

## ENGAGE

- As you approach the text you may find these thoughts to be helpful?
  - We have come through the Christmas season and covered Mary's Song and The 20 verses of Luke chapter 2.
  - Time does not need to be given to these passages, other than how they relate to where the sermon is going. There are two predictions, two births and two songs.
  - My focus will be related to the sanctity of life. God's foreknowledge of each life, John leaping at the encounter with the Christ in the womb, and the song of celebration that each life brings.
  - You might focus on Zacharias' response and consequence to unbelief followed by his song of rejoicing.
  - You may wish to focus on Elizabeth's encounter with Mary and the fetus, John, leaping.
  - Over 300 prophecies were fulfilled by Jesus, so you may wish to focus on God's promises and fulfillment in Christ

## EXAMINE

### 1. (Luk 1:5-7) The time and people beginning the history of the life of Jesus.

There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the division of Abijah. His wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and they were both well advanced in years.

a. These first events happened in a certain time: in the days of Herod. This is the man known as Herod the Great, who was at the end of a long and terrible reign. Ethnically, he was not a descendant of Israel, but of Jacob's brother Esau-and Edomite, or an Idumean. He was known for his spectacular building programs, but even more so for his paranoid cruelty, which drove him to execute many, including members of his own family.

### Sources

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b. These first events happened to certain people: to Zacharias and Elizabeth, who were righteous and obedient, yet stigmatized with barrenness (but they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren).

c. Of the division of Abijah: Priestly divisions (including the division of Abijah) are noted in 1 Chronicles 23-24.

## 2. (Luk 1:8-10) Zacharias' temple service.

So it was, that while he was serving as priest before God in the order of his division, according to the custom of the priesthood, his lot fell to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord. And the whole multitude of the people was praying outside at the hour of incense.

a. According to the custom of the priesthood, his lot fell to burn incense: Only priests from a particular lineage could serve in the temple. Over the years the number of priests multiplied, (there were said to be as many as 20,000 priests in the time of Jesus) so they had to use the lot to determine which priests would serve when. The lot to serve in the time might fall to a priest only once in his life.

i. To a godly man like Zacharias, this would be the biggest event of his life, a tremendous privilege, a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Surely, Zacharias must have wondered what it would be like to enter the holy place. And he must have wondered if God has something special to communicate to him in that special event of his life.

ii. It is also easy to imagine Zacharias asking the other priests who had already burned incense before the Lord what it was like; asking them if they had any unique spiritual experience when they were ministering before the Lord. This whole event was filled with enormous anticipation.

b. To burn incense: According to the Law of Moses, incense was offered to God on the golden altar every morning and every evening (Exodus 30:7-8). By this time, there was an established ritual for the practice.

i. There were several lots cast to determine who did what at the morning sacrifice. The first lot determined who would cleanse the altar and prepare its fire; the second lot determined who would kill the morning sacrifice and sprinkle the altar, the golden candlestick, and the altar of

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incense. The third lot determined who would come and offer incense. This was the most privileged duty; those who received the first and second lots would repeat their duty at the evening sacrifice, but not with the third lot. To offer the incense would be a once in a lifetime opportunity.

ii. Before dawn, hundreds of worshippers gathered at the temple. The morning sacrifice began when the incense priest walked toward the temple, through the outer courts, he struck a gong-like instrument known as the Magrephah. At this sound, the Levites assembled and got ready to lead the gathered people in songs of worship to God.

iii. The other two priests chosen by lot that morning walked up to the temple on each side of the priest chosen to offer the incense. All three entered the holy place together. One priest set burning coals on the golden altar; the other priest arranged the incense so it was ready to go. Then those two priests left the temple, and the incense priest was left all alone in the holy place.

iv. In front of him was the golden altar of incense; it was 18 inches square and 3 feet high. On that small table lay the burning coals, with little wisps of smoke rising up, ready for the incense. Behind the gold altar was a huge, thick curtain, and behind that curtain was the Holy of Holies, the Most Holy Place, where no man could enter, except the high priest, and that only on the Day of Atonement. As he faced the golden altar of incense, to his right would be the table of showbread, and to his left would be the golden lampstand, which provided the only light for the holy place.

