



THE GOSPEL OF  
**Luke**

**SESSION OBJECTIVE: LUKE 1:5-25**

To understand the foretelling of the birth of John the Baptist.

## Silence is Broken

Luke's narrative begins, not with the birth of Jesus, but with the foretelling of the birth of John. John will serve later a forerunner for Jesus, "declaring the way of the Lord" (Lk. 1:76), a fulfillment of Isaiah 40:3 (Lk. 3:4). But keep in mind, up to this point there has been virtually no contact between God and His people for a long time. Malachi, the most recent prophet, lived nearly 400 years ago. The experience of Zechariah and Elizabeth in this first chapter is groundbreaking in that the Spirit of the Lord is beginning to awaken the hearts of key individuals who will usher in the Messiah. John's birth is unique in many ways. The presence of an angel, a mother and a father of Aaronic descent, an unusual period of silence from the father, and other details mark this story as extraordinarily unique.

## John's Birth Foretold

Luke 1:5-25 gives the foretelling of John's birth to Zechariah and his wife Elizabeth by the angel Gabriel. John is to be an important person in God's messianic economy in that he will be the one to prepare the way for Christ. Below is a breakdown of each of the characters with some unique details.

### **ZECHARIAH**

Zechariah is introduced to us as both "a priest" and "of the division of Abijah" (Lk. 1:5). That he is of the division of Abijah also indicates that he is of Aaronic descent, which marks him as a particularly "pure" individual, religiously speaking. The priesthood was, at this time, divided into 24 divisions, and each division

would take temple responsibilities twice a year. This story focuses on one of the weeks in which “his division was on duty” (Lk. 1:8).

### **ELIZABETH**

Not many details are given regarding who Elizabeth is other than she is also, like her husband, a descendant of Aaron (Lk. 1:5). Given her status, she is also someone who possess a pure ancestry.

These details are important for a couple of reasons. For one, Zechariah’s experience with the angel will take place in a holy place, the temple, and his priestly duties speak to why he was in the temple in the first place. His background is a part of Luke’s story building. Secondly, the emphasis on their Aaronic ancestry sets them up as ideal parents for a child chosen for “set apart” reasons. Because both Zechariah and Elizabeth are of Aaronic descent, it follows that John is as well.

### **GABRIEL**

One additional character is introduced in this narrative, an angel named *Gabriel*. This was not simply an angelic encounter, but an encounter with a unique angel. Gabriel is one of only two angels named in the Scripture (the other being Michael in Jude 9 and Revelation 12:7-12). Gabriel is referenced in both Daniel 8:16 and 9:2, and possibly Daniel 10:5. In the so-called inter-testamental period (the period between Malachi and the Gospels), Gabriel was taught to be an archangel, like Michael, who stands in the presence of God (along with Raphael, who is unnamed in both the Old and New Testaments but found in the apocryphal book of Tobit). While the Bible never specifically calls Gabriel an archangel, it is perhaps implied by Gabriel’s own words to Zechariah in Luke 1:19: “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.” There is, however, no verse in the Old or New Testament that says specifically that standing in the presence of God is a qualification of being an archangel. Nevertheless, that Gabriel is identified here as the same angel in Daniel, and that he stands in God’s presence lends to not only his credibility as an important voice to be listened to, but also as someone quite terrifying (Lk. 1:12).

### **JOHN**

Zechariah and Elizabeth are told that they will have a child that is set apart for a specific life of service to the Lord. First he will bring them “joy and gladness,” and many will “rejoice at his birth, for he will be great before the Lord” (Lk. 1:14-15a). Further specifications are given regarding the pure life he must live: “And he must not drink wine or strong drink” (Lk. 1:15b). These are the same details given regarding the Nazaritic vow (Num. 6:2-5), a special set apart vow taken in the Old Testament by the likes of both Samuel (1 Sam. 1:11) and Samson (Jg. 13:4-5). However, John is given other details that set him even further apart from those who have taken the vow: “He will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother’s womb” (Lk. 1:15). This detail is extremely important, and will be revisited in a later session. For now, make a mental note that John will not only be filled with the Holy Spirit, but he will be filled with the Holy Spirit from the womb. In addition to this, his call is clarified: “And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared” (Lk. 1:16-17).

