

SEARCHING  
FOR GOOD

<b>Topic:</b>	Trusting God during unexpected change
<b>Main Point:</b>	We can trust God during unexpected change and challenges
<b>Intended Response:</b>	Trust God as you journey through the six stages
<b>Key Verse:</b>	Luke 1:39-56, Luke 2:6-7, Matt 2:19-23

### Introduction

Life has many unexpected events that occur. Unexpected change can come crashing in at any moment and can change everything. It can weigh us down. Make us worry. Consume our energy and hope.

This sermon explores the dramatic challenges Joseph faced due to the unexpected virgin pregnancy of Mary, the unexpected trip to Jerusalem, and the unexpected death threat of Herod. Throughout these events we learn some skills and habits to cultivate when we face the challenge of unexpected change.

#### A. Life as normal

- Zechariah, Elizabeth, Mary and Joseph are living their normal lives
- God disturbs their world with an unexpected announcement
- Mary turns to others for support

**Point One:** We need the support of others during times of unexpected change

#### B. Unexpected labour

- Joseph faces more challenges
- Shepherds come and worship the child
- A lack of comfort does not mean God is against you.

**Point Two:** God is with you in your situation

#### C. Dark Valleys and new obstacles

- Joseph, Mary and Jesus flee to Egypt
- There are always more obstacles to look out for
- Keep listening and leaning into God

**Point Three:** God is sovereign, therefore there is still hope

### Teaching Illustrations and props:

This sermon refers to the six stages of change. An illustration has been created for you to use throughout this sermon. This image can be used in Power Point to help communicate how Joseph and Mary journey through these stages.

**More resources for this sermon, including PowerPoint slides are available at [www.SArmy.org.au](http://www.SArmy.org.au)**

**Introduction**

Good morning everyone and welcome to church.

Christmas is just around the corner, with only one week left to go - who's excited?

Christmas is predictable – it comes around the same time every year, in the same season, in the same month, on the same date.

But there are many things in life that are not as predictable as Christmas. Life has many unexpected events that occur...

Health scare	Unplanned pregnancy	Loss of accommodation
Death in the family	Large bill	Payments cut off
Promotion	Financial crisis	Job loss

Unexpected change can come crashing in at any moment can change everything.

Unexpected change can be hard to manage at times. We all process change differently. It can weigh us down, make us worry, consume our energy and hope.

Unexpected change also brings unexpected challenge and leaves us searching for answers, searching for meaning, searching for God.

Experts have mapped how people respond to change and have discovered several key stages we move through. Here is a simple illustration showing what the stages of change usually look like:



> This Slide

	House	Status quo - Life as normal
	Meteor	Unexpected change comes crashing in
	Rain Clouds	Difficulty – move towards change trying to find footing
	Dark Valley	Emotionally hard and draining, often feel alone
	Whirlwind	On the way up out of change we face more obstacles
	New Beginning	Transition through change to a new start / season

<p><b>Relevance</b></p>	<p>Today, we are going to turn back the clock and consider the very first Christmas. We'll explore the dramatic challenges Joseph faced due to the unexpected pregnancy of Mary, their unexpected trip to Jerusalem, the unexpected death threat of Herod, and other challenges he faced.</p> <p>We'll consider</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How Joseph maintained a sense of control?</li> <li>• What Kingdom principles we can glean along the way, and</li> <li>• What new habits we can apply in our lives during times of unexpected change and challenges.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Transition</b></p>	<p>We'll start at the beginning of the Christmas story. We have...</p>
<p><b>1. Life as normal</b></p>	<p><b>An unexpected pregnancy</b></p> <div data-bbox="699 929 906 1086" data-label="Image"> </div> <p>&gt; This Slide</p> <p>Zechariah and Elizabeth: they are the soon to be parents of John the Baptist</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ But they are first introduced as an elderly couple who are childless.</li> <li>○ The Bible notes that they are righteous and just (Lk 1:6).</li> <li>○ Elizabeth was most likely Mary's cousin.</li> </ul> <p>We have Joseph, a carpenter, was in a marriage pledge to Mary.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ He was faithful to the law (Matt 1:19)</li> </ul> <p>And of course, we have Mary, who is young and also childless.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Was highly favoured before the Lord (Luke 1:30).</li> </ul> <p>So the Christmas story begins with life as normal and everyone is just plodding along. Then something unexpected happened, something big. An angel of God appears with an unexpected message that will completely change their world, and ours.</p> <div data-bbox="762 1915 842 2011" data-label="Image"> </div> <p>&gt; This Slide</p>

### ***Zechariah and Elizabeth***

An angel first appears to Zechariah and Elizabeth and tells them she will fall pregnant and have a son (Lk 1:13).

