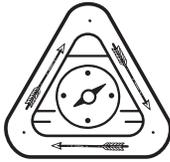


04

Christmas

PROMISE KEPT

Luke
1:26-38



EXPLORATION

Luke 1:26-38

Central TRUTH

Jesus is God's promised Messiah. He ultimately fulfills God's promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

26 In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, 27 to a virgin engaged to a man named Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. 28 And the angel came to her and said, "Greetings, favored woman! The Lord is with you." 29 But she was deeply troubled by this statement, wondering what kind of greeting this could be. 30 Then the angel told her: "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. 31 Now listen: You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. 32 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. 33 He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and his kingdom will have no end." 34 Mary asked the angel, "How can this be, since I have not had sexual relations with a man?" 35 The angel replied to her: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore, the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. 36 "And consider your relative Elizabeth—even she has conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month for her who was called childless. 37 For nothing will be impossible with God." 38 "I am the Lord's servant," said Mary. "May it be done to me according to your word." Then the angel left her.

Prepare for your group meeting by reading the passage two times.

Talk it Out

.01 WITHOUT SHARING THE GIVER'S NAME, WHAT IS THE WORST CHRISTMAS GIFT YOU'VE EVER RECEIVED? WHY DIDN'T YOU LIKE IT?

.02 WHAT IS THE BEST CHRISTMAS GIFT YOU HAVE EVER RECEIVED? WHY WAS IT SO GREAT?



This week's FOCUS

If we are honest, we've all received both bad and good gifts. You may have been given socks when you really wanted an iPad, or conversely, you may have received an iPad when you were expecting socks. Sometimes the gifts we think are going to be great end up breaking and the gifts we thought were lame end up being really useful. Who knows, maybe that pair of socks turns out to be the most comfortable socks you've ever owned. It's hard to know the true value of any gift when simply looking at its face value. This was perhaps never more true than when Mary, a virgin, learned she was about to receive the gift of a child. Looking at this gift initially, Mary surely worried about the social problems that would arise from explaining her pregnancy to the watching world. The child Mary would give birth to was God's Son, the promised Messiah who would fulfill God's plan of redemption—the very best gift of all.

Explore

OPTIONS

.01 I Promise

Bring a cloth bag students won't be able to see through to your group meeting this week. Put some individually wrapped candy in the bag (make sure you are aware of any allergies your group members might have). Start by explaining they may reach their hand into the bag without looking inside and pull out one item. Say, "I promise what you will find in the bag is good." Most students will likely reach in the bag, particularly after they've seen others get a piece of candy. After everyone has a chance to draw a piece of candy, point out how students had to trust you as they reached into the bag. You promised them something good and they had to trust you would be true to your promise. Today we are going to see how Mary had to trust God's promise to bring about good through the child He promised her. Thankfully, God was true to His promise as Jesus is God's promised Messiah and the one who ultimately fulfills God's promise of redemption.

.02 Brand Promises

In a PowerPoint presentation or on a whiteboard, write a series of brand promises from various famous brands. Examples could include: Disney "Creating happiness through magical experiences," Southwest "Low fares. Nothing to hide," REI "Bringing the outdoors to the retail experience," Subaru "Love. It's what makes a Subaru, a Subaru," Amazon "Earth's biggest selection and being the Earth's most customer-centric company" IBM "Let's build a smarter planet," Toyota "Quality, safety, and innovation," and IKEA "To create a better everyday life for the many people." Find some other brand promises to include as well. After sharing, let students vote on whether they feel like the brand represented has kept their promise. Today we are going to see how God kept His promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to bless them and bless all nations through the coming of Jesus Christ—God's promised Messiah.

D4



CONVERSATION

Read Luke 1:26-29.

Luke, having just described another birth announcement, that of John the Baptist, tells the story of another, even more important, birth announcement—that of the Messiah, Jesus Christ. As Gabriel laid out in Luke 1:17, John the Baptist’s ultimate purpose would be to prepare for One coming after him who was more powerful than him (Luke 3:16).

.03 HOW DID GABRIEL GREET MARY (V. 28)? WHAT WAS SIGNIFICANT ABOUT THIS GREETING?

