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The angel Gabriel tells the priest Zechariah he will have a baby who will prepare people for Jesus.

The Birth of John the Baptist Foretold

Luke 1:5–25

Have you ever prayed and asked God to do something for you but then given up when nothing happened?

When it was almost the time God wanted to send His Son into the world, He sent an angel named Gabriel (GAY-bree-uhl) to the temple in Jerusalem. Gabriel appeared to a priest who was burning incense in the Holy Place, the front room of the temple. The priest's name was Zechariah (zek-uh-RYE-uh). Zechariah and his wife, Elizabeth, both loved God and trusted His promise to send the Savior. Many years before, Zechariah had prayed that God would give them a child, but now they were very old, and no child had ever come.

When Gabriel suddenly appeared, Zechariah was terrified. The angel told him, “Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John.”

The angel told him that his son would be great, and he would go before the Lord as His mighty messenger. He would prepare God's people to receive His Son, whom He had promised so long ago to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden after they had eaten the forbidden fruit.

This great promise surprised Zechariah very much. He answered, “How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years.” He didn't believe God's promise because he thought Elizabeth was way too old to have a baby.

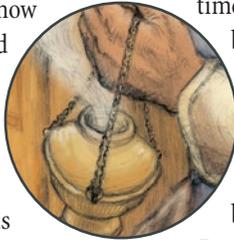
The angel answered, “I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I was sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news. And behold, you will be silent and unable to speak until the day that these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time.” Sure enough, when

the angel left him, Zechariah came out of the temple but couldn't say a word.

When his time to serve at the temple ended, he returned home and Elizabeth became pregnant, and the baby started growing inside her.

Sometimes, we pray for things, as Zechariah did, and it seems like God doesn't hear—or He doesn't care. But God hears all our prayers, and He promises to answer all of them. Sometimes, He gives us the things we ask for because those are best for us. Sometimes, He says no because He wants to give us something better than we could ever think of. Sometimes, He wants us to wait—like Zechariah—because His time has not come yet.

But whatever His answer might be, you can be sure it will be the very best for you.



LET'S PRAY: Lord God, sometimes it is hard to keep praying—especially when we pray so hard and nothing seems to happen. Give me faith to trust in You and to believe Your promise to answer all my prayers. In Jesus' name. Amen.



The angel Gabriel tells Mary God has picked her to be the mother of His Son, Jesus.

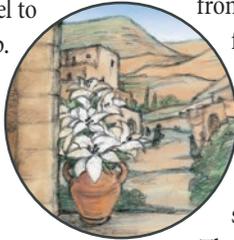
Gabriel Visits Mary

Luke 1:26–38

When you look at a manger scene at Christmastime, what do you think about little baby Jesus?

Six months after Zechariah’s wife, Elizabeth, became pregnant, God sent the angel Gabriel to a northern town called Nazareth to a young woman named Mary. She was betrothed to a man named Joseph. They had promised to marry each other and were waiting for their wedding, when they could move in together and start their family.

The angel appeared to Mary and said, “Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!” Mary wasn’t expecting an angel to come to her, and she was shaken up. She thought carefully about what he had said, and she wondered what he meant. She wondered what he was going to say to her next—would it be bad news or good news?



Gabriel said, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will bear a son, and you shall call His name Jesus.” He told her this child would be great and would be called “the Son of the Most High.”

Mary believed the angel, but she wondered how she would become the mother of this child. She wasn’t married to Joseph yet.

The angel told her the Holy Spirit would come to her and use His mighty power to give her this baby. He added, “Therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God.”

The angel said Jesus would be great; He would rule on the throne of His father David and reign over the house of Jacob forever. Mary knew this was the Savior God promised so long ago to Adam and Eve; to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and to King David. Since He is God’s own Son, His kingdom will never end.

Finally, the angel Gabriel told Mary that her relative Elizabeth was pregnant because of God’s great power, even though she was way too old to have a baby.

Mary believed the angel. She was ready to offer herself to be part of God’s loving plan. She replied, “I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.”

It’s neat that Jesus had a human mother just like you and me and every other boy and girl. Since Jesus lived as a boy on this earth, He knows what it is like to be a child, then grow up to be an adult, as you will one day. And since Jesus is a human, He was able to take our sins from us, carry them to the cross, and suffer and die there in our place.

But it’s even better that Jesus’ Father was God Almighty, and not a human birth father like our dads. That means Jesus doesn’t have our sinful nature—He is holy and perfect. That means Jesus was able to keep all God’s Commandments in our place and earn our place in heaven. And since He is God, Jesus was able to destroy the devil, death, and hell for us.

LET’S PRAY: Lord God, heavenly Father, thank You for the wonderful words the angel Gabriel brought to Mary. Thank You for sending Your only Son to be her Son, our strong Brother who saved us from our sins. In Jesus’ name. Amen.



