

CAPITOL STUDIES

JANUARY 22, 2025 • WEEK 2



LUKE FOR LEGISLATORS

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Theme Verse

Luke 19:10

For the Son of Man has come to **seek** and to **save** that which was **lost**.



Nothing Is Impossible?



EUGENE CLARK, A FORMER RESIDENT of Lincoln, Nebraska, is an amazing testimony of God's sufficient grace in a life of hardship and trial. Along with many other outstanding talents, he was an accomplished pianist, organist, gospel songwriter, and music director for Back to the Bible Ministries for many years. As a relatively young man, he became crippled with arthritis and blindness. Eventually, this left him bedfast and institutionalized. Even though he was blind, he still wrote and played music for the glory of God, leaving a legacy with his witness. One of his best-known songs, "Nothing Is Impossible," clearly testifies of his continued faith and trust in God in spite of trials. Our church choir in Norfolk, Nebraska, often sang this song. Mr. Clark's text for this song is our text for this week, Luke 1:37: "For with God, nothing shall be impossible" (KJV). Eugene Clark communicated the supernatural and miraculous outcome of faith in God and His provisions. Prophecies regarding the coming of the Messiah and his forerunner, given hundreds of years earlier, are fulfilled in Luke chapter one. The miraculous births of John the Baptist and Jesus confirm that "nothing is impossible with God."

Arin Hess

Pastor Arin Hess,
Chaplain, Capitol Studies



INTRODUCTION

In chapter one of Luke, God's messenger, Gabriel, brings to unassuming and humble people God's loving plan to send His Son, the Messiah, into the broken world to rescue and redeem. Dr. Luke includes, in his story of Jesus Christ the Son of Man, the humble beginning of Jesus' earthly life as well as that of His forerunner, John the Baptist.

I. THE BIRTH OF JOHN ANNOUNCED

A. The Parents of John the Baptist

Luke 1:5-7

In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zacharias, of the division of Abijah; and he had a wife from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. ⁶They were both righteous in the sight of God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and requirements of the Lord. ⁷But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and they were both advanced in years.

Herod (the Great) was king of Judea at this time. A very cruel and cunning person, he seemingly had no concern for anyone but himself. Herod murdered many people, including one of his ten wives, a mother-in-law, three of his sons, and the children aged two and under in Bethlehem. Despite the fact that the leader of their country systematically killed off anyone he regarded as a threat, there were still people, Zacharias and Elizabeth, who walked in righteousness, choosing to follow God's commands over man's. Zacharias ("Yahweh has remembered") and Elizabeth ("God is my oath"/"consecrated to God") were a godly couple who both came from the priestly family of Aaron. (Abijah was a son of Aaron's son, Eleazar.) But they did have something which caused them shame in their culture—they were old and childless. How hard that must have been! Yet, what a testimony is given of them—they walked "blamelessly in all the commandments and requirements of the Lord!" What testimony can others give of you and me?

B. The Angel's Appearance

Luke 1:8-11

Now it happened that while he was performing his priestly service before God in the appointed order of his division, ⁹according to the custom of the priestly office, he was chosen by lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense. ¹⁰And the whole multitude of the people were in prayer outside at the hour of the incense offering. ¹¹And an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing to the right of the altar of incense.

The temple priesthood was organized into 24 divisions, with each division serving twice a year for one week. Abijah's was the 8th division. The priests on duty drew lots to see who would offer incense in the holy place. Because of the large number of priests, most would never be chosen for such a duty. This was a high honor that was permitted to a priest but once in a lifetime. Zacharias no doubt regarded this as the supreme moment in his priestly service. The incense was kept burning



perpetually just in front of the veil that divided the holy place from the most holy place. Zacharias would offer the incense every morning and every evening, while the rest of the priests and worshipers stood outside the holy place in prayer. The temple was a place of prayer. The minister was within praying and offering incense while the multitude were without praying. Luke knew the power and importance of prayer. He emphasizes prayer more than the other Synoptic Gospels.

God often speaks to His people and calls them while they are busy with their daily tasks. Both Moses and David were caring for sheep, Gideon was threshing wheat, and Peter and his partners were mending nets when Jesus called them. It's hard to steer a car when the engine isn't running. When we're busy doing "the next right thing," God will give us direction.

C. The Angel's Announcement

Luke 1:12-14

Zacharias was troubled when he saw the angel, and fear gripped him. ¹³But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your petition has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will give him the name John. ¹⁴You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth.

John's Coming: When Gabriel appeared by the altar, Zacharias was frightened. This was a normal response and appropriate, for the angel's appearance could have meant divine judgment. Luke often reports fear in the presence of God or His mighty works. "Fear not" is a repeated statement in the Gospel of Luke (1:13, 30; 2:10; 5:10; 8:50; 12:7, 32). There is a time to fear and a time to trust and "fear not." It would appear that Zacharias had prayed much that God would give him a son, and now God was answering that prayer. Though it was hard to believe, God sent a clear explanation through Gabriel. God moves toward the fearful and offers instruction even today. Elizabeth would have a son, and he would be named John ("Yahweh is gracious"). He would bring them much joy. Joy is another key theme in Luke's Gospel. It is mentioned at least nineteen times. God wants His children to have joy in this life and the next. Good news brings joy! Zacharias should have been filled with joy at this news, but he did not believe.

