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### **An Angel Brings Good News**

But the angel said to him, “Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to give him the name John.” (Luke 1:13)

In the sixth month [after Elizabeth had become pregnant], God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee (Luke 1:26)

Zechariah served as a priest in God’s temple in Jerusalem. Zechariah and his wife, Elizabeth loved God very much. One thing made the couple sad; they had no children.

The prophets said that God would send a man to prepare the way for the Messiah. Zechariah and Elizabeth would be the parents of this special boy. God sent the angel Gabriel to tell Zechariah the good news.

When it was Zechariah’s turn to go into the temple, an angel appeared to him. Zechariah was terrified! The angel told him that Elizabeth would have a son, and that they must name him John. The angel also said, “He will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah -- to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.” Zechariah couldn’t believe it! He doubted the angel, so Gabriel made him unable to speak until John was born.

Six months later, God sent the angel Gabriel to announce another birth. This time he didn’t go to a glorious temple. Instead, he went to a small town called Nazareth. He went to see a poor young girl who loved God. Her name was Mary. She was engaged to marry a man named Joseph.

The prophet Isaiah predicted that a virgin would have a baby. He would be called Immanuel, which means “God with us.” Mary was the virgin God had chosen. The angel said, “Greetings, you who

are highly favored! The Lord is with you.” Mary was upset, but the angel calmed her and said, “You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.”

Mary had questions, but she did not doubt the angel’s message. She welcomed the good news! She told the angel, “I am the Lord’s servant ... May it be to me as you have said.”

### **Life Questions:**

Zechariah knew God’s promises, but he couldn’t believe it when God did what he promised. Do you really believe that God will do all that he promises in the Bible?

### **The Savior is Born!**

Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. (Luke 2:11)

Mary and Joseph lived in Nazareth. They were newly married and awaiting the birth of the baby growing inside Mary -- just as the angel said. When it was almost time for the baby to be born, Caesar Augustus decided to count all the people he ruled. That included the Jews. Mary and Joseph had to go to the town Joseph’s family came from -- a town called Bethlehem -- to be counted there. God had planned their trip ages before. The Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem; that’s what the prophets said.

Mary and Joseph traveled by foot and by donkey for many days. When they got to Bethlehem, they must have been tired and hungry. They needed a safe place for Jesus to be born. It was almost time. They looked for a room to rent, but all the rooms were taken. One man took pity on them. He let them sleep in the stable with his animals. That’s where Jesus was born. He had no baby clothes, just strips of cloth. He had no crib or blanket, just a feeding trough filled with hay. Jesus had no great earthly welcome, but heaven could not let his birth go unnoticed.

Some poor shepherds were living out in the Bethlehem hills. They were watching their sheep late at night. An angel of the Lord

appeared to the shepherds and said, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger”.

Suddenly a great company of heavenly host appeared with the angels, praising God and saying “glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.” Then the angels went back to heaven. And the shepherds hurried to find the Savior.

They found the baby Jesus, and Mary and Joseph, just as the angels said they would. After they had seen the baby, they told everyone what the angels said about this child and what they had seen. The shepherds gave glory to God! Everyone who heard their report was amazed! Mary knew even more than they did. She treasured these things in her heart..

### **Life Questions:**

Have you ever imagined what it was really like the night Jesus was born? Can you try to imagine what the shepherds thought and felt?

### **Visitors for the Newborn King**

Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him.” (Matthew 2:1b-2)

God sent Jesus to be a Savior for everyone. God wanted the Jews to know the Savior, so he sent prophets. God wanted other people to know about the Savior too, so he spoke to them in ways they could understand. Far away, to the east of Israel, wise men called Magi were seeking God.

These men studied the stars, trying to find some sign of God or the promised Savior that the Jewish prophets had written about. They had been taught that the promised Messiah would be king of the Jews and a Savior for all people, even the Gentiles.

When Jesus was born in Bethlehem, God sent a special star to announce his birth. When the wise men saw the star, they gathered

up their finest treasures and set out to find the newborn Savior so that they could worship him. The star led them to Jerusalem. When they got there, they asked where the newborn king of the Jews lived.

Everyone in Jerusalem was upset by their question -- and with good reason! The Jews already had a king, King Herod. He would kill anyone he thought might take over his kingdom. He had already killed his wife and some of his children. When the wise men arrived and talked about seeking the NEW king of the Jews, King Herod wanted to destroy him.

