

SAVIOR ANNOUNCED

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

LUKE 1:26-38

MEMORY VERSES: LUKE 1:32-33

PREPARE TO LEAD THE GROUP TIME

- **READ** Luke 1–2, First Thoughts (p. 44), and Understand the Context (pp. 44-45). Understand the difference between submission and surrender and the role that fear plays in both situations. Know the connection between the names of Joshua and Jesus.
- **STUDY** Luke 1:26-38, using Explore the Text (pp. 45-49). Read Matthew 1:18-25, comparing how Mary was approached to how Joseph was approached.
- **PLAN** the group time using the ideas under Lead Group Bible Study on pages 50-51, More Ideas on page 52, *QuickSource*, and ideas online at *MinistryGrid.com/ExploreTheBible*. Add variety to the plans for your group by using at least one suggestion from More Ideas on page 52.
- **GROW** with other group leaders at the Group Ministry blog (*LifeWay.com/GroupMinistry*).
- **GATHER** the following items: Personal Study Guides; **PACK ITEM 5** (*Bookmark: Memory Verses*) as needed; and A set of Advent candles for More Ideas (p. 52). Prepare to display the following Pack Item: **PACK ITEM 12** (*Poster: Joshua 24:15*).



FIRST THOUGHTS

KEY DOCTRINE

God the Son

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

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.

(In PSG, p. 42) **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.

BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATOR

For additional context, read "Angels as Heralds of God," an archived *Biblical Illustrator* article provided on the CD-ROM in the Winter 2016-17 *Explore the Bible: Leader Pack*.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

LUKE 1-2

The angel Gabriel visited Zechariah, a Jerusalem priest (1:5-25). Zechariah and Elizabeth were old and had no children (v. 7). The angel told Zechariah that Elizabeth would bear a son—John (vv. 8-13). John would be filled with the Holy Spirit and accomplish great things (vv. 15-17).

Zechariah struggled to believe the news (v. 18). Gabriel replied that Zechariah would be unable to speak because he had not believed (vv. 19-20). Elizabeth soon conceived and rejoiced over God's grace to her (vv. 24-25).

Gabriel then visited a virgin named Mary in Nazareth and told her she had found favor with God (vv. 28,30). She would bear God's Son. The Lord would give Him the throne of His father David, and His kingdom would last forever (vv. 32-33).

Gabriel explained that Mary would become pregnant by the power of the Holy Spirit (vv. 34-35). He also shared the news of Elizabeth's pregnancy (vv. 36-37), and Mary humbly surrendered to the Lord's plan (v. 38).

Mary departed for Judea to visit Elizabeth (vv. 39-40). When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, her baby leaped inside her (v. 41), and Elizabeth blessed Mary (vv. 41-45). Mary praised God; she knew future generations would call her blessed (vv. 46-49).

When Elizabeth gave birth, all rejoiced with her (vv. 57-58). Family members discussed possible names, but Zechariah wrote "his name is John" and settled the matter (v. 63). At that moment, Zechariah could speak again, and he praised God (vv. 64,67-79).

A Roman decree required all people to register in their hometowns (2:1-3). Joseph traveled with Mary to Bethlehem because he hailed from King David's line (vv. 4-5). Mary gave birth to Jesus while they were there (vv. 6-7).

That night, an angel appeared to nearby shepherds with glorious news (vv. 8-9): a Savior was born in Bethlehem (vv. 10-12). A multitude of angels then joined in praising God (vv. 13-14). Following the announcement, the shepherds went and found Mary, Joseph, and the baby (vv. 15-16). They reported what they had seen, and all were amazed (vv. 17-20).

When Jesus' parents took Him to Jerusalem to dedicate Him to the Lord (vv. 22-24), they met Simeon, who took Jesus in his arms and praised God (vv. 28-32). Nearby, the prophetess Anna also began to praise God (vv. 36-38).

When Jesus was 12, His family journeyed to Jerusalem for Passover, but as they started home, His parents inadvertently left Him behind (vv. 42-44). They returned to find Him in the temple complex conversing with the Jewish religious leaders (vv. 45-47). The family returned to Nazareth, where Jesus grew in favor with God and with people (vv. 51-52).