Gabriel’s encounter with Mary stands out from his encounter with Zechariah (Luke 1:11-20) in that his encounter with Mary includes a greeting. Gabriel calls her “favored,” a phrase that is also used in Ephesians 1:6 to refer to the free grace of God given to believers on the basis of God’s love rather than our good works. While it might have been difficult for her to see, Mary was a recipient of God’s undeserved grace. God had chosen her for an incredibly important task. She would give birth to a man who would be God’s greatest gift to the world, the one through whom He would fulfill His promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to bless all the nations of the world.



Historical Context: *What do you know about Nazareth? Why do you think God chose Nazareth as the place where Jesus, the Messiah, would grow up? See the Historical Context information in the Commentary.*

.04 WHY DO YOU THINK MARY WAS TROUBLED (V. 29) BEFORE SHE HEARD THE NEWS FROM GABRIEL?

.05 HOW DO YOU THINK MARY WOULD HAVE FELT ABOUT BEING PREGNANT IN THESE CIRCUMSTANCES IN ANCIENT ISRAEL? WHAT DIFFICULTIES DID SHE FACE AS A RESULT OF THIS NEWS?

When angels appear to people in Scripture, the response is almost always fear as they are representatives of the God of the universe who is holy beyond compare (Isa. 40:18-29).



COMMENTARY

Luke 1:26-29

26-27. Six months after announcing Elizabeth's pregnancy (Luke 1:13), Gabriel made another visit. Instead of stopping at Jerusalem, the angel visited the lowly town of *Nazareth*. Jews who lived there were often met with ridicule by other Jews. For example, when told that Jesus was from Nazareth, Nathanael questioned if anything good could come from there (John 1:45-46). The lack of respect given Nazareth was probably due to the unpolished dialect of its residents, lack of culture, and small size. Nazareth of Galilee seemed the least likely destination, but it was here that God sent His appointed messenger. God often uses places and people that many would overlook (Isa. 57:15; Luke 1:52).

Twice in verse 27 Mary is called a *virgin*, underscoring the fulfillment of the messianic prophecy regarding Jesus' birth (Isa. 7:14; Matt. 1:18; Luke 1:35). The importance of the virgin birth of Jesus cannot be overstated. It testifies of both His deity and His being without sin (Heb. 4:15). Not only was Mary a virgin, but she was *engaged to a man named Joseph*. In Mary's day, engagements consisted of a public ceremony before witnesses. The couple was considered legally married but did not live or sleep together. Although the woman continued living with her parents until the wedding day, the man had legal responsibility for the woman. Only death or divorce could break the engagement (Deut. 22:23-30). Both Mary and Joseph were descendants of David, but unlike David, they were poor peasants (Luke 2:24), supported by Joseph's work as a carpenter (Matt. 13:55). Out of these humble beginnings, God's promises made centuries earlier were fulfilled through Mary, reminding all believers that God will always keep His promises.



HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Luke here calls Nazareth a "town." It was off the main trade routes and was relatively small in comparison to Jerusalem, where Gabriel's previous appearance foretelling of the birth of John the Baptist had taken place. According to John 1:46, it must have had a reputation for being insignificant. And yet, this is the place God chose for Jesus, the Messiah, to grow up. The choice of Nazareth, however, should not surprise us as it is in keeping with the upside-down nature of Christ's kingdom (see Phil. 2:5-11).

28-29. How did Mary respond to Gabriel's message? She was *deeply troubled* or perplexed, as anyone would be who received such a message from God's angels. The divine message from God's divine messenger stirred up confusion in the young teenage girl, causing her mind to race with all kinds of questions.

Because of His great love for His creation, God took the initiative and revealed His plan of redemption. Through Mary, God would bring His Son into the world, so that people everywhere can live eternally with Him, showing that poor reputations and humble beginnings are no match for the grace of God.

