



THE GOSPEL OF  
**Luke**

**SESSION OBJECTIVE: LUKE 1:26-38**

To understand the foretelling of the birth of Jesus.

## Knives Out

“This is a twisted web and we are not finished untangling it, not yet.” That line, perhaps more than any other, best encapsulates the fictional character *Benoit Blanc* in Rian Johnson’s *Knives Out* (2019). Featuring a star-studded cast including Daniel Craig, Chris Evans, Jamie Lee Curtis, and Michael Shannon, the movie was a success in the box office and amassed a passionate following almost immediately. The movie centers around an investigation of the death of Harlan Thrombey, and the story shifts from each family member’s account of what happened on the night of his death. As the movie progresses and the accounts are given, many of the same details are recounted, but there are notable details that some were privy to that others were not. Part of what makes the movie so fun is way the multiple perspectives are unfolded on screen. You don’t get a full picture of what actually happened until the end of the movie.

One of the unique benefits of reading the three synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke) is that a clearer picture emerges after you’ve read all three of them. Each of them give the same major details, but they also include their own unique perspectives that the others do not. In Luke 1:26-38, the foretelling of the birth of Jesus occurs, but notably different than how it unfolds in Matthew’s Gospel. Matthew centers around the angel’s message to *Joseph* that predicts Jesus’ birth will be a fulfillment of Isaiah 7 (“the virgin shall conceive,” “Immanuel”). Luke, however, reveals to us the angels message to *Mary*, and her subsequent actions prior to giving birth. Luke and Matthew together, then, demonstrate a powerful picture of how each of them responded to such shocking, world-changing news.

## Mary's Visit

The passage begins by identifying the time that the following events take place: "In the sixth month" (Lk. 1:26). This is not the sixth month of the year, but as verse 36 clarifies, this is the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy with John. Like Session 2, the angel Gabriel shows up to deliver the news of a pregnancy, this time to Mary, and this time the pregnancy will include even stranger details. Below are some key details regarding this pregnancy.

### **A TROUBLING GREETING**

Just as Zechariah experienced (Lk. 1:12), the greeting from the angel was a troubling experience for Mary (Lk. 1:29). Beyond the cultural norms of women not speaking to individuals they didn't know, Gabriel was no ordinary being, and likely his visible appearance was truly intimidating. There is a reason that angels usually have to say, "fear not, do not be dismayed," whenever they appear. However, Gabriel was able to calm her and give her the message he came to deliver.

### **FAVOR**

First, Mary is described as, "O favored one" in verse 28, and then again Gabriel tells her: "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God" (Lk. 1:30). Remember that specific attention was given to Elizabeth and Zechariah because of their piety. Both were Aaronic descendants, and he even served in the temple. That John was to be set apart from birth then was not too surprising given the "set apartness" of his parents. However, Mary's favor with God has nothing to do with her piety, but God's sovereign choice. She is not earning God's favor, but her selection as the chosen vessel for the Lord could more be likened to Gideon (Jg. 6:12) than Elizabeth.

## Who Is the Child?

Gabriel then goes on to tell her: "You will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus." In the Matthew account, an unnamed angel appears to Joseph and tells him something similar, but with an added clause: "She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21). Gabriel doesn't tell Mary that He will save His people from their sins, but he does go on to say quite a bit more: "He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." Below is a breakdown of Gabriel's message to Mary.

### **HE WILL BE GREAT**

Unlike John who will be "great in the sight of the Lord" (Lk. 1:15), Jesus' greatness will be unmatched. It should also be noted that when the term "great" is used for someone without a qualifier (especially in the LXX), it is an attribute of God alone (Ps. 48:2; 86:10; 135:5; 145:3). That means this simple word is actually an argument for the deity of Christ.

### **THE SON OF THE MOST HIGH**

Secondly, he will be "the Son of the Most High God." This is a term equivalent to "Son of God," which Jesus will be called more times than once by other individuals in Luke's Gospel (Lk. 1:35; 4:9; 4:41; 22:70). However, the specific usage of "Most High" harkens all the way back to Genesis 14:18, in a description of the mysterious figure Melchizedek: "And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; now he was a priest of God Most High." Interestingly, Jesus will later be connected to Melchizedek in Hebrews 7:15-17,

albeit a “better” one (Heb. 7:22). The term “Most High” became later a term exclusively reserved for God alone.

### **THE THRONE OF DAVID**

Third, He will be “given the throne of his father David.” This speaks to the way in which Jesus will fulfill the prophecies about the Messiah who will sit on David’s throne (2 Sam. 7:14-16). In fact, while Matthew 1:23 applies Isaiah 7:14 to Jesus, Luke sees more of a fulfillment of Isaiah 9:6, a verse that captures the spirit of how the Messiah will fulfill the Davidic promises: “For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.” The child predicted in Isaiah 9:6 will do all of the things expected of the eternal Davidic heir, and Jesus captures all of these perfectly. It’s one of the reasons Matthew begins His Gospel by calling Jesus “the Son of David” (Matt. 1:1).