EXPLORE THE TEXT

A MESSAGE SENT (LUKE 1:26-29)

VERSE 26

The chronological reference *in the sixth month* likely refers to the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy. This conclusion follows logically from verse 24, which suggests she kept herself in seclusion for five months after she conceived.

The angel Gabriel, who had earlier appeared to Zechariah (1:11,19), now was sent by God on another mission—one of the most important missions in history. *Galilee* was the Jewish people's northern territory, and Judea was its southern territory. Both lay under Roman control. *Nazareth* was a small town on the edge of the Jezreel Valley. It sat well off the highways that crisscrossed the valley. Thus, people who ended up in Nazareth had chosen to depart from the major road to go there. The name of the town is related to the word *branch*. This is interesting in view of Isaiah's reference to the Messiah as the Branch (Isa. 11:1; Matt. 2:23).

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?

LUKE 1:26

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

LUKE 1:27

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

LUKE 1:28

²⁸ And the angel came to her and said, "Rejoice, favored woman! The Lord is with you."

LUKE 1:29

²⁹ But she was deeply troubled by this statement, wondering what kind of greeting this could be.

LUKE 1:30

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

VERSE 27

Gabriel was sent **to a virgin** in Nazareth. This peculiar introduction of the young woman highlights the fact that her virginity was especially significant in the account. She was **engaged to a man named Joseph**. In Bible times, an engagement or betrothal was viewed as legally binding. This is illustrated in Matthew 1:19, where Joseph, after discovering Mary was pregnant, decided to divorce her (as opposed to breaking the engagement). The mention of Joseph as **of the house of David** links him with the tribe of Judah, which was King David's tribe.

The words **the virgin's name** again highlight the significance of the woman's lack of sexual relations. The woman's name was Miriam; she thus had the same name as Moses' sister (Ex. 15:20). Christians know her as Mary, the Greek form of the Hebrew name.

VERSE 28

The angel came to her with a greeting Mary did not expect. The word **rejoice** also can be translated as a common greeting (Matt. 28:9). Gabriel described Mary as a **favored woman**, and indeed she was—not because she had earned God's favor, but because God's favor had come to her. Gabriel's assurance **the Lord is with you** had no context by which Mary could ascertain its meaning. Certainly the promise of God's presence signified something special (Josh. 1:9).

VERSE 29

Mary was **deeply troubled**. The original language suggests Mary was confused and puzzled by Gabriel's words. She was **wondering what kind of greeting this could be**. Certainly she understood the words; however, she did not know why an angel would appear to her with such a greeting.

Gabriel's appearance to Mary marks another great example of God's intervention in history. Over the course of biblical history, God had again and again intervened on behalf of His people. Now, as He prepared to send His one and only Son into the world, He sent the angel Gabriel to a virgin named Mary in Nazareth. God had promised through the prophets that He would one day send His Messiah (Isa. 11:10; Mic. 5:2). We can trust God to keep His promises (2 Cor. 1:20).

Think of a time when you experienced a special sense of God's presence. What specific details helped you see the experience as one from God? How does God communicate with us today?

THE MESSAGE DELIVERED (LUKE 1:30-33)

VERSE 30

Gabriel no doubt understood Mary was deeply troubled. His reassuring words **do not be afraid** parallel his words to Zechariah (1:13). The text does

not reveal how Mary knew she was receiving a visit from an angel, but it seems clear she knew. Gabriel's further statement **you have found favor with God** reinforced the sentiments of his greeting (1:28). The word translated *favor* elsewhere is translated "grace" (Eph. 2:8) and denotes God's unmerited favor that He extends toward individuals.

VERSE 31

The words **now listen** alert the hearer that the speaker is about to say something of significance. The words **you will conceive and give birth to a son** would have immediately raised questions in Mary's mind; she had never had sexual relations with Joseph or with any other man.

