

# BEFORE BABY JESUS' BIRTH

Matthew 1:18-25; Luke 1:5-80

## STRUCTURE

**Key-persons:** Zechariah, Mary, and Joseph

**Key-locations:** Jerusalem and Nazareth

### Key-repetitions:

- Angels: angel Gabriel visited Zechariah (Lk 1:11-20) and Mary (Lk 1:26-38). An angel appeared to Joseph (Mat 1:20-24).
- People were afraid of the angels, but the angels told them not to fear: Zechariah (Lk 1:11-13); Mary (1:26-30).
- Mary was a virgin and became pregnant by the Holy Spirit (Mat 1:18, 20, 25; Lk 1:27, 31, 34-35).
- Predictions: Zechariah would have a son (Lk 1:13); predictions about his son (Lk 1:13-17); Mary would become pregnant (Lk 1:31); predictions about Mary's baby (Lk 1:32-33; Mat 1:21).

### Key-attitudes:

- Zechariah and Mary's fear when an angel appeared before them.
- Joseph's goodness.
- Acceptance of God's will by Zechariah, Mary and Joseph.

### Initial-situation:

Many Old Testament prophecies spoke about a special person who was to come. A descendant of Eve will crush the head of the snake (Gen 3:15); through Abraham, all peoples on earth will be blessed (Gen 12:3); a great prophet is promised (Deut 18:15), a descendant of King David will reign forever (2 Sam 16); a virgin will conceive and give birth to a son (Isa 7:14).

After the end of events recorded in the Old Testament, about four hundred years passed without God's sending a prophet. No one received a vision from God or a visit from an angel.

At the beginning of the events recorded in the New Testament, the Romans dominated the world. In Judea, King Herod the Great was king of the Jews. The Roman army protected him and forced the Jews to accept Herod as king. Most of the Jews frequented the temple and offered sacrifices, though few awaited the arrival of the Promised One.

Those who remembered and longed for the Promised One, expected him to lead a political revolution which would drive out the Romans and make Israel a powerful nation.

**Initial-problem:**

After four hundred years of God not sending a prophet or visiting his people in a special way, an angel appeared to Zechariah with a message from God.

**Final-situation:**

An angel told Joseph to marry Mary. Joseph took Mary as his wife but did not have physical intimacy with her until she gave birth to the baby.

## **BIBLE STORY**

**John the Baptist's Birth Is Announced**

Herod was king of Judea. A priest named Zechariah was married to Elizabeth. Both Zechariah and Elizabeth were good people who pleased the Lord God. They had no children because Elizabeth couldn't conceive. Both of them were very old (Lk 1:5-7).

One day Zechariah's division of priests was on duty and he was serving as priest. Zechariah entered the Lord's temple to burn incense (Lk 1:8-10).

Suddenly, the angel Gabriel appeared. Zechariah was terrified. The angel calmed him, "Don't be afraid, Zechariah; God has heard your prayer. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son. You'll name him John. He'll announce the Lord's arrival in the style and power of Elijah. He'll make peace between parents and their children. He'll turn the hardened skeptics back to the right way of thinking about God. He'll prepare the people for the coming of the Lord."

Zechariah completed his time of priestly service and returned home. His wife Elizabeth became pregnant (Lk 1:11-25).

**Gabriel Announces Birth of Jesus to Mary**

Elizabeth was six months pregnant and God sent the angel Gabriel to the Galilean village of Nazareth to a virgin named Mary. She was engaged to marry Joseph, a descendant from King David. The angel told Mary, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you."

The angel's words confused Mary. The angel assured her, "Don't be afraid, Mary. God is pleased with you. You'll become pregnant and give birth to a son. You'll name him Jesus. He'll be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David. He'll rule over the people of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end."

Mary asked the angel, "How will this happen? I'm a virgin!"

The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you. The power of the Most High will cover you. So the baby will be holy. He'll be called the Son of God. Elizabeth, your elderly relative, is going to have a baby in her old age. Everyone called her barren; yet she is six months pregnant! Nothing is impossible with God."

Mary answered, "I am the Lord's servant girl. May this happen to me just as you say." Then the angel went away (Lk 1:26-38).

Mary traveled to visit Elizabeth for three months, then Mary returned home to Nazareth.

### **Birth of John the Baptist**

The time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she had a son. Her neighbors and relatives heard how good the Lord was to her and they celebrated with her. Zechariah and Elizabeth gave the baby the name John (Lk 1:57-80).

