

### **Abide with Us, Lord, at Daybreak**

One of the first statistics I remember making an impression on me was life expectancy in ancient times. In ancient times, life expectancy was around 35 years. This made an impression on me because it created a conflict in my education: If life expectancy at the time of Jesus is around 35 years, why do I keep hearing about older men and women in ancient history and in these Bible stories? Women like Elizabeth, in our lesson for this evening, and her husband Zechariah were older than 35. It was finally explained to me that the number for life expectancy is an average. It isn't that so many people were dying at age 36 in ancient times; there were plenty of people living into their 70s, 80s and even 90s. It was the number of infant and childhood deaths dragging down the average. Disease, injury and often poor sanitary conditions made this world, until about 150 years ago, a very dangerous place for children.

And while the world of today is safer when it comes to the physical health of children, we still recognize childhood in this world as a vulnerable time. You don't just bring a new baby home, you baby-proof the house first. You cover the sockets, put rubber protectors on sharp corners, move breakables out of reach, look for choking hazards, make sure there are batteries in the smoke detectors, read the labels on the food, buy a baby monitor, make sure the toys have non-toxic paint, put educational magnets on the refrigerator. Even now right now some of y'all are thinking "Ah! He forgot to mention [this important thing]! How did his daughter ever survive?"

This concern continues as children grow older. We know from experience that when parents are investigating schools for their children, safety is always a primary concern. Is there a fence around the school? How easy is it for an outsider to get in? Do you have fire drills? And of course they always want to meet the teacher, to form their own evaluation of them and determine if this is someone they feel comfortable, feel safe leaving their child with.

And there is a healthy aspect to this fear. It is borne out of a parent's love for their child. For Christians, it also comes from the understanding that with the blessing of children God has committed a great treasure into the hands of parents. A treasure that is so valuable that the penalties for misusing or abusing it are equal to its value. This can make parents feel as vulnerable to God's anger as their children are to danger. Each parent is all too aware of their shortcomings and failures. Even small failures can loom large in the conscience of parents, as they want to do right by their children.

But for our comfort, God would also have us know that He never commits this treasure idly. He does not say, "Here, I'm going to give you these kids, but after that

I'm going to consider Myself done with this and they will be totally your responsibility. I will, however, punish you severely if you don't treat them the way I expect. Good luck!" We can see this comfort in the words of Elizabeth: "The mother of my Lord". With that realization, or revelation, Elizabeth declares this child of Mary is the Messiah, the one who would be the answer to all evil, such as the perils of childhood, and would cover all sin, even the sins of inadequate parents. For all the inadequacies, for all the failures Elizabeth and Mary knew they would show, they had the greater knowledge that the child of Mary would take to Himself all those sins and failures and atone for them.

The same God who watches over children watches over you as well, to protect you from all danger and guard and keep you from all evil. The same God who chose Elizabeth, who chose Mary, chose you for your role as parent and grandparent as well. Like Elizabeth, like Mary, we are not perfect parents, much less perfect people, but God does not look for perfection from us. He expects it from Jesus, who lived a life of perfection not to shame us, but so that He could give it to us. So that by faith we could claim His perfection as our own and be changed from sinful children, sinful brothers, parents, sinful sisters, sinful parents and grandparents to perfect children of God. So that every Christian family can call themselves holy families, "born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."

Gloria Patri...

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