

“Close to Home: Laying the Foundation”  
Luke 1:57-80

Have you heard about the recent crisis of a leaning tower in Italy? No, it is not the leaning tower of Pisa. It is another tower called the Garisenda Tower in Bologna, Italy. Let’s watch a part of the news story about this tower: <https://youtu.be/KXjH-oOIExl>

This story came to my mind as I was reflecting on the importance of laying a strong foundation for our spiritual homes. As in physical buildings and homes, we know how important the foundation is for the health and integrity of the whole building. That is why today we look at the foundation of our own homes. Sometimes people think of foundation in terms of education, emotional, and moral values. But we often forget the importance of the spiritual foundation of our lives.

In this week’s Bible story, we hear about the spiritual foundation of a prophet that became an important part of the foundational story of Jesus. This is the story of John the Baptizer. He was the cousin of Jesus. He was born to Elizabeth and Zechariah. Elizabeth was the cousin of Mary, the mother of Jesus, who helped provide her with a home for three months when she first got pregnant. She was a very important part of Mary’s pregnancy.

The foundation for the birth of Jesus was based on words of blessing. First, the foundational blessing comes from Zechariah. He is a minor figure in the story and yet he lays a strong foundation of blessing for his son John, who grows up to prepare the way for Jesus. Zechariah was an unlikely figure in this story. He and his wife, Elizabeth, were too old to have children. He went into the most sacred part of the temple in Jerusalem and while there, he received a vision that he and his wife were going to have a child. But he was skeptical of this vision. But after several months of silence and prayer, Zechariah finally got it and instead of speaking words of disbelief, he spoke incredible words of blessing. Let’s listen to his words from Luke 1:76-80

<sup>76</sup> And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High;  
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,

<sup>77</sup> to give knowledge of salvation to his people  
by the forgiveness of their sins.

<sup>78</sup> By the tender mercy of our God,  
the dawn from on high will break upon<sup>[n]</sup> us,

<sup>79</sup> to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,  
to guide our feet into the way of peace.’

<sup>80</sup> The child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness until the day he appeared publicly to Israel.

No wonder John grew up to be an incredible man of faith and integrity. The words that girded his life and laid the foundation for his whole identity were words of blessing. Then Mary, the mother of Jesus, received words of blessing as she was beginning her pregnancy. Let’s listen to the blessing of the angel from Luke 1:26-33

<sup>26</sup> In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, <sup>27</sup> to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. <sup>28</sup> And he came to her and said, 'Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.'<sup>[b]</sup> <sup>29</sup> But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. <sup>30</sup> The angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. <sup>31</sup> And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. <sup>32</sup> He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. <sup>33</sup> He will reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.'

Then Elizabeth gives a blessing to her cousin Mary when she was at a scary point of her life. Not only did Elizabeth believe that her cousin was carrying the Christ child, she also celebrated the news with her and affirmed her soul. Here are the words of blessing from Elizabeth to Mary. Let's listen to Luke 1:41-45

<sup>41</sup> When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leapt in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit <sup>42</sup> and exclaimed with a loud cry, 'Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. <sup>43</sup> And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? <sup>44</sup> For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leapt for joy. <sup>45</sup> And blessed is she who believed that there would be<sup>[e]</sup> a fulfilment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.'

Then Mary turns around and blesses God in what we now know as the Magnificat from Luke 1:46-55

<sup>46</sup> And Mary said,

'My soul magnifies the Lord,

<sup>47</sup> and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

<sup>48</sup> for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.

Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;

<sup>49</sup> for the Mighty One has done great things for me,  
and holy is his name.

<sup>50</sup> His mercy is for those who fear him  
from generation to generation.

<sup>51</sup> He has shown strength with his arm;  
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.

<sup>52</sup> He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,  
and lifted up the lowly;

<sup>53</sup> he has filled the hungry with good things,  
and sent the rich away empty.

<sup>54</sup> He has helped his servant Israel,  
in remembrance of his mercy,

<sup>55</sup> according to the promise he made to our ancestors,  
to Abraham and to his descendants for ever.'

So many blessings! The foundation for the lives of John the baptizer and Jesus was that of blessings. Their whole faith was based on people who knew the importance of blessing. There are so many Bible stories about blessing. The good news is that we can learn to lay a foundation of life that flows with blessings.



We can practice blessing ourselves and others each day so that the foundations of our lives are those of blessing. A blessing is not about everything going our way. It is about recognizing God's presence in everything, in everyone, and at every moment.

Rachel Naomi Remen writes, "A blessing is not something that one person gives another. A blessing is a moment of meeting, a certain kind of relationship in which both people involved remember and acknowledge their true nature and worth, and strengthen what is whole in one another. By making a place for wholeness within our relationships, we offer others the opportunity to be whole without shame and become a place of refuge from everything in them and around them that is not genuine. We enable people to remember who they are."

Think about the moments and people in your life. All offer opportunities to offer a blessing.

- Waking up – offer a blessing for the day ahead and another day of life.

- Getting ready – gratefulness for a hot shower and blessing on those without clean water. Blessings on the people who maintain the water system providing this resource so conveniently.
- Those we love – imagine each one in the eyes of your heart, asking God to bless them
- Meals – blessing for the farmers, people who transport food across many miles, those working in soup kitchens.
- Strangers – blessings on the homes you pass as you drive or walk or the people you pass by on the streets.
- Those you meet or talk with during the day – silently bless the person right in front of you.

The more you pay attention – the more you will see blessings throughout the day.

You may use words like: God bless you to be happy and at peace. You may also come up with your own words.

We are going to practice this on ourselves: May God bless me to be happy and at peace. Now let God bring to your attention someone in your own life who needs a blessing. Surround them with your blessing as a circle of light to protect, heal, and strengthen them: God bless you to be happy and at peace.

Now think of a nation or a group of people who need this blessing: God bless you to be happy and at peace.

We will end by turning to one another and sharing a blessing: God bless you to be happy and at peace. Amen.