c. And the whole multitude of the people was praying outside at the hour of incense: When the people outside saw the two men exit the temple, they knew that the time to offer the incense had come. Those hundreds of people bowed or kneeled before the Lord, and spread their hands out in silent prayer. They knew that at that moment the incense priest prayed in the holy place, in the very presence of God, for the entire nation.

i. There followed several minutes of dead silence in all the temple precincts-as Zacharias lingered in prayer in the holy place during this, the most solemn experience of his life.

ii. The connection between the burning of incense and prayer might seem strange to some, but in the Bible the burning of incense is a strong picture of prayer (Psalm 141:2; Revelation 5:8).

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ii. What did Zacharias pray for? He must have thought about it carefully beforehand. He may have even taken out a prayer list, though it is more likely he memorized it. He also knew how long to pray, because he had attended the morning sacrifice as a worshipper many times before, and he knew how long the incense priest stayed in the temple. He must have prayed for both needs of the nation of Israel, which was occupied and oppressed by the hated Romans. He must have prayed for God to send the Messiah. He probably would have thought it wrong to throw in his personal needs at such a holy moment!

### 3. (Luk 1:11-17) The angel's announcement to Zacharias.

Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing on the right side of the altar of incense. And when Zacharias saw him, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him. But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your prayer is heard; and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. "And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth. For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink. He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, 'to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,' and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

a. Then an angel of the Lord appeared: The angel simply stood on the right side of the altar of incense. Zacharias probably had his eyes tightly shut in passionate prayer, and when he opened them he saw this angel.

b. When Zacharias saw him, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him: No wonder why! The angel who appeared to Zacharias was not a romantic figure, or a naked baby with wings. This angel was a glorious, fearful, and an awesome creature. Like most angels in the Bible, the first thing this angel has to say to his human contact is "Do not be afraid."

i. Zacharias must have thought, "Does this happen to everyone who does this? The other guys didn't tell me anything about this!"

c. Your prayer is heard; and your wife Elizabeth will bear a son: It is very doubtful that Zacharias prayed for a son when he was at the golden altar of incense. First, it might have seemed like such a "selfish" need. Second, since he and Elizabeth were both well advanced in years (Luke 1:7), they had probably given up on this prayer a long time ago.

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i. Sometime we pray for something for a long, long time. We pray for the salvation of a spouse or a child. We pray for a calling or a ministry. We pray that God would bring that special person to us. But after years of heartfelt prayer, we give up out of discouragement. Zacharias and Elizabeth probably prayed years of passionate prayer for a son, but gave up a long time ago, and stopped believing God for so much anymore.

ii. When we are in that place, we sometimes begin - in the smallest of ways - to doubt the love and care of God for us. But God always loves, and His care never stops.

iii. Zacharias' reaction to the angel's promise was probably thinking, "I don't know what you are talking about. I didn't pray for a son. We're old, you know. I gave up on that prayer a long time ago. I'm praying for the salvation of Israel. I'm praying that God will send the promised Messiah." Zacharias didn't know that God would answer both prayers at once, and use his miracle baby to be a part of sending the Messiah!

iv. Zacharias had no idea that God would answer the two greatest desires of his heart at once. He had probably completely given up on the idea of being a dad; it was a hope that was crushed over the years of disappointment. But God hadn't given up on it, even though Zacharias and Elizabeth had.

d. You shall call his name John: The boy was given a name before he was even conceived. This was a command from the Lord to name the boy John.

e. His son John would be great in the sight of the Lord, and would drink neither wine nor strong drink, a probable reference to the vow of a Nazirite found in Numbers 6. John would be specially consecrated to God all the days of his life, as Samson should have been.

i. Though John would be great in the sight of the Lord, by the grace of God, he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he (Matthew 11:11).

f. Most importantly, John would have a unique filling of the Holy Spirit-being filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb.

i. Calvin, on John being filled with the Holy Spirit from the womb: "Let us learn by this example that, from the earliest infancy to the latest old age, the operation of the Spirit in men is free."