### ***Mary***

The angel then appears to Mary and announces she will become pregnant with the Saviour (Lk 1:31-32).

- Now Mary is very young (around 14-15yrs old which would place her in Year 9 in our culture).
- At this very moment, Mary may have looked normal on the outside, but on the inside, her world is changing.
  - She going to have a baby - Babies are full on!
  
  - As a side note, this is where the gift of discernment can come in really handy (1 Cor 12). Often times, people who look like they have it all together on the outside can have a lot of challenges in their private world. Discernment is a gift of the Holy Spirit that highlights to us those who need extra understanding, sensitivity and compassion.
- Now Mary has an amazing attitude.
  - Rather than being anxious and worrying herself sick, she accepts the change with a grateful attitude and with thanks giving
  - It's a good habit to ask ourselves during times of change: "What does this enable?" or "what exciting possibilities does this bring?"
- So Mary decides to go and stay with Zechariah and Elizabeth.
- Again, this is helpful for us: Mary needed the support of others: family and friends,
- Everyone needs help from time to time.
- Can I ask, who do you turn to?
- We are here at church to help you when you need.

### ***Joseph***

Joseph's life is also turned upside down.

The virgin birth is unexpected news, hard news, scandalous news. It is totally unexpected! Imagine being a young engaged man and finding out that your bride to be is pregnant – and you're not the father! This would have caused a huge strain on their relationship.

Now, we don't know who Joseph turned to. We don't know how the conversation with his family and friends went. But we do know he initially found it hard.

	<p>The Bible says Joseph considered calling off the engagement. The word used in Matthew 1:20 “he considered” can also mean “he became angry, he was upset”. Anger, betrayal, grief – are all normal human emotions.</p> <p>Question:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Who do you turn to when you need help in times of change?</li> <li>○ Thank God for them.</li> <li>○ If you don’t have anyone, please speak to us. We are here to help you where we can.</li> </ul> <p>Again, an angel appeared – this time to Joseph in a dream and told Him this was all part of God’s plan. The baby would be called Immanuel, which means, ‘God with us’. Joseph had the support of God during his time of change.</p>
<p><b>Point 1.</b></p>	<p>We need the support of others during times of unexpected change and challenges</p>
<p><b>Transition</b></p>	<p>So God speaks to Joseph through a dream and he commits marrying Mary.</p> <p>Around the same time, a census was called and everyone was required to go to their home to register. The Romans were the ruling force at the time and had placed outposts and local officials to govern the people – like Herod who we will hear about later.</p> <p>This posed new challenges: Bethlehem was around a three-day journey for them and Mary was heavily pregnant.</p>
<p><b>2. Unexpected labour</b></p>	<div style="text-align: center;">  <span style="font-size: 2em;">&gt;</span> This Slide </div> <p>Most people know this part of the story. They make the journey, but find no accommodation is available for them, and Mary goes into labour!</p> <p>But first I’d like us to think about how Joseph might be feeling:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I cannot imagine this is how he thought his first child would be brought into the world. His family was not around. He was not in his own home.</li> <li>• First a scandalous pregnancy, now there is no accommodation for them, and the only spot for “the saviour” is in a manger – which is actually an animals feeding trough!</li> </ul>

- Maybe he's feeling cursed or having doubts again,
- Perhaps he was super stressed.
- It would have been awesome if Jesus' birth was a grand entrance – but it wasn't, it was a humble beginning
  - (God is touched by the hardships of this world)
- Joseph may have thought 'where is God in this?'

You know, a lack of comfort does not mean God is against you.

- God was aware of their need and provided a place and a manger.
- These are only small mercies and acts of grace – but they were important,
- We need to look for these when things are tough, it helps keep hope alive.

### **So God sends more Angels...**

To give more unexpected and prophetic messages. They speak to shepherd's working in paddocks nearby and announce that the Saviour has been born in Bethlehem.

There were lots of houses in Bethlehem and lots of people and families due to the census. How on earth were the shepherd's meant to find a new born baby in that crowd? The angels gave them a clue as they went searching for the child, *"you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger"* (Lk 2:12)

- God knows where you are – and He can send people to you, or He can bring you to people
  - Again, if you are a visitor here today, welcome to church.
- So the shepherds go searching for Jesus and find Him in the manger.
- The Bible says they left praising God for the things they had heard and seen
  - Words are important.
  - Gratitude during times of change can be so helpful
  - Hold onto gratitude for as long as you can.

I keep a gratitude journal. I write down 3 things each morning I'm thankful for. It only takes 15 seconds but it helps build gratitude and memories I can draw upon from strength during times of change.

As we think about all Joseph faced so far, we can see how in times of unexpected change and challenges God was there: people, angels, prophetic words, dreams, hospitality or others – and He is with you, me, us.