Gabriel instructed Mary: **you will call His name Jesus**. The name *Jesus* is the Greek form of the Hebrew *Joshua*, which means "the Lord is salvation" or "the Lord has saved." Some commentators have drawn a parallel between Jesus and Joshua. In the Book of Joshua, God used Joshua to give Israel the promised land. In the New Testament, God used His Son Jesus (Joshua) to secure for His people a home in heaven. In Matthew 1:21, God instructed Joseph to name the infant Jesus, with the explanation "He will save His people from their sins"—a clear wordplay on the meaning of the name Joshua.

VERSE 32

Gabriel's promise, **He will be great**, was only the beginning. Many in Israel's history could claim greatness, but not like the child Mary was about to bear. Jesus would be called **the Son of the Most High**—that is, the Son of God. Abraham had known the Lord as God Most High (Gen. 14:18-20). This expression means Jesus was the Son of God Himself and shared God's nature. Many times the Scriptures use the expression "son" or "daughter" more to designate a person's common relationship to someone or to a quality. For example, James and John were called "sons of thunder," meaning they were thundering in their statements (Mark 3:17; Luke 9:54). Paul referred to the Thessalonian believers as "sons of light," meaning they shared in the characteristics of God's light (1 Thess. 5:5). During His earthly ministry, Jesus called God His Father, making Himself equal with God (John 5:18).

The promise **the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David** further stressed the amazing plans God had for Mary's son. Second Samuel 7 describes how David wanted to build God a house, but instead, God said He would build David a house—of people! One day, David's descendant would build the temple, but most importantly, God would establish the throne of David's kingdom forever (2 Sam. 7:13-16). The prophet Isaiah later reiterated this theme (Isa. 9:7), as did Jeremiah after him (Jer. 23:5-6). God would bring His prophecy in 2 Samuel 7 to complete and final fulfillment in the Person of Jesus.

VERSE 33

Gabriel's words **He will reign over the house of Jacob forever** signify Jesus' coming as the Jewish Messiah, the King of the Jews. The word **kingdom**

LUKE 1:31

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

LUKE 1:32

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.

LUKE 1:33

³³ He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end.

LUKE 1:34

³⁴ Mary asked the angel, “How can this be, since I have not been intimate with a man?”

denotes not a territory but the phenomenon of God’s rule in the world. When Jesus told His listeners, “the kingdom of heaven has come near” (Matt. 4:17), He was describing the reign of God that had broken into human history. Becoming a part of God’s kingdom today means surrendering one’s life to the Lord. Sometimes today people say, “I want to include God in my plans.” God does not want that. Rather, He chooses to include us in His plan.

How did Jesus meet the qualifications to provide salvation to all humanity? What purpose did Gabriel announce for Mary’s coming child? What purpose does God have for your life?

LUKE 1:35

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.

QUESTIONS ANSWERED (LUKE 1:34-37)

VERSE 34

Mary asked the angel a question, just as Zechariah had (Luke 1:18). However, Mary’s response differs from Zechariah’s response. Mary’s question **how can this be** does not result from unbelief, but from a lack of understanding. Zechariah doubted Elizabeth could get pregnant (v. 18). Mary wondered how she would get pregnant; she had not been with a man.

VERSE 35

The Holy Spirit would **come upon** Mary. The conception would occur by **the power of the Most High** God. Consequently, through this amazing process, the holy One to be born through this supernatural process would possess a supernatural status—**the Son of God**. The Scriptures stress that Jesus was fully God but also fully man. As a human being, Jesus grew hungry and tired (Matt. 4:2; John 4:6) and experienced all the common temptations we do (Heb. 4:15). At the same time, as fully God, He could overcome sin and thus comes to our aid when we face temptation (Heb. 4:16).

Today, some false religions claim to believe in Jesus. However, the Jesus in whom they claim to believe is not the Jesus of the Bible. Some venerate Jesus as a great human teacher, but He is more than that. Jehovah’s Witnesses believe Jesus was God’s first created being, but the Scriptures tell us that Jesus was in the beginning with God and that He was God (John 1:1-2). As true man, Jesus can identify with us in every way. As true God, He can offer the perfect sacrifice for sin (Heb. 10:11-12,14).

LUKE 1:36

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.