DA



CONVERSATION

continued

According to religious law, Joseph had the right to divorce Mary publicly or privately for the adultery her pregnancy would have represented in Joseph's mind. In Matthew's account of Jesus' birth, we learn Joseph was a righteous man whose desire to follow God's law, combined with his mercy, led him to seek private divorce, until the angel told him the full story (Matt. 1:18-20). In an instant, Mary's plans for her life were derailed. The quiet life she had imagined with her future husband was suddenly and dramatically put off course. In the moment, it was probably difficult for Mary to see that God was going to bring about the greatest act of love the world has ever known through the child she was about to give birth to. Despite the angel's presence and his assurance that she was in God's favor, Mary's initial response to the angel was an honest one: "How will this be?"

Read Luke 1:30-33.



Literary Context: Consider asking students what comes to mind when they think of angels. Some might be likely to think of angels as cute and friendly winged-creatures, but this isn't biblical—see the Literary Context note in the Commentary for more information.

.06 HOW DID THE ANGEL RESPOND TO MARY'S FEARS (V. 30)? WHAT HAD MARY DONE TO FIND FAVOR WITH GOD?

Given that Gabriel was a spiritual being and a representative of the most high God, the fact that he follows up his greeting with the words, "Do not be afraid," is very good news because God's perfect love drives out fear (1 John 4:17-18). Mary had found favor with God. Up to this point in Luke's gospel, all we know about Mary is that she was a virgin. In other words, we are not given any indication that she did anything to earn her status as having found "favor with God." Mary was a recipient of God's grace, which is not dependent on our good behavior, social status, or abilities. God's message to Mary was one of love and acceptance rooted in God's character, not in Mary's performance, giving her the strength she needed to embrace the life God called her to.

.07 HOW DID THE ANGEL DESCRIBE THE CHILD MARY WAS GOING TO GIVE BIRTH TO (VV. 31-33)? WHY WAS THIS SUCH GOOD NEWS?

Mary's son would be named *Jesus*—a name indicating His role as the one who would save His people from their sins (Matt. 1:21). He would be great, but unlike John the Baptist (Luke 1:15), Jesus' greatness is not qualified—He simply is great. This Jesus was and is the Son of God and the Messiah from the line of David, who reigns forever (2 Sam. 7:12-14; Ps. 2:7-9). As we have been studying the life of Jacob, it is important to note that Gabriel said that Jesus would "reign over the house of Jacob forever." God's promises to Abraham, which were extended to Jacob, would ultimately be fulfilled in Jesus.



COMMENTARY

Luke 1:30-33



LITERARY CONTEXT

Popular culture's depiction of angels as cute winged babies or friendly strangers leave most people with misconceptions about them. According to the Bible, angels are personal spiritual beings with intelligence, emotions, and wills. Angels that are servants of God (there are fallen angels such as Satan and the demons) are often seen ministering to people (Gen. 21:17, 18:2, 19:16, 31:11). However, angels in the Bible are also seen carrying out God's judgment on people for their sin (Gen. 19:13; Ex. 12:23; 1 Chron. 21:15-16). And furthermore, when God's people had encounters with the angel of the Lord, their hearts were filled with fear (Ex. 3:1-6; Jude 6:11-23; Judg. 13:21-22).

30-31. Repeating what he told Zechariah in verse 13, Gabriel told Mary not to fear. Jesus would repeat those same words, spoken at His conception, throughout His earthly ministry (Matt. 14:27; 17:7) as He replaced fear with faith in the hearts of His people. Experiencing God's favor, Mary had no reason to fear because God's plans are always good for those who respond to Him.

In the Bible, names often have meanings, describing a person's path or future. The name *Jesus* means "Yahweh is Salvation," indicating the reason He left heaven for earth. Foretold long before His birth, the first mention of the coming of Jesus took place in the Garden of Eden when God judged the serpent for deceiving Eve and Adam (Gen. 3:15). Jesus was not God's Plan B. The birth of Jesus was part of His plan of salvation from the beginning. His coming was mentioned when Isaiah the prophet provided a fuller description of God's plan (Isa. 9:2-7; 11:1-2). In the fullness of time, Jesus was born just as God promised (Gal. 4:4).

When God makes a promise, He fulfills it completely. His Word is trustworthy and reliable. While the words of humankind pass away, God's words permanently remain.