## **From Silence to Skeptical to Silence**

One of the more humorous parts of this story is the “punishment” that Zechariah undergoes for his disbelief in Gabriel’s words: “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” (Lk. 1:20). Zechariah is subject to the supernatural power of the angel Gabriel. Two interesting themes arise in this study. This story begins on

the heels of 400 years of silence, and now that God is speaking, he will make others be silent. The other interesting detail is the presence of doubt in Zechariah. Given that, in Session 1, we discussed Luke's desire to overcome others' doubts by giving them a well-documented testimony regarding the veracity of the faith, we find the presence of doubt in John the Baptist's father in the very next passage! The detail regarding Zechariah's silence is actually quite important. Following this, in next week's study, we will see the foretelling of the birth of Jesus, and when Mary conceives and immediately goes to her family member Elizabeth's house, no one knows about either child except Zechariah (who can't speak), and Elizabeth. This adds credibility to the events that will take place when Mary visits.

## What About Now?

There are many takeaways in this study, but perhaps none more clear than the Bible's position on life in the womb. In an age where even Christians have sacrificed their biblical worldview to embrace a growing cultural acceptance of abortion, Luke 1 reminds us that life does in fact begin inside the womb. How, you may ask? The fact that John the Baptist will be filled with the Spirit of the Lord even inside the womb indicates that he is alive in the womb. It is an illogical and ill-formed idea to think that a lifeless clump of developing cells in a woman's uterus could receive the Spirit of the Lord. The Scripture speaks clearly to the reality that life begins prior to birth. Ecclesiastes 11:5 says, "As you do not know the way the spirit comes to the bones in the womb of a woman with child, so you do not know the work of God who makes everything." Psalm 139:13 says, "For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb." Isaiah 44:24 says, "Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, who formed you from the womb." In Jeremiah 1:5, God says, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you." The point is, Luke's account of John's filling of the Spirit further demonstrates what the Scripture has been saying the whole time, and thus this story gives clarity to how to think Christianly about abortion.

## Study Questions

### Day One

1. Read Luke 1:5-7. In what "days" did this take place? Who is Zechariah? What division of priests does he belong to? Who is Elizabeth and who is she a descendant of? Why do these details matter?

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2. Read Luke 1:8-11. What was Zechariah chosen to do, and who appeared to him while he was doing it?

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### Day Two

1. Read Luke 1:12-15. How did Zechariah respond to seeing Gabriel? What did Gabriel say to him? What does the command to avoid alcohol indicate? What is implied by John being filled with the spirit of the LORD in the womb?

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2. Read Luke 1:16-17. What will John do, according to Gabriel? What is significant about the mention of Elijah? What verse does this likely fulfill from the Old Testament?
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### Day Three

1. Read Luke 1:18-20. How does Zechariah respond to Gabriel's words? How does Gabriel describe himself? What does he say will happen to Zechariah because of his disbelief?
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2. Read Luke 1:21-22. What did the people think when they saw that Zechariah could not speak? How did Zechariah try to communicate with them?
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### Day Four

1. Read Luke 1:23. What did Zechariah do after his Temple duty ended?
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2. Read Luke 1:24-25. What happened to Elizabeth shortly after this? What did she say regarding everything that happened?
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## Week 2 Discussion: The Importance of Life

In our passage this week, Gabriel tells Zechariah that John will be filled with the Holy Spirit “even from his mother’s womb” (Lk. 1:15). This speaks to the reality of life in the womb prior to birth (which is in opposition with the foundational belief of a pro-choice disposition). Talk as a group about what the Scripture says about life, and how this should shape the way we as Christ followers think about such things.

1. Icebreaker: Do you believe that life begins at conception, or later? Why? Provide Scripture to support your answer.
2. How important is it to maintain grace and compassion when discussing abortion? Why?
3. Read Ecclesiastes 11:5. What does the verse indicate?
4. What are practical ways you can fight for the lives of the unborn? (Hint: It doesn’t involve social media)
5. How grieved are you by death in general? Do you feel the same for the unborn? Why or why not?
6. How can the church be better about both speaking truth regarding the sanctity of life while also maintaining love, compassion, and forgiveness for those who have had an abortion (or paid for one)?

## Takeaways:

1. Luke wrote his Gospel based on a compilation of eye witness accounts that he carefully researched.
2. Luke wrote his Gospel for the purpose of giving certainty to the validity of the Christian faith.