

**The Doors of History...**  
**Isaiah 40:1-5    Luke 1:68-79**

Our next reading is the song of Zechariah, the priest, who spoke or sang this following the birth of his son, John the Baptist. John is the one who would grow up to “prepare the way of the Lord” as you just heard from Isaiah.

At Christmas we celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ, and we also remember the birth of John, who would prepare the way.

Like Mary’s song, Zechariah speaks about God’s mercy, justice, and salvation, as if it’s already happened! It’s an expression of confidence that what God intends to do is as good as done. Even though this salvation plan started with... babies!

**Luke 1:68-79**

‘Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,  
for he has looked favorably on his people and redeemed them.  
He has raised up a mighty savior for us  
in the house of his servant David,  
as he spoke through the mouth of his holy prophets from of old,  
that we would be saved from our enemies and from the hand of  
all who hate us.  
Thus he has shown the mercy promised to our ancestors,  
and has remembered his holy covenant,  
the oath that he swore to our ancestor Abraham,  
to grant us that we, being rescued from the hands of our  
enemies,  
might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness

before him all our days.  
And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High;  
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,  
to give knowledge of salvation to his people  
by the forgiveness of their sins.  
By the tender mercy of our God,  
the dawn from on high will break upon us,  
to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of  
death,  
to guide our feet into the way of peace.'

This is the word of the Lord

One of my favorite radio stations did a segment once that featured some computer nerds who created a software program that could determine the most boring day in history. They took factors like world events & political conflict, *natural* disasters, *human-made* disasters, significant economic upturns or downturns, sports results, significant deaths, inventions, and things like that— basically, whatever makes the headlines, going back as far as they possibly can, using reliable historical records. They input all their data and the computer determines what days in history were the most boring day ever. I assume they can also determine which days were the most exciting, but these nerds went for boring. Which I think is cool.

I don't remember which date in history was number one, but I do remember that one of the dates that was in the top 10 was a date in 1809, and they said that 1809 was actually a fairly boring *year* altogether. That year stuck in

my head only because I do remember something that happened in 1809 that *was* significant (which I'll tell you in a moment, thanks to a great history teacher I had in junior high school).

But as we look at the *headlines*—those things that would qualify as significant headline type news events—1809 **was** a boring year by most counts. I did a little research of my own. Nothing of great significance happened that year except that all eyes were on Napoleon as he swept across Europe in his quest to conquer the continent. In 1809 he was in Austria. In case you were wondering.

But if we take a closer look, in hindsight, 1809 was anything but a boring year, for a completely different reason. Because although there weren't major *headlines* being made, babies were being born.

In 1809 William Gladstone was born—4-time Prime Minister of Britain whose influential career as a statesman spanned 60 years; his influence is still felt today in England. Alfred Tennyson was also born that year—one of the most beloved poets of the Victorian era. Writer and physician Oliver Wendell Holmes was born in 1809, as was Edgar Allen Poe, stage actress Minna Planer, and composer Felix Mendelssohn. In 1809 a physician named Darwin and his wife called their newborn son Charles. And a boy born that year, who became blind at age 2 because of a sickness, grew up to create a system of reading and writing for

visually impaired people that remains largely unchanged today: Louis Braille.

American writer, painter and illustrator Sophia Hawthorne was born in 1809, and in a rugged old log cabin in Hardin County, Kentucky, an illiterate wandering laborer couple welcomed their second child, Abraham Lincoln (and that's what I remember from my history teacher).

So, 1809 was a *significant* year—and in addition to these children being born, much more happened that didn't make the headlines. But who cared? The destiny of the world, in most peoples' eyes, was being shaped on the battlefields of northern Europe.

Only a handful of history buffs today could name any of the campaigns or battles of Napoleon's Europe, but who can measure the impact of those other lives, of those born that year? What seemed to be insignificant or boring in 1809 (to a computer software program at least) actually turned out to be the birth of an era, a generation of brilliant leaders, writers, scientists, and artists.

Now, go back 18 centuries before that and all of the headlines that the Roman Empire was making as *they* attempted to conquer the world. At that time there was political intrigue, racial tension, increasing poverty and a culture that was in deep transition (much like ours is today). Yet underneath the crushing grip of Rome and all of the spectacle it provided, and the cultural upheaval and

corruption, a baby was born. Quietly, out of the way, without fanfare—except for a choir of angels singing to some shepherds in a field for one birth. That’s pretty cool fanfare, but it was a really small audience! And before him, a baby was born who would prepare the way for the Messiah. Also quietly, out of the way, without fanfare.

As the saying goes, the doors of history often swing on small hinges. It’s not always the big things, the headlines, the spectacular things, but often the small things, the out of the way things that have the deepest impact over time.

Because that’s how God works, and that’s how God comes to us and works his grace into our lives and into the world. In small, sometimes quiet, seemingly insignificant ways. Like the candles during Advent, and then on Christmas eve that start with one flicker, but grow brighter and brighter as the light is spread. This is how Jesus came into the world, and it is how he comes into our lives and how he works in the world.

Once again, I’ll point out that Phillips Brooks (the Massachusetts pastor who wrote O Little Town of Bethlehem) got it right in verse 3: “How silently, how silently, the wondrous gift is given; so (in the same way), God imparts to human hearts the blessings of his heaven. No ear may hear his coming, but in this world of sin, where meek souls will receive him still, the dear Christ enters in.” That’s it!

Quietly, gently, Jesus enters the world—vulnerably, as a child. The invitation to us—and the challenge, in our noisy world—is to attempt to listen, to watch, and pay attention. To sit still long enough to see where Jesus may come to us, not in the big and flashy, but in the small and quiet.

And to have hope that God is starting new things this coming year, even if we can't seem them yet. And to have faith, like Mary, like Zechariah, that those new things will come to fruition. Even if those things aren't fulfilled in our lifetime. As is said in native American wisdom and in environmental circles: all of us should plant trees that we will never sit under. To give future generations a chance to thrive. It's an act of hope and faith. To circle back to Romans 8, where we began the season of Advent, the apostle Paul says that "Hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait, with patience."

As we celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ, and anticipate his coming public ministry, we remember that Jesus didn't come to make headlines or to make history or to start a new religion. He came to meet people in the small, the quiet, the ordinary places of their lives, in order to bring salvation—or as I like to call it, his saving health and wholeness—spiritually, yes, but also emotionally, relationally, socially. He came to bring all of that, not with great flash and fanfare,

but with quiet love, and a gentle presence that requires us to find him, not always in the big things, but usually in the little things.

We talked about 1809 being a boring year, but how about 2024? Was 2024 a boring year? I don't think there is such a thing as a boring year anymore! Or even a boring day, week, month! The last few years especially have been anything but boring!

Even so, while the headline events *are* significant, what will truly matter and make a difference over time, are the small things that God *began* this year in your life, your family's life, and in the world. Things that happened quietly and away from the larger events. The seeds of hope that were planted, the kindness of a loved one—or the kindness of a stranger. The kindness that *we showed* to a loved one or to a stranger.

As Mother Teresa once said, “We are not all called to do great things, but to do small things with great love.” Who knows what those small things will grow into, or what fruit they will bear down the road, but we act, now, in faith, hope and love anyway.

We probably won't make headlines (and probably don't want to!), but with God's love working through us, God's light shining through us, what we do *will*

make a difference. May your 2025 be a year of new hope birthed, and promises fulfilled, as God meets you in the quiet and perhaps unexpected places.