

Unexpected Christmas – Looking at the Biblical Story – Luke 1:5-25

Over the next four weeks, we will be looking at four different sections of the Christmas story and the way people respond when God speaks in unexpected ways. This week's passage describes Zechariah and Elizabeth's response to the angel Gabriel foretelling their son John the Baptist.

Objectives:

- Discuss the message given to Zechariah and his response to the angel.
- Reflect on how we respond when God speaks to us.
- Pray that we will recognize God's presence and that His Word will speak to our hearts in a transformative way that honors Him.
- Ask God to continue reveal Himself in life-changing ways and pray that we will be responsive and obedient.

Bible Discussion:

Read Luke 1:5-25 as a group. Let everyone have a moment to reflect on the text, then invite everyone to share their initial responses.

- How does Zechariah respond to Gabriel's message?
- How do you think you would have responded if you were in Zechariah's shoes?

Gabriel seems to see unbelief in Zechariah and deals with this pretty harshly. As a Jewish priest, Zechariah should be very familiar with the Genesis 18 account of Abraham and Sarah being promised, and then receiving, a son in their old age. Zechariah would have known that God was capable of doing what Gabriel said, but Zechariah still found it hard to believe that God would work this way in his own life.

- What are some areas in our lives that God has promised He is at work or will work, but we find it hard to believe?
- Why do we find it hard to believe sometimes?
- What can deepen our faith that God is good, powerful, and faithful to do all that He has promised?

Activity Suggestion:

- What might our group do together in response to God's goodness and provision and fulfilled promises in our lives? Serve together! Consider some of the local missions possibilities offered online at <https://cccomaha.churchcenter.com/registrations/events/category/25319>

Unexpected Christmas – Looking at the Biblical Story – Luke 1:26-56

This month we are looking at four different sections of the Christmas story and the way people respond when God speaks in unexpected ways. This week we will be looking at Luke 1:26-56. This passage describes Mary's response to the angel Gabriel foretelling the birth of Jesus.

Objectives:

- Discuss the message given to Mary and how her response and interaction with the angel compares to Zechariah's.
- Reflect on how Mary's story encourages us to live by the power of God's spirit as we respond to God in surrender.
- Pray that we will recognize God's presence and that God's Word will speak to our hearts in a transformative and God-honoring way.
- Ask God to continue revealing himself in life-changing ways and pray that we will be responsive and obedient.

Bible Discussion:

Read Luke 1:26-56 as a group. Let everyone have a moment to reflect on the text, then invite everyone to share their initial responses.

How does Mary's response to Gabriel compare to Zechariah's response in the previous passage?

- Why do you think Gabriel deals with Mary so much differently than he dealt with Zechariah?
- Though Mary and Zechariah's reactions are recorded similarly, God knows the intentions of the heart. Gabriel silences Zechariah in his unbelief and while Mary's voice/ song is magnified and immortalized because of her faith and obedience (verses 46-55).
- How does the author portray Mary after her encounter with Gabriel?
- What can we learn about God from Mary's song?
 - Is there sincere passion and joy in your heart when you hear the good news of Jesus?
 - How does Mary's story encourage us to live by the power of God's spirit as we respond to God in surrender?

Activity Suggestion:

Ask God for a fresh heart alignment and for him to purify the motives and intents of your heart. God is faithful to do so. Then spend some time writing your own version of Mary's song of praise/ The Magnificat. As you write ask,

- God, thank you for what have you done through Jesus. How are you including me in your redemptive plan?
- God, how have you revealed yourself to me and what can I know to be true about you?

Unexpected Christmas – Looking at the Biblical Story – Matthew 1:18-25

This month we are looking at four different sections of the Christmas story and the way people respond when God speaks in unexpected ways. This week we will be looking at Matthew 1:18-25. This passage reveals how Joseph lived a surrendered and obedient life unto the Lord regarding Jesus' birth.

Objectives:

- Discuss how a disciple lives according to God's will (obedience) and by the power of God's Spirit (surrender) through Joseph's example.
- Identify where God is at work changing your affections and will to follow Jesus.
- Pray and encourage each other to take a step of obedience and surrender to experience the joy of the Christmas season.

