

Zero Degree Festival Sermon (Luke 1 , 5-25)

Last Christmas, there was a film showing in the cinemas called “Parental Guidance”, It is a comic portrayal of the challenges associated with caring for three high maintenance grandchildren while the parents are away. Now you can just imagine it. The complicating factor is that the grandparents in question live a distance away and hardly ever see the family.

The only reason they have been entrusted with this responsibility is because the closer and more popular grandparents are unavailable. So when they arrive at their daughter’s house one of the first things they notice is that there are lots of photos everywhere, and many of them are of the family with the grandfather and the grandmother, but it’s not them. It’s the popular grandparents. The ones who just about live at the house. The ones who get all the love and attention because they are always there. And as they search fruitlessly for a photo of them with the family, they turn to each other and say, “We are the other grandparents.” The less important; the seldom called upon; the least thought about grandparents.

And the birth of John the Baptist is like that.

His is the other miraculous birth that is completely overshadowed, and rightly so, by the birth of Jesus.

You see a miracle is an event that occurs which goes against the natural order of things, and it is obvious from what we read that such was very much the case as far as the conception of John was concerned.

Immediately Luke, who was a Doctor remember, makes us of aware of not just one but two natural rules that would **not** allow Elizabeth to bear a child. (a) She was barren and had been for sometime, which meant that she had never been able to bear children. And (b) she and her husband were now way past the age when child bearing, even for those who were not barren, was even slightly possible. These two were just too old to be parents.

Now, when I read the Bible – I often ask myself questions. The most obvious one is this – why on earth did Zechariah and Elizabeth have problems. I mean why would you choose them?

If God wanted John to be the forerunner – why choose a couple who would struggle to conceive.

On one level it just does not make sense.

The reasons I suppose are a testimony to the power of Almighty God.

John was to be God’s special instrument. He would become the voice crying in the wilderness that Isaiah had prophesied would come many centuries beforehand.

Also, God needed to use two people whose utter powerlessness and physical inadequacy would allow them to be part of His miracle.

You could say of Zechariah and Elizabeth that they were unsuitable enough for God to be able to use them. That such a task was beyond them.

And you know, there have been times in my life when I have felt unsuitable for the task God has given me. At times I have sat down and said to myself – why me? What I have I done?

Times when I have sat with friends and marvelled at the things they were doing and planning for God.

And other occasions too, when I have felt so overwhelmed by the situation that I find myself in,

that I've asked God again and again, why me? And His response has constantly been, because you are weak enough for me to use. Unsuitable enough for my power to be manifested through you.

Have you ever felt like that? Have you ever felt that the task God has asked of you is – well beyond

Paul explained why this is in 1 Corinthians 1:27-29

God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. 28 He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, 29 so that no one may boast before him.

Zachariah and Elizabeth were always part of

God's almighty plan. He had planned the birth of John the Baptist right down to its fine details, when He had set in His mind the Salvation of mankind through His very own sacrifice.

He knew from the beginning that He would use them in His plan, and He knew why and He knew how. We can look back on the story today and we can begin to see some of the reasons why God obviously used them. That Zechariah was a priest came into it, and that he was being a priest in the Temple when the angel spoke to him about the baby was full of significance. And of course Elizabeth being a relative of Mary was a vital component, and there are many other details that made this couple perfect for God's purposes

But the major and most wonderful truth is that God had factored this old couple into His plans, because that is how God works. And He still works that way today. When God lays a task upon your heart, or sends someone along to call you to be available for Him in some area small or great, it is because He has factored you into His plans.

You may feel completely unsuitable, and in human eyes you could be right, but God has factored you into His plans Human eyes will only see the limits, the limit of potential – God see's the fullness of potential.

You may simply feel that you don't want to do it, or that you won't be available to do it, or have the necessary resources for it, but God has factored you into His plans.

You may argue with God, and challenge His choice of you as Zechariah did, as I have done at times, and many of you will have done, but never forget that

if the call comes from God then that means that in

His wisdom and Grace, He has factored you into His plans. How astonishing is that!

When the Angel announced to Zechariah that his wife would have this son who would do such great things for Israel, all Zechariah could think about at first was the impossibility of it all. Well if I mean, if I being totally honest and in Zechariah's shoes, I would.

Zachariah wanted God to look for someone else. In fact God's response was to silence him until the day of the birth.

I tend to feel that it wasn't just a case of Zechariah not believing, but of Zechariah not wanting to believe because it all seemed so difficult for him to contemplate. Yet God's preference was to do it His way using Zechariah and Elizabeth, and that wasn't about to change.

This experience of Zechariah reminds me of times when as a kid I was instructed to do something that I didn't want to do. I would turn to my mum and say, why can't so and so do it. And the response was always, Because I want you to do it.

That's what happens here. It also happened to Moses at the burning bush.

To Peter when Jesus said to him after His

resurrection, Feed my sheep. You will do it because I want you to do it.

What God wants us to do, or calls us to do, may not always be what we want, but we can be sure that God will always bless us through it, despite sometimes the pain and inconvenience we may suffer along the way.

Sometimes we are called to do things that stretch us, things we feel ill prepared to do, things which we simply do not see the point of.

And of course in Jesus we find the greatest example of accepting God's will for

Him when He said at Gethsemane, not just once but three times, "yet not my will but yours be done".

let us always remember that behind

John we see two elderly people that were obedient despite the upheaval to their lives.

And that in them we see testimony to God's Power, Plan, and Preference for all His children, that still undergirds His desire to use every single one of us in some way, for His Glory and for His Kingdom.

So this evening, let us pray that as we work to grow His kingdom here in Louth, we be attentive,

listen and be ready to respond to His call.