King Herod pretended to want to worship the child too. He asked the priests where Scripture said the Messiah would be born. They all agreed: Bethlehem. The prophet Micah made that clear. King Herod invited the wise men to his palace. The King told them to find the child and report back so that he could worship him too. But he really planned to kill him.

The wise men hurried toward Bethlehem with the star leading them all the way. The star stopped over the house where Jesus was staying. When they went inside, they found the child with his mother. They bowed down and worshipped him. They also gave him treasures of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. God had warned them in a dream not to go back to King Herod. So they left the country a different way.

### **Life Question:**

How do you worship Jesus? The wise men worshipped by giving Jesus gifts. What gifts can you give him?

### **Jesus in the Temple (as a Baby and a Boy)**

Joseph and Mary took him [Jesus] to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord. (Luke 2:22b)

Whenever a Jewish couple had their first son, they took him to the temple to be dedicated to the Lord. They did this in obedience to God's law.

When Mary and Joseph brought the baby Jesus to the temple, an old man, named Simeon, and an old woman, named Anna, lived

there. Both were very close to God. They prayed to God, and God talked to them by his Holy Spirit.

God promised Simeon that he would see the Messiah with his own eyes. When he saw baby Jesus, he took him in his arms and said, "My eyes have seen your salvation." He also said Jesus would be a light to the Gentiles and bring glory to Israel. Anna came to see Jesus too. She had spent most of her life in the temple, worshipping God, praying, and going without food so she could pray better. Anna was a prophetess. As soon as she saw Jesus, she knew that he was the promised Messiah. She gave thanks to God and told everyone about this special child who would set them free.

Mary and Joseph returned to Nazareth. Every year Jews came together in Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover Feast. Jesus went with his family and a large group from Nazareth every year. When he was twelve, something special happened. After the feast was over, Jesus' parents started on their journey home. They didn't realize it, but Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem.

Mary and Joseph thought Jesus was somewhere in their group. When they hadn't seen him for a day, they searched among their friends and relatives. But Jesus wasn't there. So they rushed back to Jerusalem to look for him.

Finally after three days, Mary and Joseph found him in the temple. He was sitting with the teachers and priests. He was listening to them and asking questions. The teachers were impressed with how much young Jesus understood. They had no idea that he was the Messiah -- the One who was promised in the Scriptures they were discussing! They must have asked Jesus questions too, because they were also impressed with his answers.

Mary and Joseph were upset, as any parent would be. But Jesus said, "Why were you searching for me? Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?" They didn't understand what he meant. So Jesus went home with his parents and continued to be obedient to God.

### **Life Question:**

Do you do your best to be obedient to God?

## The Baptism of Jesus

Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. (Matthew 3:13)

The child born to Zechariah and Elizabeth grew up to be the man we know as John the Baptist. He lived and preached in the desert. John was Jesus' cousin. But he didn't know for sure that Jesus was the promised one.

People came from all over Israel to hear John the Baptist. He told people, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near." He told them to change their ways, to turn away from doing wrong, and to turn their hearts toward God. Then he baptized those who responded to his message in the Jordan River.

John the Baptist was very popular with all the people. Religious leaders came from the temple to see what John was doing. John had harsh words for them. He said they were like a nest of poisonous snakes! He made it clear that they too had to change -- their hearts and their lives -- if God was going to accept them. He said that just being a child of Abraham wasn't enough.

People thought John might be the Messiah. But he told them plainly that he was not. He told the people that one coming after him was greater than he. He was so great, John wasn't worthy to untie his sandal.

God had promised to give John a sign so that he could recognize the Messiah -- for sure. The sign was that God would send the Holy Spirit as a dove. And the person on whom the Holy Spirit remained would be the Christ.

When Jesus came to John to get baptized, John recognized his cousin. John wanted Jesus to baptize him, because he knew his own sinful heart. He knew he was in the presence of one who was greater than he. But Jesus said to go ahead and baptize him. It was part of God's plan; so John agreed.

When Jesus was coming up out of the water, the heavens opened and the Holy Spirit came down in the form of a dove. The dove remained on Jesus. Then a voice spoke from heaven, saying, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." Here we see God, the Father, the Holy Spirit and Jesus, the Son of God, all revealed at once. When John saw and heard this, he knew for sure

that Jesus was the Christ.

**Life Questions:**

The baptism we practice today is a symbol of our new life in Jesus. Have you been baptized yet? If not, will you talk about this with someone?