VERSE 36

Gabriel announced to Mary another exciting fact. Her relative Elizabeth had **conceived a son in her old age**. As far as we know, this was the first time Mary had heard this news, particularly since Elizabeth had kept herself in seclusion (Luke 1:24). In fact, Gabriel continued, Elizabeth was in her **sixth month**.

VERSE 37

Gabriel's concluding statement, *for nothing will be impossible with God*, also appears elsewhere in Scripture. God brought conception to Sarah because nothing was impossible with Him (Gen. 18:14). Jeremiah the prophet also confirmed that nothing was too difficult for the Lord (Jer. 32:17). Using Elizabeth as his example, Gabriel reminded Mary that nothing was impossible for the Lord. He could bring conception to an old woman past childbearing age, and He also could enable a virgin to conceive the Messiah.

Paul wrote that God is able to do abundantly beyond what we could even ask or imagine (Eph. 3:20). Where do you need God's intervention? As we consider Mary's encounter with Gabriel, we need to remember that God is more than able to intervene in our lives for our good and His glory.

What amazes you the most about Gabriel's encounter with Mary? Do you have questions that linger in your mind about how God will help you work through a situation you are facing?

WILLING SUBMISSION (LUKE 1:38)

VERSE 38

Mary's response, *I am the Lord's slave*, stands as the perfect model of surrender to God's purpose. Slaves have no rights; they exist to do the will of their masters. As she received Gabriel's explanation, Mary yielded her body and her life to God's sovereign purpose. Her affirming reply *may it be done to me according to your word* further echoes her willing obedience. His mission complete, Gabriel departed.

One cannot overstate the significance of this moment. As a single woman, Mary faced persecution and perhaps death when her pregnancy was discovered. She risked losing Joseph; she risked losing everything. Nonetheless, when she learned of God's plan for her life, she yielded herself to her God completely and totally.

This week, Christians all over the world will celebrate Jesus' birth. Indeed, in the biblical account of the coming of God's Son to earth, Mary's visit with Gabriel comprises a defining moment. At Christmas, we celebrate God's sending His Son as the Savior of the world. Today, God continues to accomplish His sovereign purpose, and often He does that through believers who are willing to yield their lives to Him, no matter what the cost. We can trust God to keep His promises as we confidently follow Him.

Why do you think people are willing to trust God for their salvation but not willing to trust Him for everyday life issues?

LUKE 1:37

³⁷ For nothing will be impossible with God."

LUKE 1:38

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

LEAD GROUP BIBLE STUDY

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

INTRODUCE: As the group arrives, call attention to the following statement displayed in the room: “The Savior of the world has arrived!”

ASK: *What emotions could be expressed when hearing this statement?*

EXPLAIN: The message of Jesus’ arrival had been prophesied since the beginning of time (Gen. 3), and the defining moment had arrived for Jesus, God’s Son, to take on flesh and become a man. Direct the group’s attention to First Thoughts (PSG, pp. 42-43) for more explanation on how Jesus’ arrival was such a defining moment.

TRANSITION: *As we learn more about the message, we should be encouraged to make the message clearer in order to share with others during this Christmas season.*

EXPLORE THE TEXT

EXPLAIN: Direct the group to Understand the Context (PSG, p. 43) and share points that help to summarize and connect Luke’s and Matthew’s accounts of Jesus’ birth. Ask: *How are the accounts similar? Different? Whose perspective is emphasized in Luke’s account?*

READ: Invite a volunteer to read Luke 1:26-29.

EXPLAIN: Say: *Mary’s selection to be the vessel for God’s work was not based on her works or virtue. It was simply God’s favor being shown to her.* Lead the group to understand that Mary was not a sinless person; she was just like us. Say: *God was simply using her to work His purpose. We can often assume that we have to be “worthy” in our own eyes to serve or be used by God. Our worthiness is not based on our view of ourselves but rather on how God sees us. As His children, we are His vessels of service, and we have been given the same promise of God’s abiding presence as we seek to accomplish His will (Matt. 28:20).*

ASK: *Why is the virgin birth of Jesus important to Christians? How would you explain the importance of Jesus’ being fully human and fully God? (PSG, p. 45) Point to Hebrews 4:14-16 to help the group understand Jesus’ connection to our humanity and His superiority in His deity.*

TRANSITION: *The birth of Jesus was a unique event, and those involved would meet the arrival of God’s Son with fear and anticipation.*

READ: Direct a volunteer to read Luke 1:30-33, as the group notes what would have seemed unexplainable about this message that Mary received.