Bible Discussion: Read Matthew 1:18-25

Joseph had a shocking surprise; the Holy Spirit gets his bride-to-be pregnant! In what would be a loving response, he set out to end the engagement discretely in order to protect her from the actions of a judgmental society. But God reached out to Joseph and asked him to surrender his plans and trust in a bigger plan through obedience. Joseph demonstrated obedience to the Lord by taking a stand and publicly marrying his pregnant bride.

- What is something in your life that God's prompting you to take a stand that goes against the grain of the majority?
- How can your group help you trust and obey God in taking a stand?

Joseph had to surrender his needs by take cold showers for nine months so that Jesus is born of a virgin.

- Why is the virgin birth so important? <https://www.gotquestions.org/virgin-birth.html>
- What are some needs you're surrendering to God's timing and provision?
- How might God work in your surrender to bring a greater fulfillment to that need?

Activity Suggestion:

Joseph was obedient and gave up the right to give a name to the newborn child. He trusted and obeyed God in giving the newborn baby the name Jesus. Later we discover in Philippians 2:9-11, "Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, 10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." Share the name that is above all names this Christmas season!

- Who can you invite to a Christmas service to hear the name of Jesus through our online Christmas experience?
- Share the name of Jesus in my family gatherings. Simple ideas here: <https://www.focusonthefamily.com/parenting/christmas-activities/>
- Serve others so that they give thanks to Jesus for the outpouring of love and compassion. One opportunity is to help at a local homeless shelter. <https://www.opendoormission.org/volunteer/>

Unexpected Christmas – Looking at the Biblical Story – Luke 2:8-18

This month we are looking at four different sections of the Christmas story and the way people respond when God speaks in unexpected ways. This week we will be looking at Luke 2:8-18

Objectives:

- Discuss how a disciple leads from a deep sense of who they are in Jesus – identity.
- Identify where God is at work and join with connecting lost people to Jesus.

Bible Discussion: Read Luke 2:8-18

As Luke shares the story of Jesus' birth, he introduces us to the first witnesses of the newborn king. The shepherds were the first to ever hear the good news and the first to share the good news of Jesus with others. It doesn't matter if you're one of the first, or someone two thousand years later to hear and share the good news of Jesus; that news is still as powerful and life changing as ever.

- Share what opportunities you have had to spread the good news of Jesus to others lately.

Activity Suggestion: Brainstorm who you can invite to view the online Christmas service. Send text invites on the spot and pray for those invitees as a group.

Bible Discussion: Read John 10:7-15.

Thirty years after being introduced to these shepherds, people are introduced to the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd provides security through sacrificial love and actions. (Verses 7-13) When we surrender to the love of the Good Shepherd, we're adopted into the fold and recognize his voice. We're one of the lost sheep that's been found. One out of a hundred. When sheep didn't come in at night, the shepherd would build a small structure. While lying on the ground, his body would serve as a gate to keep threats out.

- In what area of your life do you need to experience the protection of the Good Shepherd?

The Good Shepherd loves and knows his sheep. (Verses 14-15) Everything changes when we understand that Jesus knows us deeply and completely. Being known by Jesus gives freedom to move beyond the shame we have buried inside and to forget the lies about ourselves.

- How does knowing Jesus knows you in the same way the Heavenly Father knows Him affect your everyday faith?

Knowing we're loved and cared for (regardless of the value the world assigns to us) allows us to live with more confidence and less fear. The world notices that quiet confidence. Strength of character underpins good decisions and the followers of Jesus who make them. In a lost and fallen world, Jesus followers who are confident about who they are and what they stand for have amazing platforms to impact families, friendships, and communities for God's Kingdom.

- Is there a decision, stand for truth, or faith risk you sense Jesus calling you to take? How does having confidence in your identity help you take steps of faith?

Prayer

Finish the statement "In Christ I am..." using John 15: 1, 15 and 16. As a group, prayerfully offer thanksgiving for who we are in Christ Jesus.