Mary visits Zechariah and his wife, Elizabeth. Their baby leaps because he is close to God's Son.

Mary Visits Elizabeth

Luke 1:39–56

Do you ever wish you could trade places with boys or girls who are more popular or have families with lots of money and things?

The angel Gabriel told Mary that God had chosen her to be the mother of His own Son. He also told her how God had used His great power to give a baby to her elderly relative Elizabeth. After the angel left, Mary decided to leave Nazareth and go visit Zechariah and Elizabeth in Judah (JOO-duh).

She traveled quickly and came to Zechariah's house. When she saw Elizabeth, Mary said hello. Right at that moment, Elizabeth's baby started leaping inside her. She was filled with the Holy Spirit and told Mary, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" Yes, even though Mary hadn't said a word about being pregnant, Elizabeth knew she was carrying a baby, and she knew this baby was the Lord, the promised Son of God.

Mary was amazed God had chosen her to be the mother of His precious Son. Mary was not famous; her family wasn't powerful; they didn't have a lot of money. Yet God chose her. He passed by all the rich, powerful, and famous families, and chose Mary of Nazareth to be the mother of His Son. She began praising Him in words we call "The Song of Mary": "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior." The more Mary thought about it, the more she realized how amazing God is. "He who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is His name." And she praised God for keeping His promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob: "He has helped His servant Israel, in remembrance of His mercy, as He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever."

Mary spent three months with Zechariah and Elizabeth. These must have been won-

derful days, talking about God's great love and feeling the babies grow inside them.

God didn't choose Mary and Elizabeth because they had a lot of friends or nice big homes or a bunch of money. He chose them because He loved them. God chose you for the same reason. It doesn't matter to Him if everyone at school knows you or not or likes you or not. It doesn't matter if your family has a lot of money or none at all. God gave His own Son, Jesus, to save you, and He made you His own child in Baptism. Now, He wants to work through you to make other boys and girls His own sons and daughters through faith in Jesus.



LET'S PRAY: Lord God, heavenly Father, thank You for choosing me to be Your child and for saving me through Your Son, Jesus. Give me Your Holy Spirit, that I may be brave and filled with love and joy to tell other people about Jesus' great love. In Jesus' name. Amen.



After Mary returns home, Elizabeth gives birth to a son, and Zechariah names him John.

The Birth of John the Baptist

Luke 1:57–80

Did you ever have to keep a secret from someone and it was almost impossible to do so?

Mary stayed with Zechariah and Elizabeth until the time came for John the Baptist to be born. Then Mary returned home to Nazareth. When Elizabeth had her baby, all their neighbors celebrated with them and praised God for being so good and kind to them.

All this time, Zechariah remained silent, unable to speak—but surely he watched and listened and had so much he wanted to say! All through the nearly three months Mary had stayed with them, he couldn't say a word. And even after his baby was born, he still couldn't talk.

One more week went by, and Zechariah's son turned eight days old. For Israelite boys, this eighth day was very special. This was the day they were circumcised and given their very own names. Zechariah and Elizabeth's neighbors and relatives gathered to celebrate.

When it was time to name the baby, the guests wanted to name him Zechariah, after his father. But Elizabeth said, "No; he shall be called John." The neighbors and relatives were puzzled: "None of your relatives is called by this name." They turned to Zechariah to see what he wanted to name him. Zechariah took a writing tablet and wrote down in front of them all, "His name is John."

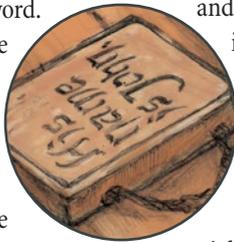
Suddenly, God opened Zechariah's mouth so he could talk again. Now at last, after holding all his thoughts inside for almost a year, Zechariah was able to praise and thank God the way he should have done when the angel Gabriel first spoke to him.

Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and said some wonderful words we call the "Song of Zechariah." We call it a song because sometimes we sing it in church. In his song, he

praised God for sending His Son to be our Savior, and he rejoiced that the promised Savior had come. He didn't say it in his song, but he knew that wonderful baby had been right there in his house, growing inside the Virgin Mary.

Then Zechariah looked at his own little baby. He told John, "And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare His ways." When John grew up, he did go before the Christ and made people ready to hear their Savior's wonderful words. Zechariah closed his song by speaking again about Mary's baby and the wonderful peace and eternal life He would win for all of us.

Keeping secrets is hard—especially when we have great good news to tell people. But the greatest, most happy news of all is something we never have to keep secret from our family, friends, and people at school and everywhere: God loves them and sent His Son to save them.



LET'S PRAY: Lord God, heavenly Father, thank You for bringing Zechariah to bold faith and confidence in Your promises, and for restoring his voice to tell all his relatives and neighbors that Your Son was coming at last. Give me confidence to tell everyone I know about how You sent Your Son as our Savior, so they, too, may know all about Jesus. In Jesus' name. Amen.