GUIDE: *Mary was a virgin who was engaged to Joseph (Luke 1:27). This was not an engagement where the marriage could be postponed; rather, the final part of the Jewish wedding ceremony would have been the consummation of the marriage. Telling Joseph the plans of God and what had already happened to her must have been stressful.*

ASK: *Have you ever been faced with a difficult decision and had the option to walk away instead of facing the circumstances? What encouraged you to move forward?*

EXPLAIN: *Turning away was not an option for Mary. Joseph considered divorce, but God spoke to Him in a vision about the plan (Matt. 1:20-25). The message delivered to them helped them move forward in spite of perceptions or pressures.*

ASK: *How do the angel's descriptions of Jesus help you better understand His mission? (PSG, p. 47)*

TRANSITION: *Christmas is the story of how God revealed His message and purpose to His people, calling us to join with Him in His mission.*

READ: Call on a volunteer to read aloud Luke 1:34-37, as the group listens for the role of the Holy Spirit in Mary's life.

ASK: *What events cause people to question the power and presence of the Lord? How can the Lord answer their concerns? (PSG, p. 48) How can we ask for clarity without doubting? Where is the line between needing assurance and needing a sign? (PSG, p. 49)*

TRANSITION: *Mary was provided a sign by God (John's birth) that these events were to take place. Even though we may not receive an explicit sign like what Mary experienced, we can know that God is at work, and we have a call to join in. Review the Key Doctrine (PSG, p. 45), and lead the group to explain the significance of the doctrine.*

READ: Call on a group member to read aloud Luke 1:38. Provide explanation on Mary's response and what that would mean for her life (see the commentary under Verse 38, p. 49).

ASK: *Why is submitting to God's will essential for Christian wholeness and happiness? (PSG, p. 49)*

EXPLAIN: *Surrender is not an act of the will; it is recognizing something that only God can do. We are called to surrender our purpose to the Lord, which means we place the focus on Him. Submission is an act of the personal will. This involves our obedience. God commands us in Scripture to follow Him, and we can either submit to His plan or disobey.*

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

TRANSITION: Lead the group to respond to the bulleted statements under In My Context (PSG, p. 50). Allow them to add statements based on their own study.

CHALLENGE: Lead the group to complete the first question set under In My Context (PSG, p. 50): *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.* Point out **Pack Item 12** (Poster: Joshua 24:15). Explain that the arrival of Jesus requires us to choose whom we will serve with our lives.

PRAY: Spend time in prayer that the group will have a faith during this Christmas season that focuses on God's plan and purpose more than on the season. Distribute copies of **Pack Item 5** (Bookmark: Memory Verses) to those who haven't yet received one.



PRACTICE

- Contact your group members and encourage them to be prepared to discuss examples of integrity and faithfulness during the next session.
- Encourage group members to share with one person they encounter during the Christmas season the insights they gained during the group Bible study.
- Contact those who were not present last week. Invite them to share any prayer requests and ministry concerns. Share a summary of the group time and encourage them to use their copy of the PSG to study the passage on their own.

MORE IDEAS

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

Use First Thoughts on pages 42-43 of the PSG to begin the session. Review news sources, looking for defining moments.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

- To supplement the teaching of Luke 1:31 that gives the name of *Jesus*, compare it to the name of *Joshua* that has been studied in previous lessons, which is the Hebrew name of Jesus and means “YAHWEH is salvation.”
- To enhance the study of Luke 1:31-33, lead the group to outline the message of the angel. Guide the group to define the message of the gospel and compare it with the message of the angel. Encourage them to consider how the message of the angel is contained in the message shared by today’s believers.

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

Use the Bible Skill activity (PSG, p. 47) to supplement the challenge: *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?*

SUGGESTED MUSIC IDEA

To close the session, read aloud the words of “Joy to the World,” by Isaac Watts. Instruct the group to listen for phrases that describe the example and influence believers can offer.