



Session 4

SAVIOR ANNOUNCED

God intervened in history, sending His Son to be the Savior.

LUKE 1:26-38

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, "Rejoice, 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 call His name 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 been intimate 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 slave,” said Mary. “May it be done to me according to your word.” Then the angel left her.

Notice the comparisons between the birth of Jesus and the birth of John. How are they similar? How are they different?

FIRST THOUGHTS

Historians love to debate what they consider to be defining moments. Certainly the invention of writing was a defining moment as people began to record events and thoughts on clay and on papyrus. Some would suggest the inventions of items such as the wheel or printing press constitute defining moments. For some, the Protestant Reformation was a defining moment, as Martin Luther and others stood up to a Roman Catholic church in serious need of reform.

Think of some defining moments in your own life. What makes them stand out from other important events you have experienced?

Your list may have included the day you met the person who would eventually become your spouse. The birth of a child may also be described as a defining moment. The death of a loved one may also be on your list. Changes in your work and new opportunities may show up on our lists as well. Hopefully, you included spiritual markers as well, especially your salvation experience.

This week's session focuses on a defining moment in world history. That defining moment came when God's Son took on a human nature and experienced birth in Bethlehem. When the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary and told her she would give birth to God's Messiah, Mary humbly submitted to God's plan, knowing it would change her life forever. Her willing submission stands as a testimony to believers everywhere. Mary was ready for her defining moment as God intervened in history and sent His Son to be our Savior.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

LUKE 1-2

Matthew and Luke both began their Gospels with birth narratives. The First Gospel presents the birth of Jesus from Joseph's perspective. Matthew recorded Joseph's consideration of divorcing the pregnant woman to whom he was betrothed (Matt. 1:19). Matthew recorded an angel's appearance to Joseph to explain Mary's miraculous conception (1:20-21). Matthew also recorded an angel's appearance to Joseph to tell him to flee to Egypt with his family to escape Herod's forthcoming attempt to murder the Child (2:13).

In contrast to Matthew, Luke wrote of issues that would have concerned Mary. We read of Mary's concern after an angel referred to her as a "favored woman" (1:28-29). Luke recorded Mary's response: she "was treasuring up all these things in her heart and meditating on them" (2:19). Luke recorded that Joseph took Mary and Jesus back to their hometown of Nazareth (2:39), where "the boy grew up and became strong, filled with wisdom, and God's grace was on Him" (2:40). Luke also recorded that Joseph took his family to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover (2:41-50). Departing Jerusalem, neither Joseph nor Mary knew that Jesus, age 12, had stayed behind. One can visualize Joseph and Mary as they frantically sought and found Jesus in the temple complex, listening and asking questions to the teachers (2:46), astonishing "all those who heard Him" (2:47). Luke concluded his birth narrative with: "And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and with people" (2:52).

EXPLORE THE TEXT



A MESSAGE SENT (LUKE 1:26-29)

VERSE 26

²⁶ In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth,

Scholars recognize two parallels within Jesus' birth announcement. First, the Old Testament records similar birth announcements of Isaac (Gen. 17:15-22; 18:9-15) and Samuel (1 Sam. 1:9-20). The conceptions and births of Isaac and Samuel demonstrated God's great acts in the past. Second, Luke recorded the similarities and differences between the birth of Jesus and the birth of John the Baptist. With the unique manner of Mary's conception, Luke confirmed Jesus' superiority over John.

In the sixth month refers not to the sixth month of the year but to the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, as indicated by 1:36. In order to help his non-Palestinian readers understand location, Luke qualified the location of **Nazareth** as **a town in Galilee**. The same angel, **Gabriel**, also delivered to Zechariah the announcement regarding the birth of John (1:19).

VERSE 27

²⁷ to a virgin engaged to a man named Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary.

Luke described Mary as **a virgin engaged**. He provided additional support of Mary's virginity in verse 34: "How can this be, since I have not been intimate with a man?" The birth of Jesus to a virgin indicates Jesus' deity. His conception would come through supernatural means. The fact that Mary gave birth to Jesus underscores His humanity. The virgin birth unites the humanity of Jesus and the deity of Christ. Jesus is fully human and fully divine.