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g. His ministry would be to turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. He would prepare the way of the Messiah by turning hearts to God before the Messiah came. The pattern for his ministry would be the great prophet Elijah - will go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah. Jesus later said this was fulfilled in John (Matthew 11:14 and 17:12).

h. To turn the hearts of the fathers to the children: This quotation from Malachi 4:5-6 is meaningful for more than its reference to Elijah. These were essentially the last words in the Old Testament, and now God's revelation is resuming where it had left off.

i. Elijah was a man who called Israel to a radical repentance (1 Kings 18:20-40).

#### 4. (Luk 1:18-20) Zacharias' doubt and muteness.

And Zacharias said to the angel, "How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is well advanced in years." And the angel answered and said to him, "I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, and was sent to speak to you and bring you these glad tidings. But behold, you will be mute and not able to speak until the day these things take place, because you did not believe my words which will be fulfilled in their own time."

a. How shall I know this? For I am an old man and my wife is well advanced in years: Zacharias' attitude was, "Thanks for the promise, angel. But knowing the condition of my wife and I, this is a big one. Can you give us a sign to prove it?"

i. It isn't that Zacharias doesn't want to believe this; he does. It is simply that he feels it must be too good to be true, and he has probably protected himself from disappointment by not setting his expectations too high. We rob ourselves of many a miracle by the same attitude.

ii. Zacharias looked at the circumstances first, and what God can do last; we are tempted to think this is logical; but if God is real, there is nothing logical about putting circumstances before God.

b. I am Gabriel who stands in the presence of God: Gabriel reminds Zacharias of who he is and where he has come from. There is a big contrast between I am an old man and I am Gabriel-

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which held more weight? Gabriel also "preaches the gospel" to Zacharias (brings you glad tidings).

i. It was nothing but good news to Zacharias that he would not only have a son, but that the son would have a significant role in God's plan of redemption. This is the good news that Gabriel brought to Zacharias.

ii. This gives a better idea of what it really means to preach to gospel-it is to bring good news to people who need it.

c. If there is no Zacharias, there is no John the Baptist. If there is no John the Baptist, there is no herald announcing the coming of the Messiah. If there is no herald announcing the coming of the Messiah, the prophecies in the Old Testament regarding the Messiah are unfulfilled. If any of the prophecies of the Old Testament regarding the first coming of the Messiah are unfulfilled, then Jesus did not fulfill all things. If Jesus did not fulfill all things, then He did not complete God's plan of redemption for you and I and we must perish in our sins! This was good news!

d. But behold, you will be mute and not able to speak: Zacharias paid a price for his unbelief. His unbelief did not make God take his promise back; it just kept Zacharias from enjoying it.

i. When we do not believe God's promise for our lives, we do not necessarily destroy the promise; but we do destroy our ability to enjoy the promise. What made this such a severe punishment was that Zacharias had such great news to tell.

ii. Strangely, many Christians would not consider this a punishment-they don't mind keeping quiet about the good news of Jesus.

#### **5. (Luk 1:21-23) Zacharias appears to the multitude.**

And the people waited for Zacharias, and marveled that he lingered so long in the temple. But when he came out, he could not speak to them; and they perceived that he had seen a vision in the temple, for he beckoned to them and remained speechless. And so it was, as soon as the days of his service were completed, that he departed to his own house.

