

# Stories of Christmas

## God Promises John to Zechariah

Luke 1:1-25

### Opening

Gathering: What are you doing this advent season to prepare yourself to celebrate Jesus' coming?

Today's Focus: God prepared the world to receive and recognize His Savior by sending John the Baptist, filled with the Holy Spirit, to prepare the way.

Key Verses: *I myself have carefully examined everything from the beginning ... so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.* Luke 1:3-4

*He will be filled with the Holy Spirit from even from birth. Many of the people of Israel will he bring back to the Lord their God.* Luke 1:15-16

Opening Prayer

### Lesson

Luke - The Historical Gospel (*Luke 1:1-4*)

Who was Luke?

Colossians 4:14 = A doctor, friend of Paul's, likely a Gentile

How qualified was Luke to write the gospel (*good news*) of Jesus? = Changed here from "they" to "we"

Acts 16:8-10 = Traveled & worked with Paul on his 2nd & 3rd journeys

What was the scope of his gospel? = Written third of 4 gospels, around 90 AD

Acts 1:1-2 = From when Jesus began to do & teach until He ascended

Did Luke write his gospel because no one else had tried to record what had happened?

Luke 1:1-2 = No, many had already tried to record the story from eyewitnesses

Why did Luke go to this trouble if others had already done so? = *may know the certainty*

Luke 1:3-4 = *carefully investigated everything*, hired by Theophilus (*loved by God*)

How carefully had Luke investigated everything and made his facts certain?

Luke 3:1-2 = Nailed things down to the nth degree

Did Luke have any help getting his facts straight?

2 Peter 1:20-21 = Scripture not written by men, but by God's Spirit working thru men

Why is it so important to God that the Bible is fully accurate and without errors?

2 Timothy 3:16-17 = God breathed His truth into it so we may be *thoroughly equipped*

Zechariah and Elizabeth (*Luke 1:5-7*)

With what story and details does Luke begin his book? = Nails down who & when

Luke 1:5 = Story of Zechariah and Elizabeth, priests during Herod the Great (37-4BC)

What does it mean that Zechariah *belonged to the priestly division of Abijah*? = weekly rotation

1 Chronicles 24:1, 3, 10, 19 = Aaron's descendants divided into 24 divisions by David

Priests could only marry Jewish women, especially honorable to marry a desc of Aaron

Was this marriage a coincidence or were these devout Jews trying to please God?

Luke 1:6 = Not sure, but they devoutly tried to please God, were righteous in His sight

Did God shower them with earthly blessings in response to their faithfulness?

Luke 1:7 = No, childlessness was considered a sign of God's displeasure

Childlessness was blamed on the woman, legal grounds for divorce

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### Zechariah Is Specially Selected (Luke 1:8-10)

What special honor did Zechariah receive once when he went on duty?

Luke 1:8-10 = Chosen by lot to burn incense in temple (am & pm priests)

About 20,000 priests divided into 24 divisions, each on duty at the temple two weeks per year

All priests on duty at the temple for Passover, Pentecost and Feast of the Tabernacles

Special duties (50 per day) assigned to priests by throwing lots

Most special duty was to offer the incense in the Holy Place before the Holy of Holies

Could only do once in a lifetime, many priests never had the opportunity

Incense offered in morning and evening with sacrifice

Rising sweet smoke symbolized prayers going to heaven

Worshippers prayed until the priest came back out and gave the benediction

### Zechariah Gets a Special Surprise (Luke 1:11-13)

Did things go smoothly for Zechariah during his special service?

Luke 1:11 = An angel of the Lord appeared to him next to the altar

Jewish tradition reserved the right side of the altar for God and the left for angel Gabriel

How did Zechariah feel about what he saw?

Luke 1:12 = Very scared

Besides being surprised, why would Zechariah be so scared?

Exodus 33:20 = God told Moses that no one can see His face and live

What comforting message was Zechariah given? = Johanan - *Jehovah's gracious gift*

Luke 1:13 = *Don't be afraid, your prayer has been heard, Will have a son, John*

*Don't be afraid* - also used by angels and Jesus in Luke 1:30; 2:10; 5:10; 8:50; 12:7, 32

### You Can't Steer a Parked Car (Colossians 3:23-24)

Does God come to His people in His house like His angel came to Zechariah in the temple?

Exodus 33:9 = The Lord met with Moses inside His house, the Tent of Meeting

Do we need to go to God's house for Him to speak to us?

Exodus 3:1-2 = Moses was tending his father-in-law's sheep when God called him

Judges 6:11 = Gideon was threshing wheat when the angel came to him

1 Samuel 16:11 (Psalm 78:70) = David was tending sheep when Samuel called him

1 Kings 19:19 = Elisha was plowing with oxen when he received Elijah's mantle

Matthew 9:9 = Matthew was busy collecting taxes when Jesus called him

Mark 1:16-20 = Peter, Andrew, James & John were fishing & mending nets

Does this mean we should not sit back quietly and wait for the Lord to come to us?

2 Thessalonians 3:6, 11-13 = Yes, God gives us productivity so we may be productive

But don't we need to quietly meditate to hear God talk to us?

Matthew 13:11, 14-16 = No, we need open hearts to receive and accept God's calling

So does God want us to put ourselves fully into our work?