The word **engaged** referred to the first step of a two-step Jewish marriage process. The first step involved a formal agreement of marriage accompanied by a bridal gift. This engagement could not be broken in any manner other than divorce (see Matt. 1:19). The second step occurred approximately one year later with the actual marriage ceremony. The husband would then take his wife home and consummate the marriage.

VERSES 28-29

28 And the angel came to her and said, “Rejoice, favored woman! The Lord is with you.” 29 But she was deeply troubled by this statement, wondering what kind of greeting this could be.

God *favored* Mary in that He chose her to give birth to the Messiah. Mary did not possess a superior holiness that warranted this privilege. God chose Mary as He chose the Israelites: “The LORD ... chose you, not because you were more numerous than all peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But because the LORD loved you” (Deut. 7:7-8).

Gabriel’s words confused and puzzled Mary. What prompted Mary to be *deeply troubled by this statement*? We can imagine that an angel’s speaking to her would create confusion and anxiety. In addition, Mary knew her pregnancy would create misunderstandings—even accusations—and this would have troubled her.

Why is the virgin birth of Jesus important to Christians? How would you explain the importance of Jesus’ being fully human and fully God?

KEY DOCTRINE: *God the Son*

In His incarnation as Jesus Christ, He was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary.

THE MESSAGE DELIVERED (LUKE 1:30-33)

VERSE 30

30 Then the angel told her: Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.

The angel attempted to ease Mary’s anxiety by saying, *Do not be afraid, Mary*. Gabriel informed her that she had *found favor with God*. The concept of favor signified God’s choice of an individual through whom He would do an especially significant work.



God had bestowed His favor on Noah (Gen. 6:8), Moses (Ex. 33:17), and Hannah (1 Sam. 1:18). In the Old Testament, God sometimes extended His favor after someone made a request (see 1 Sam. 1:10-11). Here, God gave His favor freely, without any request.

VERSE 31

³¹ Now listen: You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will call His name Jesus.

The angel informed Mary that she would ***conceive and give birth to a son***. The angel also informed Mary of the baby's name: ***Jesus***. The Old Testament name "Joshua" and the New Testament name "Jesus" both mean "the Lord is salvation." Matthew provided additional insight into the meaning of Jesus' name: "You are to name Him Jesus, because He will save His people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21). Mary's child would be nothing less than the Savior of the world.

We should not miss the parallels between Joshua and Jesus. God used Joshua to save His people from their nomadic, roaming lifestyle and to provide the promised land as their home. God gave Jesus to save us from our sins. Jesus gave His life to provide the way for our eternal home in heaven.

VERSES 32-33

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.

Gabriel verbalized several characteristics of Mary's child to let her know she would give birth to Israel's long-awaited Messiah. The angel described John earlier as "great in the sight of the Lord" (1:15). Here, the Christ child would be simply ***great*** (no qualifier). People would also call the Messiah ***the Son of the Most High***, underscoring Jesus' superiority over John, whom Gabriel described as a "prophet of the Most High" (1:76). Luke identified Jesus as the Son of God.

Furthermore, Gabriel said that the Lord God ***will give Him the throne of His father David***. Gabriel paraphrased 2 Samuel 7:12-13, where the writer prophesied that the Lord, after David's death, would "raise up after you your descendant [notice the singular] ... and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever." Jesus fulfilled God's

prophesy to David in that ***His kingdom will have no end.*** Mary's firstborn would usher in an eternal Kingdom.

How do the angel's descriptions of Jesus help you better understand His mission?

How does the idea of the afterlife ("His kingdom will have no end") shape your perspective of earthly living?

BIBLE SKILL: *Read, reflect on, and react emotionally to a Bible verse.*

Focus on Luke 1:31-33. Read the verses aloud several times. Each time you read, emphasize different words or phrases. For example, in one reading emphasize the words that describe God. Then read the verses again, emphasizing words that reveal Jesus' ministry. As you read the verses a third time, take note of your thoughts. How do the verses move you emotionally? What feelings are evoked when you consider that Gabriel's words to Mary and her subsequent receiving of God's plan for her life eternally impact you?

