon states that God's plan included people who were 'aged and seemingly forgotten.' If you feel overlooked or past your prime, how might God still have extraordinary purposes for your faithfulness?

Small Group Guide:

Unexpected People, Extraordinary Blessings

Opening Prayer & Icebreaker (10 minutes)

Icebreaker Question: Share about a time when God's timing in your life surprised you—when something you had been waiting for finally happened, or when God showed up in an unexpected way.

Key Scripture Passages

- Luke 1:5-25, 57-80 (Zacharias & Elisabeth)
 - Luke 2:25-38 (Simeon & Anna)
 - Matthew 2:1-12 (The Wise Men)
 - Numbers 24:17
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Main Themes

1. The Faithful Who Wait (Zacharias & Elisabeth)

Key Takeaway: God hears longstanding prayers and His timing is perfect, even when we don't understand.

Discussion Questions:

1. Zacharias and Elisabeth were described as "righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord, blameless" (Luke 1:6). Yet they struggled with unanswered prayer. How does their story encourage you when you're facing unanswered prayers?
2. The sermon mentioned that "waiting time is not wasted." What might God be preparing in you during seasons of waiting?
3. Zacharias doubted even after the angel's message. Why do you think God still kept His promise despite Zacharias's doubt? What does this teach us about God's faithfulness?
4. Can you share about a time when you were faithful to God but didn't understand what He was doing? Looking back, can you see His purpose now?

2. The Faithful Who Watch (Simeon & Anna)

Key Takeaway: God rewards those who faithfully watch and wait in His presence with extraordinary blessings.

Discussion Questions:

1. Both Simeon and Anna were elderly, yet they were actively serving God in the temple. What does their example teach us about faithfulness in every season of life?
2. The sermon emphasized that Simeon was "led by the Spirit" to the temple at exactly the right moment. How can we become more sensitive to the Holy Spirit's leading in our daily lives?
3. Anna "departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day" (Luke 2:37). What practical steps can we take to maintain this kind of devotion in our modern lives?
4. The sermon mentioned that we sometimes miss what God is doing because we're not as close to Him as we should be. What tends to pull you away from consistent time with God? How can the group pray for you in this area?
5. Both Simeon and Anna were in God's house when Jesus arrived. How does their story challenge us about the importance of gathering with other believers?

3. The Seekers From Afar (The Wise Men)

Key Takeaway: God draws people from every nation who honestly seek Him, and they will find Him.

Discussion Questions:

1. The wise men traveled a great distance and likely made significant sacrifices to worship Jesus. What does their journey teach us about the cost and value of seeking Christ?
 2. When the wise men found Jesus, they "fell down and worshipped him" (Matthew 2:11). How does their response challenge our own worship?
 3. The gifts they brought—gold, frankincense, and myrrh—represented Jesus as King, Priest, and His sacrificial death. How does understanding the symbolism of these gifts deepen your appreciation of who Jesus is?
 4. The wise men were Gentiles from a foreign land, yet they were included in the Christmas story. What does this tell us about God's heart for all nations? How should this impact our view of missions and evangelism?
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Practical Applications

This Week's Challenge:

Choose one of the following to practice this week:

Option 1: The Waiting Faithful

- Identify one area where you've been waiting on God. Commit to praying about it daily this week, asking God to help you trust His timing rather than demanding your own.

Option 2: The Watching Faithful

- Set aside specific time each day this week to "pray and watch"—spend time in prayer, then watch throughout your day for opportunities God brings to serve, encourage, or share the gospel with others.

Option 3: The Seeking Worshipers

- Like the wise men, bring your most valuable "gifts" to Jesus. Identify something precious to you (time, talent, treasure, a dream, a relationship) and prayerfully surrender it to Him this week.

Group Discussion: Personal Reflection

1. **Which character in the Christmas story do you most relate to right now?**
 - Zacharias/Elisabeth (waiting for God to answer prayer)
 - Simeon/Anna (faithfully serving and watching)
 - The Wise Men (seeking and worshiping)
 2. **The sermon stated: "God's people do not always understand what God is doing."** Share about a current situation where you don't understand what God is doing. How can the group support and pray for you?
 3. **Perfect Timing:** The sermon emphasized God's perfect timing throughout these stories. Share a testimony of when you experienced God's perfect timing in your life.
 4. **Faithfulness in Every Season:** How does the inclusion of elderly believers (Elisabeth, Zacharias, Simeon, Anna) in the Christmas story encourage you about God's plans for every stage of life?
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Action Steps

Individual:

- ☐ Identify one unanswered prayer and commit to continue trusting God's timing
- ☐ Evaluate your faithfulness in gathering with believers—are you where God is working?
- ☐ Ask God to lead you to someone who needs to hear about Jesus this week

As a Group:

- ☐ Pray specifically for others who are in seasons of waiting
 - ☐ Commit to pray for each other's sensitivity to the Holy Spirit's leading
 - ☐ Discuss: How can our group be more intentional about sharing the gospel with those who are "seeking from afar"?
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Closing Reflection

Key Quote from the Sermon: *"God uses unexpected people from all walks of life in His plan to reach the world. The first Christmas reminds us that God's greatest blessings come to those who are faithfully waiting and watching and seeking the Lord Jesus Christ."*

Reflection Questions:

- How does this truth change the way you view your own life and circumstances?
 - What "extraordinary blessing" might God have for you as you remain faithful to Him?
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Prayer Focus

Pray for:

1. **Those waiting** - for answered prayers, for understanding, for God's perfect timing
 2. **Faithfulness** - to be consistent in prayer, worship, and gathering with believers
 3. **Sensitivity** - to the Holy Spirit's leading and perfect timing in our lives
 4. **Boldness** - to share the gospel with family, friends, neighbors, and co-workers
 5. **The lost** - that God would draw seekers from every nation to Jesus Christ
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For Next Week

Read ahead: Continue reflecting on the Christmas story and how God used ordinary people in extraordinary ways.

