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Advent Midweek

Luke 1:5-25

“Intrude” Series: Zechariah

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Is anybody here tonight perfect? Are any of you 100% flawless, faultless? You may have perfect attendance at confirmation, or at school, this year. You may have the perfect pillow to sleep on tonight. You may think your hair, or your makeup, or your outfit, is perfect this evening. But are any of you perfect in every way? Have any of you never sinned, never messed up? Not me. Not even remotely close to perfect.

But just imagine tonight that this is your life. Imagine that your life really is perfect. Perfect in every single way. Everything about you, everything you experience, everything you do or think or say, is impeccably picture-perfect.

Now imagine this is God, barging into your perfect life. You didn't invite him. You didn't give him permission. He just pushes in. That might not feel very good. You might not welcome him. After all, if your life is perfect, you don't really need God's help, God's guidance.

But what about if your life is not perfect? Let's picture our lives more like this. Imperfect, right? Flawed. Defective. Damaged.

Now, again, imagine God coming into your life. Maybe you didn't send him an e-vite, or sign a permission waiver. But God is bringing his perfect love, his perfect help, perfect healing, perfect guidance, perfect opportunities and blessings – all for you. Would you say “No” to all of that? Wouldn't you welcome him?

That's our topic tonight. And that's really our topic every Wednesday, every Sunday. That's really the story of the whole Bible right there, isn't it? God made a perfect world; but our sin has made our world and our lives imperfect in every way. And, yet, God brings his perfect gifts to us, undeserved, in Jesus Christ.

Tonight our Bible story, from Luke chapter 1, tells this same story. We read about a priest named Zechariah. He's not a perfect man. He doesn't live in a perfect world. His religion's not perfect. His family's not perfect. Just like us, Zechariah is imperfect.

We heard what happens to Zechariah. God interrupts him one day. Zechariah is at work. He works in the temple in Jerusalem. He's one of the priests who helps the people make their sacrifices, say their prayers, and give worship to God. Zechariah's not a young vicar. He's an old man, and he's been a priest for a long time.

One day he goes, all by himself, into the inner part of the temple. Imagine there's a wall around this altar area, where no one is allowed to go – except twice a day, one priest goes in to light the incense bowl on the altar. On this one particular day, it's Zechariah's turn.

So there he is, all alone, in the holy part of God's house. Suddenly, an angel appears standing next to the altar. God sends this angelic messenger, interrupting Zechariah's work, interfering in Zechariah's life.

"Your prayers have been answered," the angel says. "Your wife Elizabeth is going to have a son, and you will name him John. He's going to be a great man, filled with the Holy Spirit. And he's going to help the children of Israel to be ready for the coming of the Lord, the Messiah."

God inserts himself into Zechariah's life, and says, "I'm sending a Savior for the whole world; but I'm giving you a son to prepare the way for my Son." God is bringing his perfect love, perfect help, perfect healing, perfect guidance; and giving a perfect opportunity and blessing to Zechariah.

Uninvited? Yes. Without permission? Yes. Welcome? No. At least, not at first. Do you remember Zechariah's first response? "No way can this possibly happen!" he thinks to himself. "How shall I know this?" he asks the angel. In other words, "Can you give me some kind of proof? Look at me. I'm a really old man, and my wife is old, as well. We're way past the age where we can have a child."

And we can certainly understand Zechariah's hesitation. Science, medicine, human reason, and decades of experience all told him that he is right, and the angel is wrong.

But, remember, the angel is speaking for God. And nothing is unachievable, nothing is hopeless, nothing is impossible, for God. If God says Zechariah and Elizabeth are going to have a baby, then Zechariah and Elizabeth are going to have a baby. God's perfect promise will come true.

Our Bible story teaches us that Zechariah's faith, just like mine sometimes, was imperfect. His trust in God, his ability to believe God's words, his capability to follow God's commands, was imperfect.

And this really is a picture of our lives, isn't it? Not just Zechariah. Not just me. All of us come up short. All of us are damaged, broken, imperfect.

But here comes our God. Always interrupting, infringing, intruding in our lives. Bringing his perfect love, perfect help, perfect healing, perfect guidance, perfect opportunities and blessings into our lives. Are we ready? Will we welcome him?

The old priest, Zechariah, wasn't ready. Remember the story? God gave him a temporary punishment to set him straight. After seeing the angel in the temple, Zechariah was unable to speak, not a single word, until his son John was born. Boy, his poor wife Elizabeth. She must have missed her husband's whining and complaining and critiquing her cooking for all those months.

But Zechariah learned his lesson. He learned to welcome God's intrusion. When his son was born, he was finally able to speak. Joyfully, he cried out: "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people" (1:68). See, Zechariah knew that his own son, John, was only going to pave the way for the real Savior. He knew that when the Christ Child came, God's perfect gifts would come for his imperfect people. Love, help, healing, guidance, opportunities, and blessings. All perfect! All coming to you in Christ!

Are you ready? Is your heart open? Is your mind prepared, your spirit receptive, for God to intervene and bless you in impossibly-wonderful ways, through his Son Jesus Christ, just like he did Zechariah?

In these days before Christmas, let Zechariah's story remind you to be ready. God doesn't need your invitation or permission, but let's be ready to welcome him, to welcome the incomparable gift of his Son. Amen.