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3. Visit of the Angel

Luke 1:5-45 & 57-66

Luke 1:5 - 25 The Birth of John the Baptist Foretold

During the time when Herod was king of Judea, there lived in Judea a priest named Zechariah. He and his wife Elizabeth were good people, who had lived their lives obeying the word of God. Their one sadness was that they did not have children and they were growing old.

One day Zechariah was chosen to burn incense on the altar of the temple. So he went into the Temple of the Lord, while a crowd of people waited outside and prayed during the hour when the incense was burnt.

As Zechariah stood watching the fragrant smoke rise from the altar he saw an angel of the Lord standing before him. Zechariah was afraid.

Luke 1:13 But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah! God has heard your prayer, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son. You are to name him John."

¹⁴ How glad and happy you will be, and how happy many others will be when he is born! *Luke 1:15* He will be a great man in the Lord's sight. He must not drink any wine or strong drink. From his very birth he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, ¹⁶ and he will bring back many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God.

¹⁷ He will go ahead of the Lord, strong and mighty like the prophet Elijah. .. he will get the Lord's people ready for him."

¹⁸ Zechariah said to the angel, "How shall I know if this is so? I am an old man, and my wife is old also."

Luke 1:19 "I am **Gabriel**", the angel answered, "I stand in the presence of God, who sent me to speak to you and tell you this good news. ²⁰ But you have not believed my message, which will come true at the right time. Because you have not believed, you will be unable to speak; you will remain silent until the day my promise to you comes true."

Zechariah prepares to burn incense in the Temple.



INFO BANK

Gabriel

The name Gabriel means 'mighty man of God'. He is one of only two angels in the Bible who are named. The other is Michael, the warrior angel. Gabriel is the messenger of God. Reference: Illustrated Bible, p.213



Luke 1:21 In the meantime the people were waiting for Zechariah and wondering why he was spending such a long time in the Temple.

²² When he came out, he could not speak to them, and so they knew that he had seen a vision in the Temple. Unable to say a word, he made signs to them with his hands."

Shortly after this, Elizabeth became pregnant.

Luke 1:26 - 38 The Birth of Jesus Foretold

Luke 1:26 In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy God sent the angel Gabriel to a town in Galilee named **Nazareth**. ²⁷ He had a message for a young woman promised in marriage to a man named Joseph, who was a descendant of King David. Her name was Mary.

²⁸ The angel came to her and said, "Peace be with you! The Lord is with you and has greatly blessed you!"

Mary was afraid.

The angel said, "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favour with God. Soon you will be with child and give birth to a boy. You are to give Him the name Jesus. He will be great and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. His kingdom will never end.

INFO BANK

Nazareth

The dome on the top of the Basilica of the Annunciation was designed to resemble a lighthouse. The church was built over the ruins of five earlier churches and it marks the traditional site where it is believed the angel Gabriel announced to Mary that she was going to be the mother of the Messiah.



The angel Gabriel appears to Mary.

Mary said, "I am still a virgin. How then can this happen?"

Luke 1:35 "The angel answered, "The Holy spirit will come on you, and God's power will rest upon you. For this reason the Holy Child will be called the Son of God."

³⁶ Remember your relative Elizabeth. It is said that she cannot have children, but she herself is now six months pregnant, even though she is very old. ³⁷ for there is nothing that God cannot do."

Mary replied solemnly, ³⁸ "I am the Lord's servant," said Mary; "may it happen to me as you have said."

Then the angel left her. Mary thought about everything that the angel had said to her. If what the angel said was true, then her life would be changed. She would play an important role in God's plan, helping to bring the Son of God into the world.

But there would also be danger. Would Joseph believe her and still want to marry her? Would her family and friends believe her? According to the

laws of Moses, she could be stoned to death for becoming pregnant before she was married.

But the angel had given her a sign. Elizabeth, her cousin was pregnant, in her old age. Mary decided to go and visit her.

Luke 1: 39 - 80 Mary Visits Elizabeth

She quickly made preparations and went to the hills of Judea to visit her cousin. When Mary entered the house and called out to greet her cousin, Elizabeth felt the baby leap for joy in her womb. She was filled with the Holy Spirit and knew that the woman standing in front of her was the mother of the Son of God.

Elizabeth was so happy to see Mary. She said, **Luke 1:44** "... As soon as I heard your greeting, the baby within me jumped with gladness. How happy you are to believe that the Lord's message to you will come true!"

Mary said, "My heart praises the Lord. My soul rejoices in God who is my Saviour. He has looked with kindness on me, His lowly servant! And because He has honoured me, future generations will bless my name. He is always merciful to those who love and obey Him."

Elizabeth encourages Mary.

Some time later Mary spoke with Elizabeth alone. She said, "I am engaged to be married. According to the Law, I could be stoned for becoming pregnant before my marriage. What am I to do?"

Elizabeth took Mary in her arms and said, "Stay with us and we will pray for guidance."

"Elizabeth, why did God choose me? I am just an ordinary person?" Mary asked earnestly. Elizabeth smiled and replied, "In time my child. In due time, He will show us."

Mary stayed with Elizabeth for three months. Then she returned to her home in Nazareth.

Soon afterwards, Elizabeth gave birth to a son and **they named him John** as the angel had instructed. Their neighbours and relatives heard the wonderful news and rejoiced together with her.

All who heard the story knew that something special had happened and that the Lord was with the child.

INFO BANK

They named him John

Zechariah, the father, was unable to speak at that time. When Elizabeth suggested the name John, the relatives were puzzled. They did not have any relatives named John. Then Zechariah wrote the name down on a piece of paper. After that his voice returned to him. Read the full story in Luke's Gospel.

Lessons from the Story

1. John's mission in life is given before his birth. He is to prepare the way for the Messiah. John is obedient to his calling.
2. Nazareth is a poor village in Galilee. God chose a virgin from a poor family background to be the mother of His Son. This birth will fulfill a prophecy from the Old Testament (Isaiah 7: 14). Through the power of the Holy Spirit, Mary will bear a son without a human father. Jesus will be fully human but also fully Divine.
3. Although she knows there will be difficulty ahead, Mary believes what the Angel has said and submits herself to God's plan. Mary's reply to angel Gabriel is a lesson for all of us when she said, "I am the Lord's servant."

Questions for Discussion

1. Why did Zechariah doubt the angel's message to him about him and his wife having a son? Why might you be sympathetic or critical of Zechariah at this point?
2. How would you compare and contrast Mary and Zechariah's response to the message of angel Gabriel.
3. What lesson can we learn from these characters in this story:
 - Zechariah
 - Mary
 - Elizabeth