Memory Verse: *"Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard."* - Luke 1:13

Challenge: Share with the group next week about one way you saw God's timing or leading in your life this week.

Additional Resources

- Reread Luke 1-2 and Matthew 1-2 this week
- Journal about areas where you're waiting on God
- Consider: What does it mean to "walk in the Spirit" daily? (Romans 8, Galatians 5)

5-Day Devotional: Faithful Waiting and God's Perfect Timing

Day 1: When God Seems Silent

Reading: Luke 1:5-13

Devotional: Zacharias and Elisabeth lived faithfully through years of unanswered prayer and apparent silence. They were righteous, obedient, and devoted—yet barren. Sometimes our most faithful seasons feel the emptiest. But God's silence doesn't mean God's absence. While Zacharias served in the temple, doing what seemed like ordinary priestly duties, heaven broke through with extraordinary news. Your waiting isn't wasted. God is preparing you for something beyond your imagination. The prayers you've prayed for years haven't been forgotten. Like Zacharias, you may be one ordinary day away from a life-changing encounter with God's faithfulness. Keep serving. Keep trusting. Your breakthrough may come when you least expect it.

Reflection: What long-standing prayer have you nearly given up on? How might God be using this waiting season to prepare you?

Day 2: Perfect Timing, Perfect Place

Reading: Luke 2:25-38

Devotional: Simeon and Anna didn't miss their divine appointment because they were exactly where they needed to be—in God's house, faithfully serving. Simeon came to the temple led by the Spirit at the precise moment Mary and Joseph arrived with Jesus. Anna, who served "night and day" in prayer and fasting, arrived at that same instant. This wasn't coincidence; it was divine orchestration. How many blessings do we miss because we're not where God wants us? Faithfulness positions us for God's extraordinary moments. When we consistently show up—in worship, prayer, and service—we place ourselves in the path of God's miracles. Your faithful presence matters more than you know.

Reflection: Are you consistently positioning yourself where God is working? What adjustments might increase your spiritual sensitivity?

Day 3: No Age Limit on God's Plans

Reading: Luke 1:57-80

Devotional: Anna was widow of 84 years when she witnessed the Messiah. Zacharias and Elisabeth were "well stricken in years" when they became parents to John the Baptist. God doesn't retire His servants; He refines them. Your age, stage, or season doesn't disqualify you from God's extraordinary purposes. In fact, seasoned saints often carry wisdom, discernment, and faithfulness that younger believers are still developing. Simeon had waited his entire life for this moment. Anna had served faithfully for decades. Their persistence was rewarded. Whether you're young and eager or older and weary, God has kingdom assignments with your name on them. Your best days of service may still be ahead.

Reflection: What limitations have you placed on yourself that God hasn't? How might your life experience uniquely position you for ministry?

Day 4: Seeking and Finding

Reading: Matthew 2:1-12

Devotional: The wise men traveled hundreds of miles, following a miraculous star, searching for the King of the Jews. They weren't Jewish. They weren't expecting a Messiah. But they were seeking truth, and truth led them to Jesus. When they found Him—not in a palace but in a simple house—they didn't hesitate. They fell down and worshipped, offering their most valuable treasures. God draws seekers from every nation and background. Those who honestly seek Jesus will find Him. But finding isn't enough; we must worship and surrender our treasures to Him. The wise men didn't just observe Jesus; they gave Him everything valuable they had. True wisdom always leads to worship and sacrifice.

Reflection: What treasures is God asking you to lay at Jesus' feet? How are you actively seeking Him in this season?

Day 5: Walk in the Spirit, Watch for God

Reading: Romans 8:12-17; Galatians 5:16-25

Devotional: Simeon was "led by the Spirit" to the temple at exactly the right moment. This spiritual sensitivity didn't happen accidentally—it was cultivated through faithful walking with God. When we walk in the Spirit, we develop discernment to recognize God's movements and timing. We notice divine appointments others miss. We sense when God is at work. But walking in the Spirit requires daily surrender, consistent prayer, and obedience to God's Word. It means staying close enough to hear His whisper. Like Simeon and Anna, we must be both prayerful and watchful. God is always working; the question is whether we're spiritually alert enough to see it and participate in it.

Reflection: How sensitive are you to the Holy Spirit's leading? What spiritual disciplines help you stay alert to God's work around you?

Closing Prayer

Father, thank You for the beautiful reminder that You use ordinary, faithful people in extraordinary ways. Help us to wait patiently when answers seem delayed, to position ourselves faithfully where You're working, and to walk closely with Your Spirit so we don't miss what You're doing. Give us eyes to see, ears to hear, and hearts ready to respond. May we, like the saints of old, be found faithful—watching, praying, and ready when You speak and lead. In Jesus' name, Amen.