Luke 1:15-17

"For he will be great in the sight of the Lord; and he will drink no wine or liquor, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit while yet in his mother's womb. ¹⁶And he will turn many of the sons of Israel back to the Lord their God. ¹⁷It is he who will go as a forerunner before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers back to the children, and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous, so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

John's Character: He would be filled with the Spirit before birth (see Luke 1:41). He would not drink wine or strong drink. Zacharias would likely have looked at this as a Nazirite vow which was usually temporary, although both Samson (Judges 16:17) and Samuel (1 Samuel 1:11) were subject to it from birth.





John's Calling: He would be God's prophet to present His Son to the people of Israel. God would use John's ministry to turn many people back to the Lord, just as Isaiah had promised (Isaiah 40:1-5, Luke 3:4-6). Gabriel alluded to Malachi 4:5-6 to compare John the Baptist with the Old Testament prophet Elijah, who was known for his bold, uncompromising stand for the Word of God—even in the face of a ruthless monarch. Jesus refers to John as a type of Elijah in Matthew 11:14. John would preach the need for repentance of sin and the need for a Savior from sin. He would prepare the way for the Messiah.

D. The Angel's Answer

Luke 1:18-20

Zacharias said to the angel, "How will I know this for certain? For I am an old man and my wife is advanced in years." ¹⁹The angel answered and said to him, "I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news. ²⁰And behold, you shall be silent and unable to speak until the day when these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their proper time."

"I am an old man": You would think that the presence of an angel and the announcement of God's Word would encourage Zacharias' faith, but they did not. Instead of looking to God by faith, the priest looked at himself and his wife and decided that the birth of a son was impossible. He wanted some assurance beyond the plain word of Gabriel, God's messenger, perhaps a sign from God. This, of course, was unbelief, and unbelief is something God does not accept. God brings us to a crossroads where we must choose fear or faith. Zacharias was really questioning God's ability to fulfill His own Word! He had forgotten what God did for Abraham and Sarah (Genesis 18:9-15).

"I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God": Gabriel came directly from God with God's message for Zacharias. Basically, he told Zacharias, "I was sent to give you good news from God, but you don't want to receive it. It **will** happen, and you will have plenty of time to think about it because you will not be able to speak until your son is born." It's easy for us to condemn Zacharias, but, before we criticize too much, we should ask, "How strong is my faith in God?"

E. The Angel's Accuracy

Luke 1:21-25

The people were waiting for Zacharias, and were wondering at his delay in the temple. ²²But when he came out, he was unable to speak to them; and they realized that he had seen a vision in the temple; and he kept making signs to them, and remained mute. ²³When the days of his priestly service were ended, he went back home. ²⁴After these days Elizabeth his wife became pregnant, and she kept herself in seclusion for five months, saying, ²⁵"This is the way the Lord has dealt with me in the days when He looked with favor upon me, to take away my disgrace among men."



Zacharias was speechless: He had asked for a sign, and God gave it to him. It was customary for a priest to pronounce a blessing after coming out of the temple, but Zacharias was forced to use sign language.

Elizabeth was with child: Though Zacharias' faith was weak, God was faithful. He did what He said He would and took away the disgrace of both Elizabeth and Zacharias. There is nothing too hard for the Lord. "Nothing is too difficult for you" (Jeremiah 32:17b). Apparently, the amazement and curiosity of people forced Elizabeth to hide herself even as she praised the Lord for His mercy.

The Messiah was coming! Not only was she to have a son, but the birth of her son was evidence that *the Messiah was coming!* These were joy-filled days indeed!

II. THE BIRTH OF JESUS ANNOUNCED

A. The Parents of Jesus

Luke 1:26-27

Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city in Galilee called Nazareth, ²⁷to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the descendants of David; and the virgin's name was Mary.

Jesus' mother, Mary, was a virgin. She was probably a young teenage girl who truly loved God and knew the Scriptural prophecies of the Messiah. Mary was betrothed to Joseph. Both of them were of the family of David. At this time, betrothal represented a permanent relationship nearly equivalent to marriage. Breaking off a betrothal required a decision similar to divorce.

Jesus' Father was God, not Joseph. Luke calls Mary a virgin twice in this verse to demonstrate that Jesus' conception was a miraculous act of God. Jesus was born of "the seed of a woman." Normally, a man's seed would determine conception.

B. The Angel's Announcement

Luke 1:28-33

And coming in, he said to her, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." ²⁹But she was very perplexed at this statement, and kept pondering what kind of salutation this was. ³⁰The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; for you have found favor with God. ³¹And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus. ³²He 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; ³³and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end."

Six months after Elizabeth conceived (v. 24), Gabriel is sent to visit Mary in Nazareth. Again, Luke shows us someone who is afraid. Again, Gabriel says to fear not. Again, God moves toward the fearful and gives clear explanation. Unlike Zacharias, Mary chooses to trust, not fear.