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a. And the people waited for Zacharias, and marveled that he lingered so long: The custom was for the priest to come from the temple as soon as he was finished praying, to assure the people that he had not been struck dead by God. Zacharias' delay had started to make the crowd nervous.

i. After the incense priest finished, he came out of the holy place through the great doors of the temple, and met the other two priests right outside the doors. Then the incense priest raised his hands and blessed the people with the blessing from Numbers 6:24-26. The hundreds of gathered worshippers knew what to do; they responded by saying, "Blessed be the Lord God, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting."

ii. After all this, the Levites got the "praise band" started. They began with a blast from special silver trumpets; then a priest struck the cymbals, and the choir of Levites began to sing the Psalm of the day. The choir was made up of not less than twelve voices, which mingled young and old for a full range of sound and probably some great harmonies.

b. But when he came out, he could not speak to them: When Zacharias came out, he was supposed to stand on the temple steps, overlooking the crowd, and pronounce the priestly blessing on the people (Numbers 6:24-26), and the other priests would repeat it after him. But Zacharias couldn't speak!

i. Doing the best he could through hand motions, he told the story of what happened to him in the temple. It's hard to know if everyone believed him!

## **6. (Luk 1:24-25) Elizabeth's conception and joy.**

Now after those days his wife Elizabeth conceived; and she hid herself five months, saying, "Thus the Lord has dealt with me, in the days when He looked on me, to take away my reproach among people."

a. His wife Elizabeth conceived: Zacharias had normal relations with his wife; he partnered with God to fulfill the promise. He did not count on this child coming from a miraculous conception.

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b. She hid herself five months: Why did Elizabeth go away? Not to hide her pregnancy; she was gone for the first five months, the time when she would be least noticed as pregnant. She went away to spend time with the Lord, and to meditate on the destiny of the child within her.

## C. The announcement of the birth of Jesus.

### 1. (Luk 1:26-27) Gabriel is sent to Mary in Nazareth.

Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary.

a. Nazareth was a village seventy miles northeast of Jerusalem. It was a tough town, a known for its corruption and low morals.

b. Mary is said to be betrothed to Joseph. There were three stages to a Jewish wedding in that day: engagement (a formal agreement made by the fathers), betrothal (the ceremony where mutual promises are made), and marriage (approximately one year later when the bridegroom comes at an unexpected time for his bride).

i. When a couple was betrothed, they were under the obligations of faithfulness, and a divorce was required to break the betrothal. This was not a casual promise.

c. To a virgin betrothed ... the virgin's name was Mary: Mary is also said to be a virgin. There is no ambiguity about the idea here-Mary had never had sexual relations with any man.

d. If the conception of John the Baptist, the forerunner, was miraculous, how much more should we expect the conception of the Messiah to be miraculous?

### 2. (Luk 1:28-33) Gabriel's announcement to Mary.

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And having come in, the angel said to her, "Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!" But when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and considered what manner of greeting this was. Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name JESUS. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end."

a. The angel said to her: Gabriel has three things to say to Mary. First, that she is highly favored. Second, that the Lord is with her. Third, that she is blessed. All this was certainly true of Mary, who has a unique privilege among any person to ever live.

i. However, all these things are true of the believer in Jesus. We are highly favored as Mary was (Ephesians 1:6), the Lord is with us (Matthew 28:20), and we are blessed (Ephesians 1:3).

ii. The Roman Catholic prayer that begins "Hail Mary, full of grace" is accurate. Mary was full of grace, and so is the believer. But Mary's grace was a received grace, not grace to bestow to others.

b. But when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying: The fact that Mary is troubled at his saying shows her humility. Mary was surprised to hear such extravagant words used of her. Truly godly people don't go around thinking about how godly they are!

c. And bring forth a Son: The focus is not on Mary, but on a Son, to be named JESUS, which was a common name. This Son is unmistakably identified as the Messiah predicted by the Old Testament.

i. He will be great: has anyone influenced history more than Jesus Christ has?

ii. He will be called the Son of the Highest: Jesus would be the son of Mary, but not only her son; He would also be, and be known as, the Son of God.

iii. The throne of His father David: He will be the Messiah prophesied to David (2 Samuel 7:12-16), who has the rightful authority to rule over Israel, and of His kingdom there will be no end.

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d. Mary knew exactly what Gabriel was talking about because she was a woman of the word of God. When he said you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, she knew he quoted from Isaiah 7:14: the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son.