32-33. What makes the birth of Jesus the greatest birth in the history of humanity? Gabriel outlined four reasons for His greatness. First, Jesus is *the Son of the Most High*, meaning the Supreme God. As Mary's son, Jesus would be fully human; as the Son of the Most High, He would be fully God. The reason for Jesus' greatness was not because He was Mary's son, but because He was God's Son. Second, Jesus' greatness is seen in that *God will give him the throne of his father David*, fulfilling God's covenant of a perpetual kingdom from David's lineage (2 Sam. 7:13-16). Third, Jesus is great because he *will reign over the house of Jacob forever*, fulfilling God's covenant with Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3). The phrase *house of Jacob* refers to the nation Israel. With the birth of Jesus, God would fulfill all His promises to the patriarchs of old. Fourth, Jesus is great because *his kingdom will have no end* (Rev. 17:14; 19:16).

DAY 4



CONVERSATION

continued

Read Luke 1:34-38.

.08 WHAT DO WE LEARN ABOUT MARY FROM HER QUESTION IN VERSE 34 AND HER STATEMENT IN VERSE 38? WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

.09 HOW DID GABRIEL ANSWER MARY'S QUESTION (VV. 35-37)? HOW MIGHT THIS HAVE EMPOWERED MARY TO EMBRACE GOD'S PLAN?

Mary's question does not seem to have been motivated by a lack of faith. Mary was understandably confused as to how all these things would come about given that she was a virgin. This can be seen in how Gabriel responds to her question by promising her that God, the Holy Spirit, would accomplish these things. Gabriel even gives Mary a sign by informing her that her barren cousin, Elizabeth, was also pregnant. Indeed, as Gabriel pointed out, "nothing is impossible with God" and when Mary hears these words she responds with holy resolve to submit to God's plan despite the social difficulties she would surely face from being found pregnant.

.10 WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM MARY'S EXAMPLE? ABOUT TRUSTING GOD'S WORD? ABOUT EMBRACING THE MISSION GOD HAS GIVEN US?

Share with students that God does not promise them an easy, trouble-free life. Students can, however, rest in the knowledge that nothing is impossible with God. Mary was able to embrace the confusing and difficult path God laid out for her because she knew her story was not ultimately about her, it was about God's glory, grace, and plan of redemption. The same is true for us—if we have truly trusted Jesus, our life stories are not ultimately about us, but rather about God's glory, grace, and mission to redeem sinners like us.

Leader Pack / ITEM 6: Display the **Luke 1:33** verse poster in your room this week as a reminder of God's faithfulness to His promises.



COMMENTARY

Luke 1:34-38

34-35. Unlike Zechariah’s response of unbelief, Mary’s response was one of wanting details; she questioned how God could perform such a miracle. Gabriel’s answer was straightforward. Through the *power of the Holy Spirit*, God would *overshadow* her.

Gabriel pointed out that Jesus’ birth was holy, calling Him *the holy one*. This birth was holy because of its design. The Spirit of God formed this child in His mother’s womb, apart from natural conception. Moreover, this birth was holy because of its Designer. God’s holiness was part of Jesus’ DNA. This was no ordinary child. This Child was Deity—God’s very own Son, the Savior of the world.

36. Gabriel offered evidence of God’s divine authority over the human body, telling Mary about Elizabeth’s pregnancy. Saddled with the stigma of being childless in a culture that valued large families, God granted Elizabeth’s request for a child. During a time when Mary would be ridiculed for bearing a child that was not Joseph’s, God gave Mary a relative who could relate to her and be a source of comfort, shelter, and encouragement.

37. Before leaving, Gabriel assured Mary, *nothing will be impossible with God*. Centuries earlier, Abraham and Sarah heard this same message when the angels informed them they would have a son in their old age (Gen. 18:14). As an adult, Jesus would make this same declaration regarding salvation (Luke 18:27). Believers can have confidence that Jesus is the Son of God who came to save those who follow Him. Only Jesus can fill empty hearts with inexpressible joy.

38. With an attitude of total surrender, Mary gave herself over to God’s will. *Then the angel left her*, perhaps ascending Jacob’s ladder (Gen. 28:12). The word translated *servant* literally means slave, not handmaiden or servant. It’s the same word used by Paul (Rom. 1:1), James (Jas. 1:1), Peter (2 Pet. 1:1), Jude (Jude 1:1), and John (Rev. 1:1), describing their relationship with Christ. The word paints a clear picture of the believer’s relationship with the Lord. With His blood, Jesus redeemed or purchased the believer’s salvation. As a result, every believer belongs to Him. When God speaks, the only acceptable response is willing obedience with a humble commitment to serve Him, as Mary did.