### **REIGN OVER THE HOUSE OF JACOB**

Fourth, “He will reign over the house of Jacob forever.” This is another descriptor that speaks to the deity of Christ. Micah 4:7 says, “I will make the lame a remnant and the outcasts a strong nation, and the LORD will reign over them in Mount Zion from now on and forever.” Only God will reign over His people forever, and yet Mary’s Son will according to Gabriel.

### **A KINGDOM WITH NO END**

Finally, Mary’s Son will rule over a kingdom with no end. The aforementioned Isaiah 9:6 is followed by this same decree in verse 7: “There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness from then on and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this.” Jesus will eternally reign, and the kingdom of God will never cease.

## **A Virgin Birth**

The final piece to the puzzle is how Mary will give birth if she is still a virgin? In the Greek, Mary literally says, “How will this be, *since I am not knowing a man?*” Like any rational individual, Mary understands that babies are made through intercourse, and that since she is an unmarried woman, it would not be appropriate and therefore not possible for her to conceive. However, she does not respond in disbelief like Zechariah did (Lk. 1:18), but rather she wrestles with what seems like God calling her to something that violates His own morality. How can God choose her for a child, when having a child would require something of her that would violate His will?

Gabriel responds in verses 35 through 37: “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God. And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. For nothing will be impossible with God.” In what is perhaps the most perplexing, mysterious, and awe-inspiring moment in the New Testament, Mary is told that in some way, she will supernaturally become pregnant with this child by means of God “overshadowing” her. The Greek word for “overshadow” is ἐπισκιάζω (episkiazō), and it is a very intentional word as it recalls God “overshadowing” the tabernacle upon its completion and infusing it with His presence and glory (Ex. 40:33-35). There, in the tabernacle in space and time, God’s presence was seen, felt, and acknowledged. Luke sees the birth of Jesus as a similar instance, and John borrowed this concept as well when he wrote: “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (Jn. 1:14). The word “dwelt” is a word that literally means, “to pitch a tent.” In other words, the eternal Son of God

took on human flesh and *tabernacled* among us. ἐπισκιάζω (episkiazō) is used again in Luke 9:34-36 when the divine cloud “overshadows” Jesus along with Peter, James, and John, an event that impacted Peter so greatly that he wrote about it (2 Pet. 1:16-18).

While Elizabeth’s pregnancy is certainly unusual, Mary’s pregnancy defies all human logic and depends on no human power. This is the work of God to fulfill the promise of God and accomplish the will of God. Nothing about Jesus’ birth is ordinary, and though He will appear ordinary as a human man, He is also the divine and eternal Son of God.

## What About Now?

The foretelling of Jesus’ birth provides a ton of details that show how He will ultimately fulfill so many of God’s of promises in Old Testament history. There was nothing random about the birth of Jesus. Everything about it had a reason. The main takeaway from this story is that God has a definite plan that He has been working to bring about and complete since time began. God is not randomly deciding what He wants to do on the spot; He has carefully planned everything, and even though our fallenness leads us away from what He desires us to do, it doesn’t thwart His carefully laid out plan. Understand that if God has accomplished this much, He is trustworthy to accomplish the rest. The end of the story has not yet come to pass. Jesus will come again and execute judgment and bring about His eternal kingdom. It’s not a matter of if, but when.

## Study Questions

### Day One

1. Read Luke 1:26-27. When does this passage take place? Which angel came to speak to Mary? How is Mary described?

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2. Read Luke 1:28-30. What did Gabriel say to Mary? What was her response, and why? What did the angel say to her to calm her down?

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### Day Two

1. Read Luke 1:31. What did Gabriel tell her would happen to her? What was she to call the son?

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2. Read Luke 1:32. What three things does Gabriel say regarding Jesus in this verse? (Hint: See above notes)

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### Day Three

1. Read Luke 1:33. What two things does Gabriel say regarding Jesus in this verse? (Hint: See above notes)

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2. Read Luke 1:34. What does Mary say to Gabriel in response to his message?

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### Day Four

1. Read Luke 1:35. What does Gabriel say will happen to Mary? What is the significance of the term “overshadow?” (Hint: See above notes)

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2. Read Luke 1:36-38. Who is Mary’s relative? What does Gabriel say has happened to her? How does Mary respond to all of this?

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## Week 3 Discussion: When It Doesn’t Make Sense

In our passage this week, God reveals how the eternal Son of God will become human and it is, if nothing else, a miraculous event. Mary wrestles with how all of it will work, but in the end she is receptive to God’s plans even though she can’t really comprehend them. Talk as a group about how easy/difficult it is for you when God begins to move in your life in a way that doesn’t make sense. Are you able to be receptive like Mary, or are you skeptical like Zechariah?

1. Icebreaker: Has God ever moved you to do something that didn’t make sense to you? Share with the group if you are willing.
2. Will God ever violate His own morality or will?
3. What are some good steps you can take if you sense God is calling you in some specific way?
4. How does knowing God’s Word help you ‘when it doesn’t make sense?’
5. How can you help encourage other believers when they can’t make sense of what God is calling them to do?
6. How can the church help “when it doesn’t make sense?”

### Takeaways:

1. Gabriel revealed to Mary that Jesus’ birth would be unlike any other birth that has ever happened.
2. Gabriel revealed to Mary that Jesus would be unlike any other person that has ever lived, and that He would fulfill a great number of Messianic expectations.