### **Point 2.**

God is with you in your situation

<p><b>Transition</b></p>	<p>So it's all good. Baby Jesus was born, the shepherds are happily praising God, the new family is together. Joseph can finally relax. No more problems, no more unexpected surprises, no more unexpected challenges... for now,</p> <p>But very shortly after, King Herod, issues a decree to kill all male children under the age of two – his eyes are focused on finding this Christ child and destroying him.</p>
<p><b>3. Dark Valleys</b></p>	<div data-bbox="699 521 903 701" data-label="Image"> </div> <p data-bbox="906 667 1058 701">&gt; This Slide</p> <p data-bbox="325 757 564 790">Death is in the air.</p> <p data-bbox="325 801 1326 835">So Joseph and Mary now have to escape to Egypt to avoid Jesus being killed.</p> <p data-bbox="325 891 1406 965">This is what we call a dark valley. It's one of the lowest points in the change stages and darkest parts of the Christmas story.</p> <p data-bbox="325 1010 1374 1122">Going through change can be so hard: dealing with feelings of loss, anger, grief, sadness, depression, worry, anxiety, uncertainty. It's here we can lose hope and sight of God.</p> <p data-bbox="325 1167 1366 1240">But God is at work – He doesn't stop here – no one needs to give up in the dark valley for God is Immanuel – He is with us. He will lead you through (Psalm 23).</p> <ul data-bbox="325 1301 1422 2011" style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• God doesn't cause pain but He works through it.</li> <li>• This was all part of God's plan to fulfil the Scriptures (Matt 2:15), "Out of Egypt I called my son"</li> <li>• God's got a plan for your dark valley – there is always hope:       <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Psalm 23:4 – As we walk through – God is with us</li> <li>○ 2 Cor 1:6 – Others can benefit from our valley</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Small mercies are present even in the darkest valleys       <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Many scholars speculate how the gifts of the magi funded the trip.</li> <li>○ Provision is often an insight to God's plan – though we are caught off guard, God is never surprised and makes provision for us.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Reminds me of a line in a Hymn we sing:       <p data-bbox="373 1798 1390 1921"><i>"When the darkness falls around me, when bewildered and afraid, when I feel the most deserted and betrayed, Then my every need is answered by God's providential care, And His precious Holy Spirit hears my prayers..."</i></p> <p data-bbox="373 1933 679 2011">Song: 316 His Provision by John Gowan</p> </li> </ul>

**Point 3:** God is sovereign, therefore there is still hope

**Transition** And just when you think it's all over, Joseph must face yet another obstacle to face...

**Call to Action**

 > This Slide

Herod dies and Joseph, Mary and Jesus are about to travel home. But God speaks to Joseph in a dream to warn him, not once, but twice. Herod's son was just as bad as he was. The threat of danger still hangs in the air.

Small point but important one – there are always more obstacles to look out for – so keep listening and leaning in to God. In the book of Revelation, Jesus tells four churches that are facing persecution and challenges, to “listen to what the Spirit says to the churches”.

During times of unexpected change, keep an ear out for God.

**Conclusion**

 > This Slide

In the Bible, some years after the Christmas story ends, we see Joseph and Mary taking Jesus to Jerusalem to celebrate the festival of Passover. They made it through their dark valley and started a new life.

Years after that, we see how Zachariah and Elizabeth's son, John the Baptist, has grown into a godly man who would announce Jesus to the world (Luke 3:16). And we see how Jesus grew as a man who would lead the world to God – and offer a new beginning to all of us here today.

**Call to Action**

 > This Slide

As we close today, can I ask...

- Where are you on this journey?
- How are you going?
- Some journeys take longer than others: Nazareth to Bethlehem took 3 days, Bethlehem to Egypt took 30-50 days. I don't know how long your journey has been, maybe you've been travelling through a dark valley for a long time?
- How is your gratitude going? Are you keeping hope alive?
- Do you have support – if not, we are here to help.

And what about others?

- Is there someone you should be offering support too?
- Is there someone you know who is in a dark valley at the moment? Someone whose life has been dramatically taken off course.

***Insert Christmas appeal reminder:*** Each year, we take up a special collection for our Christmas Appeal. This year, our focus is to bring hope where it's needed most. There are many people who are going through a challenging time or dramatic change and they feel their life is reeling off course. The Salvation Army, you, me, all of us – can be there for them. Can I encourage you to give generously this year to our Christmas appeal so we can help others on their journey.

- Perhaps God has been speaking to you today during the message?
  - If we were to pause for a moment, what would your Heavenly Father say to you as you listen in?
  - Is there something you need to respond to today?
  - Is there someone you need to help?

