

# McCabe United Methodist Church

## 2017 Advent and Christmas Series

### *Praying for Miracles at 6<sup>th</sup> & Boulevard*

Sermon on Luke 1:1-25 (12/2 & 12/3/17)

Pastor Jenny Hallenbeck Orr

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*God of all seasons, in this season, may our thoughts be of you, may our words speak your love, and may our actions be a gift to all we encounter. Amen.*

Well, friends, welcome to Advent and Christmas here at McCabe! *Advent* is the season of the church year directly ahead of Christmas.

The season of Advent is an *adventure*...a journey of preparation and waiting and great anticipation *ahead of* Christmas. It's a time of excitement and hope – a time of celebration and gifts. Advent is a time of reflecting on who the Christ child is in our daily lives. And, here at McCabe, our series theme for Advent and Christmas is “Miracle at 6<sup>th</sup> and Boulevard”.

In the classic Christmas movie *Miracle on 34<sup>th</sup> Street*, a Christmas miracle happens through a famous department store on 34<sup>th</sup> Street in New York City.

(If you haven't seen either the 1947 or 1994 versions of *Miracle on 34<sup>th</sup> Street*, sometime in the next few weeks would be a great time to watch!)

Well, here we are, in McCabe United Methodist Church – at 6<sup>th</sup> and Boulevard in Bismarck, North Dakota. Here we are at 6<sup>th</sup> and Boulevard, kicking-off the Advent and Christmas seasons...thinking about *miracles*.

According to *Google*, a “miracle” is “a surprising and welcome event that is not explicable by natural and scientific laws and is therefore considered to be the work of a divine agency.” A *miracle* is “a surprising and welcome event that is not explicable by natural and scientific laws and is therefore considered to be the work of a divine agency.”

In somewhat simpler terms: A “*miracle*” is something only God could do.

Each week of this season, our Scripture readings will focus on sections of the beginning of the Gospel of Luke. In our Bible, there are four “gospels” in the New Testament; each Gospel is someone's telling of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ.

A bit ago, we heard from the Gospel of *Luke* chapter 1, verses 1-25... and, from those verses, we learn immediately that the story *Luke* tells us about Jesus is going to be a story of *miracles* – and the first miracle in this story isn't even about Jesus, per se!

We typically think of Christmas time as focusing on the miracle of *Jesus'* conception and birth: the angel Gabriel appearing to the young, virgin Mary, inviting her to be the mother of God's Son, Jesus.

But the first miracle story in the Gospel of Luke is about a *different* baby – it's a story about a *different* miraculous conception...this one, not by a young, virgin girl named Mary, but by an older, *barren* woman named Elizabeth. And we learn about this story through Elizabeth's husband, Zechariah.

Zechariah was a Jewish priest in Jerusalem who served in the temple.

Zechariah was married to Elizabeth (who, incidentally, was a relative of Mary's) and, despite the fact that they had been married a long time, they had not been able to have children. Luke tells us not only was Elizabeth barren, but she was now well beyond her child-bearing years. Yet...

Yet, one day, as Zechariah was serving in the temple, the angel Gabriel appeared to him and said Elizabeth would soon become pregnant and would bear a son they were to name “John”.

Zechariah was, as you might imagine, a bit shocked...and he didn't respond all that well, basically challenging the angel, saying such a thing would be impossible. So, as a form of holy discipline, the angel Gabriel rendered

Zechariah mute – stating he would not be able to speak again until after the baby was born.

When Zechariah's work in the temple was done, he returned home to Elizabeth and it wasn't long before she miraculously became pregnant. I don't know if you caught Elizabeth's words upon becoming pregnant, but they are rather bittersweet:

“What the Lord has done for me will keep people from looking down on me.”  
*“What the Lord has done for me, will keep people from looking down on me.”*

Elizabeth had felt that her prior barrenness had caused people to look down on her, as though she were less of a woman because she had not been able to have children. This is not *true*...but she felt it to be true – and others made her feel it to be true.

But I love what she says at first: “What the Lord has done for me...”

Elizabeth knew, without a doubt, the child within her was a miracle. She knew *only God* could have given her a child.

*A miracle is something only God could do.*

Here at 6<sup>th</sup> and Boulevard this season, we're paying for a financial miracle to help us end 2017 “balanced” and “in the black”. But 6<sup>th</sup> and Boulevard isn't just about our church as a whole: it's also about every one of us who connects with the body of Christ called “McCabe”...

and I know many of you are hoping and praying for miracles of your own:

perhaps your miracle relates to a loved one caught in an addition... perhaps your miracle relates to a health crisis or a financial jam of your own...perhaps the miracle you need relates to your job or to something going on at school...maybe you need a miracle in your marriage or with a child or an important friendship.

Well, we're praying for miracles. This season, we're praying for things *only God could do*. Because our God is the God of Jesus Christ – the God who creates out of nothing...the God who gives babies to barren women and virgin girls. Thanks be to *that* God. Let us pray...

*God of Advent, fill us with wonder at the miracles you brought the first Christmas – the miracle you brought through Zechariah and Elizabeth, through Mary and Joseph. Open our hearts and minds to see the miracles you bring to us today. Keep us praying for the things only you could do. We pray in the name of your beloved, miraculous Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.*