QUESTIONS ANSWERED (LUKE 1:34-37)

VERSES 34-35

³⁴ Mary asked the angel, "How can this be, since I have not been intimate 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.



Understandably, Mary had questions. The Hebrews recognized Joseph and Mary as husband and wife, even though Joseph and Mary had not consummated their marriage (see Matt. 1:25). Given her virginity, she voiced her greatest puzzlement: **“How can this be, since I have not been intimate with a man?”** Though young, Mary understood human biology.

While Mary questioned the method, Luke records no evidence that she doubted the announcement. Contrast Mary’s lack of a request for a sign with Zechariah’s need for one. When told his aged wife would conceive, Zechariah asked, “How can I know this?” (1:18). Gabriel informed Zechariah that his son (John) would be “filled with the Holy Spirit while still in his mother’s womb” (1:15), but the angel informed Mary that her child would be conceived by the Holy Spirit. Again, Luke demonstrated Jesus’ superiority over John.

Attempting to ease Mary’s anxiety, Gabriel told her **the power of the Most High will overshadow you**. In the Old Testament, the concept of overshadowing referred to God’s presence in protecting His people (see Ps. 91:4; 140:7). Gabriel insisted that God would protect Mary.

VERSES 36-37

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.”

Although Mary did not request it, Gabriel sought to encourage her by giving a sign. In three months, Mary’s long-barren relative, Elizabeth, would give birth to **a son in her old age**. With this announcement, perhaps Mary began to understand Gabriel’s words: **nothing will be impossible with God**.

Mary and Elizabeth both conceived children in a miraculous manner. Both birthed a miraculous son. Elizabeth’s son would proclaim the good news. Mary’s son is the good news.

What events cause people to question the power and presence of the Lord? How can the Lord answer their concerns?

How can we ask for clarity without doubting? Where is the line between needing assurance and needing a sign?

WILLING SUBMISSION (LUKE 1:38)

VERSE 38

³⁸ “I am the Lord’s slave,” said Mary. “May it be done to me according to your word.” Then the angel left her.

Given the circumstances of an imminent pregnancy, who could have thought less of Mary had she requested a sign of God’s presence and power? Mary understood, in Jewish custom, the binding nature of her engagement to Joseph. She anticipated Joseph’s initial misunderstanding (see Matt. 1:19, where Joseph decided to divorce Mary secretly). Mary also expected the stigma of being looked upon as a sinful woman and the loss of her reputation among her neighbors. She also knew Jewish law dictated the stoning of an engaged woman exposed as having sexual relations with another man (Deut. 22:23-24). Jewish law ominously stipulated that offenders must be punished in order to “purge the evil from you” (Deut. 22:24).

Believers today should appreciate Mary’s faith in that she did not require a sign. She responded simply with, ***“I am the Lord’s slave.”*** Mary’s use of the word *slave* demonstrates her recognition of her position in life as well as God’s preeminence in all things. He was the Most High and the Lord God. She was His slave.

Mary communicated a humble commitment to God with her final words to Gabriel. As the slave of God, Mary submitted to following God’s plan and what He had asked her to do.

Why is submitting to God’s will essential for Christian wholeness and happiness?



IN MY CONTEXT

- Believers can trust God to keep all of His promises.
- Only Jesus meets the qualifications for providing salvation to humanity (see Acts 4:12).
- Believers can follow God’s plan and purpose with confidence, knowing God has the power to complete them.

List ways God has demonstrated His trustworthiness to you in the past two weeks. Identify how the things you listed strengthen your confidence in Him.

Share with the group how you first came to understand your need for a Savior. Challenge each other to find ways during the holidays of sharing how only Jesus fills our need for a Savior.

List directions God has given you. What actions are you taking in obedience to His directives?

MEMORY VERSE

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. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end.
—Luke 1:32-33