04 CENTRAL TRUTH

Jesus is God's promised Messiah and the one who ultimately fulfills God's promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

NOW WHAT?

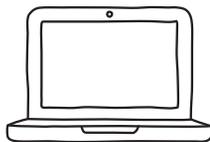


.11 HOW HAS YOUR HEART OR THE HEART OF SOMEONE CLOSE TO YOU BEEN TROUBLED LATELY? HOW MIGHT REMINDING OURSELVES AND OTHERS OF GOD'S PROMISES HELP US IN THE MIDST OF TROUBLE?

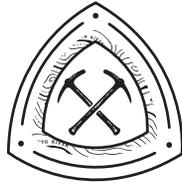
.12 HOW DID GOD'S PLAN IN MARY'S LIFE CHANGE EVERYTHING? HOW DO YOU SEE GOD WORKING IN YOUR LIFE TODAY?

.13 HOW DID KNOWING NOTHING IS IMPOSSIBLE WITH GOD EMPOWER MARY? HOW DOES THIS TRUTH COMFORT OR EMPOWER YOU TO EMBRACE THE MISSION TO GO AND MAKE DISCIPLES (MATT. 28:18-20)?

.14 IN WHAT WAYS DO YOU NEED TO TRUST GOD AND SUBMIT TO HIM LIKE MARY DID? HOW MIGHT WE ENCOURAGE FRIENDS, PEERS, AND OTHERS?



For an expository verse-by-verse sermon outline/discussion guide that complements this session by diving into Luke 1-11, see LifeWay.com/etbwin19luke. For free training, go to MinistryGrid.com/web/ExploreTheBible.



Daily DEVOTIONS

Challenge your students to choose five days this week to set aside time to dig deeper into God's Word in the devotions included in their Daily Discipleship Guides (item 005646504). These devotions are perforated so that your students can tear them out if you prefer to hold on to their Daily Discipleship Guides for them. A summary of their devotions is provided below so you can review what they will be studying on their own.

Day One LUKE 1:26-38

While she was initially troubled by her meeting with the angel Gabriel, Mary fully submitted to God's will and plan (v. 38). Her son, Jesus, would be the promised Messiah who would fulfill God's promise to establish His forever kingdom on earth.

Day Two LUKE 1:39-56

Mary was overwhelmed by God's grace in choosing her to participate in the coming of King Jesus, and also by the promise that God's kingdom was indeed coming to earth. However, such thoughts did not fill her heart with pride, but with humility. She was overwhelmed by the undeserved kindness of God.

Day Three GENESIS 30:22-24

God remembered Rachel (v. 22). This is what theologians call an "anthropomorphism." The Bible is describing God in human terms for our benefit even though He is far greater than any human. It is not as though He suddenly stopped and recalled that Rachel was barren. God remembered in the sense that He looked on her situation and chose to bless her with what her heart desired most.

Day Four GENESIS 30:25-36

Laban and Jacob's relationship was marked by tension from the very beginning when Laban tricked Jacob into marrying Leah first, and then worked it to where he got 14 years of labor out of him. Understandably, Jacob would want to get some space between the two of them. Here we see God keep His promise to extend the promise of Abraham to Jacob (Gen. 28:14).

Day Five GENESIS 30:37-43

Jacob and Laban's contentious relationship continued as Jacob attempted to control the breeding process of Laban's flocks of sheep and goats so as to benefit himself. This is an odd story—there was nothing about the sticks that Jacob placed beside the watering troughs that should have had any impact on the flocks, and yet the strong animals kept winding up in Jacob's care and the weak in Laban's.



Challenge TO LEADERS

Memorize.

Luke 1:33

Connect.

Encourage students to complete the Daily Devotions included in the Daily Discipleship Guide. Check in with them mid-week to remind them of the devotions and challenge them to set aside time five days this week to read and study God's Word.