

Reading – Luke 1:8-20

⁸Once when he was serving as priest before God during his section's turn of duty, ⁹he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to enter the sanctuary of the Lord to offer incense. ¹⁰Now at the time of the incense offering, the whole assembly of the people was praying outside. ¹¹Then there appeared to him an angel of the Lord, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. ¹²When Zechariah saw him, he was terrified, and fear overwhelmed him. ¹³But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will name him John. ¹⁴You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, ¹⁵for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He must never drink wine or strong drink; even before his birth he will be filled with the Holy Spirit. ¹⁶He will turn many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. ¹⁷With the spirit and power of Elijah he will go before him, to turn the hearts of parents to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." ¹⁸Zechariah said to the angel, "How can I know that this will happen? For I am an old man, and my wife is getting on in years." ¹⁹The angel replied, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news. ²⁰But now, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time, you will become mute, unable to speak, until the day these things occur."

Sermon Title: *Gabriel: A Messenger of Inflection Points*

Introduction: Gabriel as a Messenger of Change

Today, we return to Luke 1, the announcement of the birth of John the Baptist. Over the past two weeks, we've focused on key figures in this passage—Liz explored Zechariah, and Larisa reflected on Elizabeth. So, who's left to talk about? The angel Gabriel.

When I read this passage again, focusing specifically on Gabriel, one question stood out: *What effect did Gabriel's words have on Zechariah?* Of course, Zechariah was stunned. Who wouldn't be? But beyond the initial shock, what deeper effect did Gabriel's words have? Surely, learning that he would father someone like John the Baptist—someone with such a prophetic calling—changed how he approached his role as a parent. Gabriel's message was an inflection point in Zechariah's life, a moment that shifted his path and his purpose.

(Insert joke): And though I'm not focusing on Zechariah today, I can't help but revisit his response: "How will I know?" Well, Zechariah, if you don't know what it looks like when your wife becomes pregnant, maybe that's part of the reason you've had so much trouble in the past!

But seriously, Gabriel's words didn't just inform Zechariah—they transformed him. And this isn't unique to Zechariah. Gabriel's appearances in Scripture consistently serve as inflection points—moments of dramatic change that require faith, courage, and a willingness to embrace the unknown. And just as Gabriel's words were transformative, God often uses people, situations, and words

to create inflection points in our lives. Just as importantly, He calls us to be instruments of change and encouragement for others.

1. Gabriel's Appearances as Inflection Points

Gabriel doesn't appear often in Scripture—only four times—but each time, he shows up at a pivotal moment.

1. To Daniel (Daniel 8 and 9): Gabriel appeared twice to Daniel, offering clarity and assurance in times of confusion and turmoil. His messages helped Daniel understand God's plan and strengthened him to remain faithful.
2. To Zechariah (Luke 1:5–20): Gabriel announces John's birth, a message that sets the stage for John's role in preparing the way for Jesus.
3. To Mary (Luke 1:26–38): Gabriel's announcement to Mary is arguably the most transformative message of all—God's plan to bring salvation through Jesus. Mary's response, "Let it be to me according to your word," demonstrates the faith and courage required at such an inflection point.

In each of these moments, Gabriel's messages marked a transition—a calling to embrace God's work in a way that required stepping into roles that were unexpected and, at times, overwhelming.

2. Recognizing Inflection Points in Our Lives

Let's bring this closer to home. Think about moments in your life when someone's words or actions shifted your perspective or changed your path. Maybe it was a teacher who saw potential in

you, a friend who spoke truth during a difficult time, or a spiritual mentor who encouraged your faith. These are modern-day inflection points—moments when God uses others to move us toward His purpose.

But recognizing these moments often requires faith. Zechariah doubted initially, but he ultimately grew into his role. Mary accepted her calling immediately, despite its challenges. And in our own lives, stepping into God’s purpose can feel daunting, but it’s through these moments that transformation occurs.

3. A Contemporary Example: Spiritual Health

A recent study by McKinsey & Company explored the importance of spiritual health alongside the other three pillars of health—physical, mental, and social. Based on a global survey of more than 41,000 participants, the study found that spiritual health, defined as a sense of connection to something larger and a strong sense of purpose, positively correlates with the other three pillars.

Interestingly, Gen Z reported lower spiritual health, often citing a lack of meaning in life and a diminished sense of purpose in work or personal beliefs.

This presents an opportunity for faith communities like ours. If people are searching for purpose and connection, how can we help them find it? How can we become inflection points in their lives?

4. The Church as an Inflection Point

In reading St. Lydia's Mission Site Profile, I found much about the demographics of this community. St. Lydia's is a congregation of

well-educated individuals—many of whom hold theological training—and it skews toward middle to high income levels. It is also a congregation rich in artistry and creativity. Many of you are writers, musicians, designers, or thinkers. These qualities represent not only the makeup of our community but also a wealth of skills and opportunities to expand how St. Lydia's can serve as an inflection point for others.

Consider this: Can St. Lydia's be a place where someone hears the words or the song, sees the sights, or dreams the dreams that shift their perspective to a broader purpose? Can we create an environment where those seeking meaning or renewal encounter something here that redirects their lives toward God's calling?

And could this work extend beyond these walls every Sunday? What if our creativity and passion became outward-facing? Imagine St. Lydia's hosting a podcast series that explores spirituality and purpose. What if we embraced live-streaming as a tool to reach those who might never step foot in a church? Could we create accessible spiritual programming online or through social media, using our unique voices to inspire others and bring them closer to God?

These are the possibilities when a community like ours turns its creative minds to the needs of the broader world. We have the privilege of being uniquely equipped to inspire others. But inspiration must turn into action. Let us ask ourselves not just, *Who are we?* but *What are we doing to reflect God's kingdom and create meaning for others?*

Conclusion: Responding to the Call

Gabriel's story teaches us that inflection points aren't accidents—they're part of God's plan. Whether it's through a teacher, a friend, or a congregation like ours, God uses people to create turning points that lead us closer to Him.

Today, I challenge you to reflect on two questions:

1. Who has been a Gabriel in your life? Take time to thank God for the people who have spoken into your life and helped you grow.
2. How can you be a Gabriel to others? Ask God to show you opportunities to be an inflection point for someone who needs it.

Let's close in prayer: *Lord, thank You for the moments that shape us and the people You send to guide us. Help us to recognize these inflection points and step boldly into Your calling. Use us, Lord, to be instruments of change, hope, and encouragement for others. Amen.*