

FINDING PEACE IN HIS PURPOSE
BIG IDEA: God used faithful people to achieve His purpose of redemption through Jesus.
DATE: Sunday, December 6, 2026
SCRIPTURE: Luke 1:5-38 (CSB)

OPENING QUESTION

What's your favorite "unexpected" detail in the story of Jesus' birth? In another story from Scripture?

Why do you think God chooses to work in ways that surprise us? What's one unexpected way God has worked in your life lately?

The Gospel of Luke begins with an angel promising the births of John the Baptist and Jesus. As we study, we'll see a common theme develop—God's use of the unexpected to bring Jesus into the world. Scripture from Genesis to Revelation shows that God often works in unexpected ways, just as He does in our lives today.

Today we will see how two birth announcements were "unexpected interruptions" to their parents.

THE SETTING

Luke wrote his Gospel to give "an orderly account" of how God kept His promise to send a Deliverer who saves people from their sins. Throughout the book, he presents Jesus as that Deliverer—the perfect human and Savior. This opening chapter pairs two birth announcements: one to Zechariah, a respected priest in Jerusalem's temple, and one to Mary, a humble girl in a Galilean village. Together they show that Jesus both continues the prophetic tradition and is uniquely the Messiah and Son of God. Zechariah and Elizabeth teach us to bring both our questions and our rejoicing to God, and Mary shows that God works through anyone willing, however unassuming.

SCRIPTURE

Luke 1:5-38 (CSB)

5 In the days of King Herod of Judea, there was a priest of Abijah's division named Zechariah. His wife was from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. 6 Both were righteous in

God's sight, living without blame according to all the commands and requirements of the Lord. [7]But they had no children because Elizabeth could not conceive, and both of them were well along in years.

[8]When his division was on duty and he was serving as priest before God, [9]it happened that he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to enter the sanctuary of the Lord and burn incense. [10]At the hour of incense the whole assembly of the people was praying outside. [11]An angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing to the right of the altar of incense. [12]When Zechariah saw him, he was terrified and overcome with fear. [13]But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, because your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will name him John. [14]There will be joy and delight for you, and many will rejoice at his birth. [15]For he will be great in the sight of the Lod and will never drink wine or beer. He will be filled with the Holy Spirit while still in his mother's womb. [16]He will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. [17]And he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of fathers to their children, and the disobedient to the understanding of the righteous, to make ready for the Lord a prepared people."

[18]"How can I know this?" Zechariah asked the angel. "For I am an old man, and my wife is well along in years." [19]The angel answered him, "I am Gabriel who stands in the presence of God, and I was sent to speak to you and tell you this good news. [20]Now listen. You will become silent and unable to speak until the day these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their proper time."

[21]Meanwhile, the people were waiting for Zechariah, amazed that he stayed so long in the sanctuary. [22]When he did come out, he could not speak to them. Then they realized that he has seen a vision in the sanctuary. He was making signs to them and remained speechless. [23]When the days of his ministry were completed, he went back home. [24]Afther these days his wife Elizabeth conceived and kept herself in seclusion for five months. She said, [25]"The Lord has done this for me. He has looked with favor in these days to take away my disgrace among the people."

BIBLE STUDY

READ: LUKE 1:5-25

Enlist people to act out the scene as they read it aloud. You will need a narrator, an angel, Zechariah and Elizabeth. Enlist a married couple if possible. You will find the scripts in your packet.

What characteristics of Zechariah and Elizabeth made them good candidates for a special assignment from God?

Zechariah and his wife Elizabeth lived rightly before God, obeyed the laws, and met the expectations of the Lord. Unfortunately, they were childless. Zechariah had reached an advanced age and yet continued to serve God faithfully even though God seemingly had not answered his prayer for a child.

What do you do when your prayers go unanswered? How is your relationship with God affected?

ASK: What emotions did Zechariah experience when Gabriel appeared? Put yourself in the place of the two parents. What would you think and feel as you listened to the angel?

ASK: How did the angel say John's birth and life would affect his parents and others?

The nature of John's ministry was to bring God's people back to the Lord. He would serve as the forerunner of the Messiah, through whom God's kingdom would break into human history.