Colossians 3:23-24 = Yes, *work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord*

Does this mean that being a workaholic is in line with God's desire for our lives?

Luke 10:41-42 = Work should not take priority in our lives over God

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### This Special Son (*Luke 1:14-17*)

How would John be different than other kids? = *Many will rejoice*

Luke 1:14-15 = Great in God's sight, never drink alcohol, filled with HS from birth

How would Zechariah understand the point that John should never drink alcohol?

Numbers 6:1-3 = Would be a Nazirite, life or period dedicated to God

What examples of Nazirites do we have in the Old Testament?

Judges 13:3-5 = Samson was brought to a childless couple to be a Nazirite for life

1 Samuel 1:20, 27-28 = Samuel was born of a childless woman who gave him to God

How do we first see that John was truly filled with the Holy Spirit from birth as the angel said?

Luke 1:41-44 = Elizabeth learned from the Spirit in unborn John that Mary would have Jesus

### Prepare Ye the Way of the Lord (*Luke 1:16*)

What work would the Spirit accomplish through the life of this Nazirite?

Luke 1:16 = Return many of the Jews to faith & devotion to God

Why was this important to God's plan?

Mark 1:1-3 = To fulfill Isaiah's prophesy of one to *prepare the way for the Lord*

How effective would John be in his ministry?

Mark 1:4-5 = *Whole Judean countryside & all the people of Jerusalem* confessed

### The Spirit and Power of Elijah (*Luke 1:17*)

What other special thing did the angel foretell about John?

Luke 1:17 = *He will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah*

What was the last prophesy God had given the Jews 400 years earlier? = quoted by angel

Malachi 4:5-6 = I will send Elijah to *turn the hearts of the fathers to their children ...*

Did the people recognize John to be the promised return of Elijah?

Matthew 17:10-13 = *Elijah has already come, and they didn't recognize him*

Were the people told that Elijah had returned?

Matthew 11:7, 10, 14 = Jesus told crowd - *John is the Elijah who was to come*

### Doubting Zechariah (*Luke 1:18*)

After hearing the message from the angel what story would Zechariah have remembered?

Genesis 18:1, 10-11 = The gift of Isaac to old Abraham & Sarah

How easily did faithful Abraham and Sarah believe God's promise?

Genesis 17:17; 18:12-14 = Both Abraham & Sarah laughed at this impossible promise

Did Zechariah show any stronger faith when given a similar message? = Asked for sign

Luke 1:18 = Questioned the impossible promise, just like Abraham & Sarah

How did the angel remind Zechariah who the promise was from?

Luke 1:19 = Introduced self as Gabriel sent by God with this message

Would this angel's name mean anything to Zechariah? = Gabriel - *Man of God*

Daniel 8:15-16 (9:21-22) = Sent by God to explain visions to Daniel, An archangel

What other job does Gabriel get to do? = Only other named angel is Michael (Daniel, Jude, Rev)

Luke 1:26-28 = Announce the birth of Jesus to Mary (next week's lesson)

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### Greek Word Meanings:

Angelia (ahn-ge-LEE-a) = Message

Angel = Messenger

Evangel = Good Message - literally translated in English to gospel

Gospel = From Anglo-Saxon *gōd spell* (meaning good tidings)

Evangelist = One who brings good message (gospel)

### You Asked For A Sign, You've Got It (Luke 1:20)

What sign would Zechariah be given because of his lack of faith?

Luke 1:20 = Unable to speak until John is born

Was there any other part of the sign?

Luke 1:62 = He may also have been made deaf

Did the worshippers outside realize what had happened?

Luke 1:21-22 = They wondered what took so long, realized he saw a vision

Why had the worshippers waited so long for Zechariah?

Numbers 6:22-26 = He was to give the Aaronic benediction before they left

What other sign was Zechariah given that the promise would happen?

Luke 1:23-25 = Elizabeth got pregnant after he returned home

### Closing Prayer

### Response - Consider and meditate on one each day this week

1. When have I carefully investigated everything so that I might understand and know the certainty of something in God's Word?  
(Luke 1:1-4; John 5:36-40; 20:30-31; Acts 17:11-12)
2. What special honors have I been given to serve God in special ways?  
(Luke 1:8-9; 14:7-14; 1 Samuel 2:8, 30; Psalm 84:11; Proverbs 15:33; John 12:26; 1 Cor. 10:31)
3. How do I approach the work that I do – as a service to God or as a drudgery?  
(Colossians 3:23-24; Proverbs 10:4-5; Ecclesiastes 5:18-20; Ephesians 4:16, 28; 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15)
4. In what ways have I dedicated my life to God?  
(Numbers 6:1-21; Judges 13:3-5; 1 Samuel 1:20-28; Mark 8:34-38; Luke 1:14-17; Ephesians 4:1; 1 Timothy 4:13-16; 1 Peter 3:1-2)
5. When has a lack of faith led me to question a direction God has shown me for my life?  
(Luke 1:18-20; Isaiah 7:9b; Matthew 14:25-33; Mark 6:5-6; Hebrews 11; James 2:14-26)

Next Week - *Jesus' Annunciation* (Luke 1:26-38)