### 3. (Luk 1:34-37) Mary's question and Gabriel's response.

Then Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I do not know a man?" And the angel answered and said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God. Now indeed, Elizabeth your relative has also conceived a son in her old age; and this is now the sixth month for her who was called barren. For with God nothing will be impossible."

a. How can this be, since I do not know a man? Mary's question is logical. She asks basically the same question Zacharias asked (Luke 1:18), but his question was asked in skeptical unbelief, her question was asked in wonder-filled faith.

b. The power of the Highest will overshadow you: Gabriel answered that the power of the Highest, in the Person of the Holy Spirit, would overshadow Mary. The word overshadow means "to cover with a cloud," like the cloud of Shekinah glory (Exodus 16:10, 19:9, 24:16, 34:5, 40:34) or the cloud of transfiguration (Matthew 17:5, Mark 9:7, Luke 9:34).

i. This cloud is a visible manifestation of the glory and presence of God; this means that the same power of God that was with Moses and others in the Old Testament is now going to do a unique work in the life of Mary.

ii. "This delicate expression rules out crude ideas of a 'mating' of the Holy Spirit with Mary." (Morris)

c. That Holy One who is to be born: Because this will be the manner of His conception, He is a Holy One (different from all others), and He will be called the Son of God.

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i. This doesn't have the same impact on us today, when many people claims to be a "son of god." But Mary (and all other Jewish people from her culture) knew what this meant: this child would be equal to God (John 5:18).

ii. Jesus did not become the Son of God; He was called the Son of God, recognizing His nature from all eternity.

d. Now indeed, Elizabeth your relative has also conceived a son in her old age: With such an amazing promise, Gabriel also brings evidence-Elizabeth is pregnant. If God can do that, He can do what He promised for Mary.

i. "Though believers are satisfied with the bare word of God, yet they do not disregard any of his works which they find to be conducive to strengthen their faith." (Calvin)

e. With God nothing shall be impossible: The point is clear. More literally, one could translate this for no word of God shall be powerless. God will absolutely perform what He has said.

#### **4. (Luk 1:38) Mary's response of faith.**

Then Mary said, "Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.

a. Behold, the maidservant of the Lord! Mary first responds by agreeing with what Gabriel has said about her. She is the maidservant of the Lord, and it isn't her position to debate with her Master, but to accept what He says.

b. Let it be to me according to your word: Mary then responds with an affirmation of faith. Let it be to me according to Your word is the proper response of every believer.

i. All this took more trust in the Lord than we might think. Mary agrees to receive a pregnancy that will be seen as suspicious, and this in a culture that had a death penalty for adultery. Mary identified herself with sinners so that the purpose of God would be fulfilled.

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c. And the angel departed from her: We don't know the exact moment Jesus was conceived in the womb of Mary. It may have been when Gabriel spoke to her, or soon after. Whenever it was, Mary was overshadowed by the cloud of God's glory (Luke 1:35), and Jesus was miraculously conceived in Mary's womb. Jesus' birth from this conception is what we call the Virgin Birth.

i. When we approach the Virgin Birth, we have to agree with Paul's analysis: great is the mystery of godliness (1 Timothy 3:16). But the message of the Scriptures is clear regarding the Virgin Birth. There can be no question about the Virgin Birth, only questions about the authority of Scripture.

ii. The Virgin Birth is unique. Many mythologies have legends about a god who has sexual relations with a woman and produces offspring, but the idea of a virgin birth is unique to Christianity.

#### **D. Mary's song.**

1. (Luk 1:39-45) Mary's visit to Elizabeth.

