

# Discipleship Moment

**Sermon Text: Luke 1:5-25**

I had an unhappy realization last month. I suppose, looking back, it had been coming for a few years. My birthday is in late November and I received a handful of birthday cards. Every time one came in, I lit up a little, opened the envelope, read the front, opened the flap, read the well wishes inside, and then was hit with a little bit of disappointment. Growing up I had been conditioned to expect a ten- or twenty-dollar bill to fall out of the card. After I graduated from college, I noticed the strange change in my birthday cards: not only did I receive *fewer* cards, but I also received no monetary birthday gifts. This has only declined as I've grown older. Now that I have turned 27, I only received a few and no gifts within them.

I jokingly mourn this change in my life: the change from being lavished with cash every birthday and Christmas to receiving just a few cards with no gifts. But even without the cash (and even without receiving many cards) these birthday and Christmas cards communicate something profound to me: someone is thinking of me, even without me being there with them. My grandmother has my birthday written on her calendar and, leading up to that day, she prays for me and thinks about me and writes a card and puts it in the mail to ensure that I receive by my birthday. That's an awful lot of work for a piece of paper that says, "happy birthday." But we know it is so much more than that: it is about connecting with and communicating love with someone far away.

Pastor Ben taught about the announce of John the Baptists birth. John the Baptist was the last of a long line of prophets that we hear about in the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament). Samuel's mother was barren (much like Elizabeth), Isaiah was confronted with God in the Temple (much like Zechariah), and Hosea's marriage to a prostitute and life of forgiveness was an object lesson for Israel (much like John's abstinence and wilderness life). God used the themes from the Prophets' lives to show us that John is in the same line. A God, too holy to be with the people of Israel, sends prophets to share his message and prepare the way for the Messiah. These are the "Christmas Cards" that God was sending were to tell Israel, "I love you and I'm thinking about you." But the separation felt by holiness, righteous, and sin was about to be bridged. When Jesus was born, no longer did God have to send "Christmas Cards" but now he was close. Very, very close. And could communicate his love not through messages, but by touching, hugging, speaking and being spoken to, and being in proximity to us.

Hebrews 1:1-2 says, "Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds." Advent is the time to prepare our hearts to celebrate the birth of Jesus—God made flesh.

Praise God for his gift of presence, let us look to him for all good things.

## Going Deeper

*Use this resource to start conversations about this week's sermon for your personal devotions, with your family, or with your Life Group. You can use one question per day or all at once.*

1. If someone asked you what Advent was, what would be your answer?
2. Do you enjoy getting birthday or Christmas cards? Why or why not?
3. What do you know about the Old Testament prophets? Read Luke 3:1-20—how is John the Baptist similar to these prophets?
4. How is Jesus greater than these prophets?
5. When was the last time you spoke to God? Did you thank him for his closeness through Jesus? Do that now.
6. Read Luke 1 and ask God to prepare your heart to worship the baby King.