### **An Angel Announces the Birth of Jesus to Joseph**

Mary was engaged to be married to Joseph. *It was the Jewish custom that an engagement involved a commitment that could only be dissolved through divorce.* Before Mary and Joseph went through the marriage ceremony; before they were intimate, Joseph discovered that Mary was pregnant. She was pregnant by the power of the Holy Spirit, but Joseph didn't know that. Joseph always did what was right. *Jewish custom gave Joseph a choice about how he could divorce Mary. He could take Mary to a public square and publicly accuse her of being an adulteress, or Joseph could write out a letter of divorce and deliver it to Mary in the presence of two witnesses.* Joseph didn't want to disgrace Mary in public, so he planned to divorce her quietly.

Joseph was thinking about this and an angel came to him in a dream. The angel said, "Joseph, descendant of David, don't be afraid to marry Mary. God's Holy Spirit made her pregnant. She'll give birth to a son, and you are to name him Jesus. The word Jesus means 'God Saves.' Name him Jesus because he will save his people from their sins. This fulfills what the Lord said through the prophet, 'The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel' (*quotation from Isaiah 7:14*). Immanuel means 'God is with us.'"

Joseph woke up and obeyed the Lord's angel. Joseph took Mary home as his wife but didn't consummate the marriage with physical intimacy until she gave birth to the baby (Mat 1:18-25).

### **GENERIC DIALOGUE QUESTIONS**

1. What catches your attention in the story?
2. Is there anything in the story that is hard to understand?
3. Who are the main characters in the story?
4. What problems did the characters face?
5. How did the characters face their problems?
6. How have you faced similar problems?
7. Is there someone in the story who is similar to you or who is different from you?
8. What does the story tell about God?

### **SPECIFIC DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. What did the angel Gabriel predict about Zechariah's son?
2. How did Mary become pregnant with Jesus, if she had never had sex with a man?
3. Why did Joseph marry a pregnant woman when he was not the father of her child?
4. What risk did Mary face in becoming pregnant before she was married, and what risk did Joseph face in marrying a pregnant woman who was carrying someone else's baby?

5. What risks do people face today in order to do God's will?
6. What does the name "Jesus" mean?
7. How do the events preceding Jesus' birth reveal that God has the power to do whatever he wills?

### **LIFE-LESSONS**

1. **The proclamation of God's message should result in transformed lives.** The angel Gabriel predicted to Zechariah that his son John's message would bring about peace between generations and transform skeptics into believers (Mat 1:16-17).
2. **God chooses unlikely candidates for his service.** Mary was young, female, and poor. People would have considered her unusable for any important task (Lk 1:27-28). Joseph was a poor carpenter with limited education.
3. **God's will may require a person to face personal risks.** God's will was for Mary, an unmarried girl, to become pregnant. She risked the shame of being called adulterous, could have been stoned, and would have probably remained unmarried for life. Yet, she answered, "I am the Lord's servant girl" (Lk 1:31-38). Joseph faced the risk of ridicule because he married a pregnant woman, who was carrying someone else's baby (Mat 1:18-20).
4. **Jesus was conceived for the purpose of saving people from punishment for their sins.** The name Jesus means, "The Lord saves." The angel informed Joseph that Jesus would save people from their sins (Mat 1:21-23).
5. **Mary's pregnancy was a supernatural event:**
  - Jesus' birth was predicted by Old Testament prophets (Isaiah 7:14, 9:6-7; Micah 5:2).
  - An angel prophesied Jesus' birth (Lk 1:30-33; Mat 1:20-21).
  - Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit (Lk 1:35; Mat 1:20).
  - Mary was still a virgin when she became pregnant, and when she gave birth to Jesus (Lk 1:28-38; Mat 1:24-25).
6. **God is omnipotent. God has the power to do whatever he wills.** For God, nothing is impossible (Lk 1:37). God enabled an elderly couple, where the wife was unable to conceive, to have a son (Lk 1:5-25), he caused a virgin to become pregnant (Lk 1:26-38), and he enabled Joseph, a confused man, to understand God's will (Mat 1:18-24).

## LEARNING ACTIVITIES

### **Role-playing Drama:**

Have two ladies dramatize Mary telling her mother that she is pregnant. Instruct the ladies that Mary's mother is suspicious that Mary is pregnant, and her mother is thinking, "I never thought that Joseph would bring this disgrace on our family." Mary then explains that Joseph is not the father.