Why did Zechariah doubt the angel's word that he would have a son (v. 18)? How can you relate to his reaction? What was the angel's response?

LEADERS, READ: LUKE 1:26-38 *(This passage is not provided in the Discussion Guides due to space; invite your group to look up this passage to follow along)*

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]" See, I am the Lord's servant," said Mary. "May it happen to me as you have said." Then the angel left her.

What parallels do you see between these verses predicting Jesus' birth and the previous set of verses predicting John the Baptist's birth?

In both stories we get an introduction to the parents, angelic prophecies, signs, statements about each child's mission, and unexpected pregnancies. We also see affirmation of God's grace at work. Elizabeth acknowledged God's favor in her life (v. 25) and the angel described Mary as "highly favored" by God. This favor wasn't based on either woman's merit, but on God's grace in their lives.

In what ways do you sometimes take God's grace for granted? What do our day-to-day lives reveal about our appreciation for God's grace?

ASK: Why do you think Mary was troubled? What dangers did she face?

Mary was betrothed to Joseph, which made them legally husband and wife even though the marriage wasn't finalized. Discuss what possible legal and social consequences Mary and Joseph might have faced as a result of her being pregnant out of wedlock.

ASK: What did the angel's description of the child (vv. 31-33) mean to a Jewish person at the time of Jesus' birth? What does it mean to people today?

ASK: What attitudes are revealed by Mary's question (v. 34) and statement (v. 38)? Why did Mary refer to herself as a servant? Why do people shy away from the idea of submitting to God like a servant?

How did Mary's reaction to the angel's news compare with Zechariah's reaction in Luke 1:11-18? What are a few key differences between *questioning* God (as Zechariah did) and *asking* questions of Him (like Mary)?

Zechariah didn't believe God's ability to give him and his wife a son, and he asked for a sign to prove God's words were true. Mary voiced confusion over the logistics of how she'd have a child, but she never acknowledged skepticism or doubt. These two responses show us an important distinction between questioning God and asking questions of Him.

APPLICATION

The angel told Mary, "Nothing is impossible with God." What feels impossible about your life right now? When God moves in unexpected ways we too can find peace in His purpose.

Close your group time in prayer, asking God to strengthen our faith and our courage to obey Him even through times of interrupted expectations. Thank Him for sending Jesus and for the salvation available through Him. Pray that God will open our eyes to Jesus' identity and His work in our lives through our study of Luke.

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COMMENTARY

LUKE 1:1-38
Luke began his narrative about the events of Jesus' life and ministry with a formal preface. This was a common practice in historical works of Luke's era. A number of others had previously written about the life and works of Jesus. This may include the Gospels of Mark and Matthew since they preceded Luke's writing. "Events... fulfilled among us" speaks of how Jesus fulfilled many Old Testament prophecies. Original eyewitnesses included Mary, the mother of Jesus, about whom Luke wrote more than any other New Testament author. **Luke's stated purpose in writing his Gospel** was to provide historical certainty and theological clarity for Theophilus in regard to what he had been taught about Jesus.

1:5-7 Zechariah was of the line of Aaron, Israel's first high priest. Elizabeth, too, was a descendant of Aaron. Luke pointed out that they were upright in the sight of God and not just in outward appearance. Luke underscored Zechariah's and Elizabeth's dedication by declaring that this couple blamelessly followed both God's commandments and His regulations. This couple had committed themselves to faithfully follow God's will. Luke indicated that they had no children. Zechariah and Elizabeth's childlessness caused them great sorrow and perhaps even produced in them a sense of inferiority. The reference to Zechariah and Elizabeth's childlessness along with their advanced ages points to the human impossibility of the birth of a son and emphasizes the miraculous nature of God's intervention in their lives with the birth of John the Baptist.

1:11-13 Zechariah encountered an angel of the Lord in the holy place. The term translated "appeared" often denotes divine manifestation. Of course, the elderly priest was startled at the angel's sudden arrival. Zechariah also was gripped with fear. The angel, seeing Zechariah's discomfort, quickly told him not to be afraid. Then the angel revealed his reason for being there. The angel told Zechariah that his prayer had been heard and was about to be answered. Both the prayer for a child and the prayer for the Messiah would receive an answer in the same event, for their son would prepare the way for the Messiah. The angel instructed Zechariah to name that son John. John means "the LORD has been gracious." Probably this name underscored God's grace as it was being extended either to Zechariah in giving him a son or, more likely, to Israel in sending the Messiah.