Revelation: Mary would have a Son. The child would be named Jesus (from the Hebrew name Joshua, “Yahweh is help or salvation”). He would also be called the **Son of the Most High**, highlighting Jesus’ divinity and royalty. (Compare Luke 1:35, 76.) Gabriel implied that Jesus will fulfill the Davidic covenant (2 Sam. 7:12–13). He would be the Messiah.

Luke 1:34-38

Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I am a virgin?” ³⁵The angel answered and said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy Child shall be called the Son of God. ³⁶And behold, even your relative Elizabeth has also conceived a son in her old age; and she who was called barren is now in her sixth month. ³⁷For nothing will be impossible with God.” ³⁸And Mary said, “Behold, the bondservant of the Lord; may it be done to me according to your word.” And the angel departed from her.

Realization: Mary thinks, “I have not had sexual relations. How can I have a son?”

Ramification: Gabriel responds, “**He will be the Son of God.**” This title reflected Jesus’ miraculous conception and, consequently, His divinity. God Himself (the Most High) would place this Child within Mary.

Reassurance: Gabriel continues, “I will give you a sign to show you how God works. Nothing is impossible for Him. Elizabeth, your old cousin, is going to have a baby. She is six months pregnant.” Mary does not ask for the sign, but in kindness, God gives it to her.

Readiness: Mary responds, “I am your servant, God. I am ready and willing to do whatever You desire.”

Response: Joy! Joy! Joy!

Luke 1:39-45

Now at this time Mary arose and went in a hurry to the hill country, to a city of Judah, ⁴⁰and entered the house of Zacharias and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the baby leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. ⁴²And she cried out with a loud voice and said, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! ⁴³And how has it happened to me, that the mother of my Lord would come to me? ⁴⁴For behold, when the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby leaped in my womb for joy. ⁴⁵And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what had been spoken to her by the Lord.”

Mary believed the angel and went to visit Elizabeth. Instantly, Elizabeth’s baby, John, leaped in the womb when he heard Mary’s voice because Mary was pregnant with Jesus. (Note that God, as Jesus, communicated with an unborn child.) Elizabeth, being immediately filled with the Holy Spirit, also recognized that Mary was carrying the Messiah. What an encouragement this must have been to Mary! (Remember what Gabriel told Zacharias about John in verse 15.)



III. THE ANTHEM OF MARY

Luke 1:46-55

And Mary said: “My soul exalts the Lord,⁴⁷ And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior.⁴⁸ For He has had regard for the humble state of His bondservant; For behold, from this time on all generations will count me blessed.⁴⁹ For the Mighty One has done great things for me; And holy is His name.⁵⁰ And His mercy is upon generation after generation toward those who fear Him.⁵¹ He has done mighty deeds with His arm; He has scattered those who were proud in the thoughts of their heart.⁵² He has brought down rulers from their thrones, And has exalted those who were humble.⁵³ He has filled the hungry with good things; And sent away the rich empty-handed.⁵⁴ He has given help to Israel His servant, In remembrance of His mercy,⁵⁵ As He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and his descendants forever.”

This song is known as *The Magnificat*. Mary’s song marks the first of four hymns in Luke’s birth narratives. It is styled after Hannah’s song of praise in 1 Samuel 2:1–10.

It was personal: Mary called Jesus Christ *my Savior*.

It was practical: Mary’s Son would be a channel of blessing and salvation to the nation of Israel (Genesis 12:1–3; 17:1–27) and everyone from every age who would exercise faith like Abraham.

It was prophetic: It shared fulfillment of Yahweh’s promise to Abraham that through his descendants would come the One would bless all nations.

CONCLUSION

Birth announcements in our day are often very public, extravagant, and creative. The birth announcements from God through Gabriel were private and powerful. We are grateful the Holy Spirit allowed Luke, the historian, to interview eyewitnesses of these events. It is very probable that Mary spoke or sang the words of her *Magnificat* for Luke. As we read this inspired passage, we, too, can have confidence in God’s salvation narrative and its faith-supporting details. Jesus came to save needy souls. This is personally for you, my friend. In Whom are you placing your faith?

God calls us to believe His Good News. Those who believe it experience His joy and want to express their praise to Him. It is not enough for us to say that Jesus is *a Savior*, or even *the Savior*. With Mary, we must personally place our trust in Jesus, so that we can say, “My spirit hath rejoiced in God *my Savior*” (Luke 1:47).

Chaplain Arin Hess



FOOTNOTES

All Scripture quotations, unless noted, are taken from the *New American Standard Bible*, 1995 Update.

Some of this material was gleaned from the following sources:

Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, Victor Books, 1996, pg. 170-175.

Lexham Press, *Faithlife Study Bible*, 2012, Luke 1.

J.A. Martin, "Luke" in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, Victor Books, 1985, Vol. 2, pg. 202-207.

Personal Study Notes



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WEEKLY BIBLE STUDY

Meeting during the
109th Legislature's
First Session

SENATORS

6:45 – 7:45 A.M.
Wednesdays
Capitol Office #1004

STAFF

12:00 – 1:00 P.M.
Wednesdays
NE State Office Building
Morrill Room