No matter where you find yourself, this Christmas hope remains: Jesus said, "I have come that you might have life in all its fullness" (Jn10:10)

There is hope for all of us this Christmas. Would you pray with me...

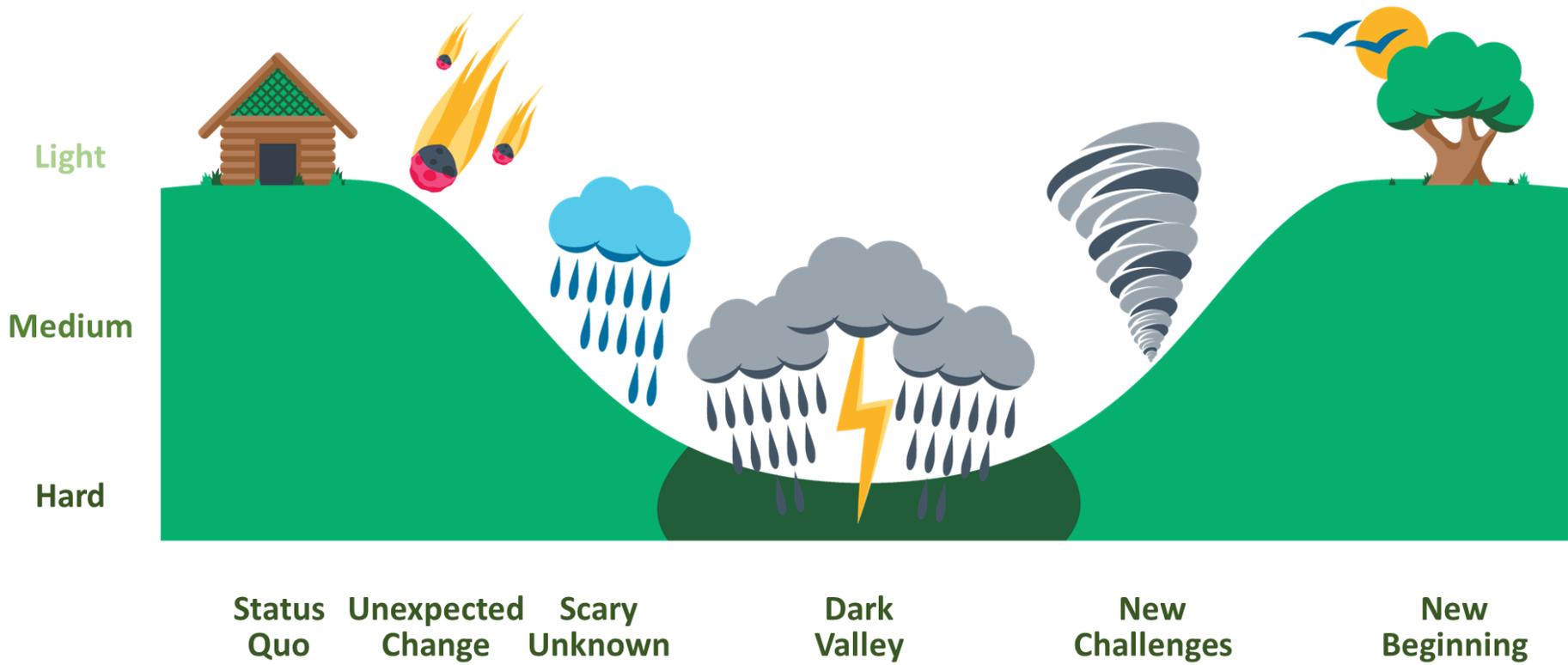
## Prayer

Heavenly Father, we know life's journey is full of ups and downs. We all experience times of unexpected change and challenges.

Christmas can also be a difficult time for many people. There are many hardships in our community. Many rain clouds that drown out hope, dark valleys that cast shadows over our hearts, whirlwind season that consume all our energy.

But Lord you – Immanuel – are with us. We pray that this Christmas we will trust in your small mercies. We will celebrate your presence and listen out for your voice.

And most of all, we thank you for sending Jesus. We make room for Him this day in our hearts, and ask that you would fill us with your Spirit once again.



**Lk 1:6**

Both of them were righteous in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's commands and decrees blamelessly.

**Matt 1:19**

Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

**Luke 1:30**

But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God.

**Lk 1:13**

But the angel said to him: "Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to call him John.

**Lk 1:31-33**

"And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus. "He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end."

**1 Cor 12:10**

to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits.

**Lk 2:12**

This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

**Matt 2:15**

where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: "Out of Egypt I called my son."

**Rom 8:29**

For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.

**2 Cor 1:6**

If we are distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation; if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings we suffer.

**Matt1:20**

But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.