Now Mary arose in those days and went into the hill country with haste, to a city of Judah, and entered the house of Zacharias and greeted Elizabeth. And it happened, when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, that the babe leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. Then she spoke out with a loud voice and said, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! But why is this granted to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For indeed, as soon as the voice of your greeting sounded in my ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy. Blessed is she who believed, for there will be a fulfillment of those things which were told her from the Lord."

a. The babe leaped in her womb: When Elizabeth saw Mary, her unborn child - John the Baptist-leaped, because he was filled with joy. Though John wasn't born yet, he had a spiritual awareness and could respond to the Spirit of God.

b. Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! John the Baptist had not yet been born, and Zacharias was still mute. Yet Elizabeth believes the word of the Lord given to her husband Zacharias when he was in the temple. In the temple, Gabriel told him that their promised son would make ready a people prepared for the Lord (Luke 1:17). Elizabeth

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believed it, and believed that the baby in Mary's womb was the Lord who Elizabeth's son would prepare the way for (the mother of my Lord). This faith was in Elizabeth because she was filled with the Holy Spirit.

c. Blessed is she who believed, for there will be a fulfillment of those things: Elizabeth recognized that Mary's faith played an active role in receiving the promise. God promises should never make us passive; they should prompt us to seize them by faith. Elizabeth wanted to encourage Mary's faith, so she declared "there will be a fulfillment of those things which were told her from the Lord."

## **2. (Luk 1:46-56) Mary's song of praise to the Lord.**

And Mary said: "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior. For He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant; for behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed. For He who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is His name. And His mercy is on those who fear Him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with His arm; He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He has sent away empty. He has helped His servant Israel, in remembrance of His mercy, as He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his seed forever." And Mary remained with her about three months, and returned to her house.

a. My soul magnifies the Lord: This song (often called the Magnificat, after the Latin translation of the first few words) resembles Hannah's song in 1 Samuel 2:1-10, but it also has at least 12 other allusions to the Old Testament. This means that Mary was a woman who drank deeply of God's Word. It was on her heart, and comes out through her song.

b. This song mainly celebrates God's goodness, faithfulness, and power. Mary's song shows the futility of trusting in yourself, trusting in political power, or trusting in riches. Mary's trust has been in God, and it has been rewarded.

c. My spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior: This means Mary needed a Savior, and she knew she needed a Savior. "Mary answered the Roman Catholic dogma of the immaculate conception, which holds that from the moment of her conception Mary was by God's grace 'kept free from all taint of Original Sin.' Only sinners need a Savior." (Liefeld)

### **Sources**

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## E. John the Baptist's birth.

### 1. (Luk 1:57-66) The birth and naming of John the Baptist.

Now Elizabeth's full time came for her to be delivered, and she brought forth a son. When her neighbors and relatives heard how the Lord had shown great mercy to her, they rejoiced with her. So it was, on the eighth day, that they came to circumcise the child; and they would have called him by the name of his father, Zacharias. His mother answered and said, "No; he shall be called John." But they said to her, "There is no one among your relatives who is called by this name." So they made signs to his father; what he would have him called. And he asked for a writing tablet, and wrote, saying, "His name is John." So they all marveled. Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, praising God. Then fear came on all who dwelt around them; and all these sayings were discussed throughout all the hill country of Judea. And all those who heard them kept them in their hearts, saying, "What kind of child will this be?" And the hand of the Lord was with him.

- a. She brought forth a son: The promise was fulfilled just as God said it would be. God always keeps His promises.
  
- b. They would have called him by the name of his father, Zacharias: Both Zacharias and Elizabeth knew the name of the child had to be John, according to the command from the angel (Luke 1:13).
  
- c. They made signs to his father: They treated Zacharias as if he were deaf, not mute! This must have been constantly annoying to Zacharias.
  
- d. His name is John: Now, Zacharias responds in total faith. It isn't "I think his name should be John." For Zacharias, this was recognition of a fact, not a suggestion.
  
- i. Even though he had failed before, God gave Zacharias a second chance at faith. He gives the same to us today.
  
- e. Immediately his mouth was opened: Just as Gabriel said, Zacharias can speak again. He spoke, praising God. It is fitting that Zacharias' first words were praise to God. His chastisement

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for disobedience hasn't made him bitter. It's made him want to trust God all the more, at every opportunity.