1:14-17 Then the angel informed Zechariah of the effect of his son's ministry. John would be a joy and delight to his father and mother. Further, many others would rejoice because of his birth. The people of Israel longed for a prophetic voice for they had not heard one for centuries. John would be that voice. The Savior about whom John would witness would bring and still is bringing joy to people throughout the world. The angel then stated certain characteristics that would lie behind John's effective ministry. John would be filled with the Holy Spirit even from birth.

1:18-20 Zechariah asked for some assurance regarding the truth of the angel's message. He protested that he and his wife were too old to produce a child. This expression of unbelief strongly displeased the heavenly messenger. The angel insisted he, Gabriel, had come to the temple from the presence of God to tell Zechariah "this good news." Gabriel announced that Zechariah would be unable to speak until the day when the imparted prophecy had been fulfilled.

1:26-27 The announcement of Jesus' birth carried the authority of God. It came in the sixth month, a reference to the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy with John the Baptist. Both that message and this one came through God's authorized representative—the angel Gabriel. The truth of this announcement came from the highest source. The term virgin emphasized the purity associated with a young, unmarried woman. Although engaged to a man named Joseph, Mary did not yet live with Joseph. In first-century Jewish culture, engagement (or betrothal) bound them together legally as husband and wife. The wedding and consummation of the marriage, however, followed at a later time. Luke identified Mary's husband, Joseph, as a member of the house of David. The Jews knew from the Scriptures that the future Messiah would be a descendant of the great King David. This fact supported the identification of Jesus as King. The Child to be born, then, would be identified with the lineage through which the Messiah had been promised (see Isa. 9:6-7; 11:1-5).

1:28-31 The angel greeted Mary with the words, "Rejoice, favored woman! The Lord is with you." Mary, a normal Galilean girl, received favored status not because she was in some way unique or sinless but because God selected her for a high honor. Gabriel delivered a shocking message to the young Mary. She would conceive and give birth to a son. The idea of conception by a woman not yet married made this a hard statement to accept. The angel even provided the name of the Child—Jesus. The name Jesus means "Deliverer, Savior."

1:32-33 With this verse Luke began a description of who Jesus is. His greatness indicated that He would be more than human. Normally the term "great" referred to God. The exalted title "Son of the Most High" also connected Jesus with God. As Most High, God reigns over all creation. As a descendant of King David, Jesus would occupy the great king's throne to carry on the just and righteous reign of God on earth (see Isa. 9:7; Dan. 7:14). These titles look to Jesus as the Messiah and emphasize His divine nature. Jesus' reign as Messiah-King will last forever. It will be a kingdom

with no end. The eternal reign coincided with the Old Testament view of the Messiah. The phrase "house of Jacob" stood for Israel as a nation. Luke, however, understood God's people to be all who by faith gave God authority over their lives. Thus, Jesus came to establish Himself as King over a kingdom not limited by earthly boundaries.

1:34-35 Mary took in the angel's comments about the Child to come. Her question about it, however, set up the further explanation offered in verse 35. She questioned how a virgin could conceive and give birth. The Holy Spirit, the third Person of the Godhead, is God present in His power. He acted to make the conception happen apart from the normal biological process. Mary's human abilities played no part in this process. She simply made herself available to God. Luke identified the Child as the holy One. Only God makes things holy. "Holiness" indicates something or someone set aside by God to be used to accomplish His purpose.

1:36-38 The angel urged Mary to consider the case of her relative Elizabeth. He offered further evidence of God's power to assure Mary. God enabled a childless woman to give birth and a virgin to be pregnant. Mary made herself available for God to work through her. She accepted slave status, which meant total submission and obedience. Nothing else needed to be said after Mary's affirmation of faith. So the angel left her. This departure indicated the settlement of the matter in Mary's heart. Things could move forward.