## 2. (Luk 1:67-80) Zacharias' prophecy.

Now his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied, saying: "Blessed is the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited and redeemed His people, and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of His servant David, as He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets, who have been since the world began, that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us, to perform the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember His holy covenant, the oath which He swore to our father Abraham: To grant us that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our life. And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Highest; for you will go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways, to give knowledge of salvation to His people by the remission of their sins, through the tender mercy of our God, with which the Dayspring from on high has visited us; to give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace." So the child grew and became strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his manifestation to Israel.

a. The prophetic voice of the Lord had been silent for 400 years; it is no small thing to read Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied - and he now proclaims the salvation of the Messiah and His forerunner.

i. Zacharias' song has been called the Benedictus, from its first words in the Latin translation.

b. Has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of His servant David: We know this is truly Spirit-inspired prophecy because the focus of his prophecy is the unborn Jesus, not Zacharias' new son John.

i. Zacharias doesn't even know Jesus yet, but he praises Him, he loves Him, and he is passionate about Jesus. We know so much more about Jesus than Zacharias does, so what can excuse the coldness of our hearts?

c. The child grew and became strong in spirit: The promise of God came to fruition in John's life. Why was John in the desert till the day of his manifestation? Because that is where God has trained many of His prophets.

### Sources

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## QUESTIONS

- **Read Luke 1:5-25.**
- What characteristics do you learn about Zechariah and Elizabeth (vs. 5-7)?
- What prayer of Zechariah's was heard and who heard it (v. 13)?
- Explain the role Zechariah and Elizabeth's son will play in redemptive history.
- Why was Zechariah's response in v. 18 worthy of Gabriel's rebuke & discipline?
- **Read Luke 1:26-38.**
- What characteristics do you learn about Mary (vs. 26-27)?
- Which one is most important and why?
- Explain what Gabriel says about the Son Mary will bear, especially about the themes we covered in "The Promise" series.
- What is the difference between Mary's response (v. 34) and Zechariah's response (v. 18)?
- Explain how the names of Mary's Son ("holy" "the Son of God") are connected with the means of her conception (notice the "therefore" in the middle of v. 35).
- Why does Gabriel inform Mary about Elizabeth?
- **Read Luke 1:39-45.**
- What is the connection between John leaping in Elizabeth's womb and her being filled with the Holy Spirit (remember Gabriel's message to Zechariah)?
- How did Elizabeth know Mary was pregnant with the Messiah ("mother of my Lord")?
- Compare and contrast the faith of Mary, Zechariah, and Elizabeth (cf. vs. 18, 34, 38, & 45).
- Consider what you would have done if you were Mary or Elizabeth. For example: If you were Mary, how would you have been prepared to tell Elizabeth of your pregnancy ("There was an angel, and the Holy Spirit, and I've never been with a man, and yet here I am . . .")?
- If you were Elizabeth, would you have wanted to talk about Mary's baby or your own? Etc
- **Read Luke 1:46-55.**
- Explain how a person's "soul magnifies the Lord" and "spirit rejoices in God."

### Sources

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- What is Mary revealing about herself and her state when she identifies God as “my Savior” and why is this important?
- Explain each of the 6 descriptions found in vs. 51-53 that describe how God shows mercy to those who fear Him (v. 50).
- What do you learn about God and His character from Mary’s song?
- **Read Luke 1:46-55.**
- Consider all you learned during the last 4 or 5 months in our series, “The Promise: Christ the Seed of Abraham,” and explain how Mary understands the child in her womb according to vs. 54-55.
- What do you learn about worship from Zechariah, Elizabeth, and Mary?
- In what ways does Mary’s Magnificat (vs. 46-55) instruct and encourage you in your daily walk of faith, especially in this wonderful, yet busy & distracting, time of year we call “The Christmas Season?”
- Mary’s song of praise gives evidence of her deep knowledge of Scripture. Are the times when your “soul magnifies the Lord” and your “spirit rejoices in God” fueled by such a deep knowledge of the Scriptures?
- Does such a life of worship even require such a deep knowledge of Scripture? Why or why not?

**Sources**

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