

For the past two years we have been focusing on *God's Good News Story*. The Good News Story's central plot is God's actions to bring mankind out of the separation of sin and back into a right relationship with Him through Jesus Christ. So, Jesus Christ is THE KEY FOCUS of this Good News Story. So, this Christmas it seems proper to focus on the 'story' aspect of Jesus coming to earth at his human birth in particular the GLORIOUS nature of the Christmas Story. It is a story of spectacular Light & Glory.

Today we turn to the Book of Luke for The Glorious Story of Christmas. It is well accepted that a man by the name of Luke, a well-educated, Gentile/Greek Physician is the writer/compiler of this Gospel. It is truly a Good News Story book. One of the key verses of this book is **Luke 19:10...** *"For the Son of Man has come to seek and save the lost"*. This verses reminds of the Good News Rescue Story that the whole Bible reveals to us.

As I have said many times before, if we are to truly KNOW the Good News Story we must READ the Good News Story. Sadly, many Christians have not completely read the whole Christmas Story. So, that's what we are going to do for the next three weeks. We will have various members of our church read in narration format the Christmas Story and then I will give a brief summary lesson.

Color Code Legend

Black: Luke, the Narrator/Author

ANGEL

ZECHARIAH

MARY:

ELIZABETH

Luke 1:1-56... Many have undertaken to compile a narrative about the events that have been fulfilled among us, ² just as the original eyewitnesses and servants of the word handed them down to us. ³ So it also seemed good to me, since I have carefully investigated everything from the very first, to write to you in an orderly sequence, most honorable Theophilus, ⁴ so that you may know the certainty of the things about which you have been instructed. ⁵ In the days of King Herod of Judea, there was a priest of Abijah's division named Zechariah. His wife was from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. ⁶ Both were righteous in God's sight, living without blame according to all the commands and requirements of the Lord. ⁷ But they had no children because Elizabeth could not conceive, and both of them were well along in years. ⁸ When his division was on duty and he was serving as priest before God, ⁹ it happened that he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to enter the sanctuary of the Lord and burn incense. ¹⁰ At the hour of incense the whole assembly of the people was praying outside. ¹¹ An angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing to the right of the altar of incense. ¹² When Zechariah saw him, he was terrified and overcome with fear. ¹³ But the angel said to him,

"Do not be afraid, Zechariah, because your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will name him John. ¹⁴ There will be joy and delight

for you, and many will rejoice at his birth. ¹⁵ For he will be great in the sight of the Lord and will never drink wine or beer. He will be filled with the Holy Spirit while still in his mother's womb. ¹⁶ He will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. ¹⁷ And he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of fathers to their children, and the disobedient to the understanding of the righteous, to make ready for the Lord a prepared people."

¹⁸ "How can I know this?".... "For I am an old man, and my wife is well along in years."

¹⁹ ... "I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, and I was sent to speak to you and tell you this good news. ²⁰ Now listen. You will become silent and unable to speak until the day these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their proper time."

²¹ Meanwhile, the people were waiting for Zechariah, amazed that he stayed so long in the sanctuary. ²² When he did come out, he could not speak to them. Then they realized that he had seen a vision in the sanctuary. He was making signs to them and remained speechless. ²³ When the days of his ministry were completed, he went back home. ²⁴ After these days his wife Elizabeth conceived and kept herself in seclusion for five months. She said, ²⁵ "The Lord has done this for me. He has looked with favor in these days to take away my disgrace among the people."

²⁶ In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, ²⁷ to a virgin

engaged to a man named Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸ And the angel came to her and said,

"Greetings, O Highly Favored One! The Lord is with you."

²⁹ But she was deeply troubled by this statement, wondering what kind of greeting this could be. ³⁰ Then the angel told her,

"Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹ Now listen: You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name Him Jesus. ³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. ³³ He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end."

³⁴ Mary asked the angel,

"How can this be, since I have not known a man?"

³⁵ The angel replied to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore, the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. ³⁶ And consider your relative Elizabeth—even she has conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month for her who was called childless. ³⁷ For nothing will be impossible with God."

³⁸ "See, I am the Lord's servant,". "May it happen to me as you have said."

Then the angel left her.³⁹ In those days Mary set out and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judah⁴⁰ where she entered Zechariah's house and greeted Elizabeth.⁴¹ When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped inside her, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.⁴² Then she exclaimed with a loud cry,

"Blessed are you among women, and your child will be blessed!⁴³ How could this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?⁴⁴ For you see, when the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby leaped for joy inside me.⁴⁵ Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill what He has spoken to her!"

⁴⁶ And Mary said:

My soul magnifies the Lord,⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,⁴⁸ because he has looked with favor on the humble condition of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed,⁴⁹ because the Mighty One has done great things for me, and His name is holy.⁵⁰ His mercy is from generation to generation on those who fear him.⁵¹ He has done a mighty deed with his arm; he has scattered the proud because of the thoughts of their hearts;⁵² he has toppled the mighty from their thrones and exalted the lowly.⁵³ He has satisfied the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty.⁵⁴ He has helped his servant Israel, remembering his mercy⁵⁵ to Abraham and his descendants forever, just as he spoke to our ancestors.

⁵⁶ And Mary stayed with Elizabeth about three months; then she returned to her home.⁵⁷ Now the time had come for Elizabeth to give birth, and she had a son.⁵⁸ Then her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown her his great mercy, and they rejoiced with her.⁵⁹ When they came to circumcise the child on the eighth day, they were going to name him Zechariah, after his father.⁶⁰ But his mother responded,

"No. He will be called John."

⁶¹ Then they said to her, "None of your relatives has that name."⁶² So they motioned to his father to find out what he wanted him to be called.⁶³ Zechariah asked for a writing tablet and wrote, "His name is John."

And they were all amazed.⁶⁴ Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue set free, and he began to speak, praising God.⁶⁵ Fear came on all those who lived around them, and all these things were being talked about throughout the hill country of Judea.⁶⁶ All who heard about him took it to heart, saying, "What then will this child become?" For, indeed, the Lord's hand was with him.⁶⁷ Then his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied:

⁶⁸ Blessed is the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has visited and provided redemption for his people.⁶⁹ He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David,⁷⁰ just as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets in ancient times;⁷¹ salvation from our enemies and from the hand of those who hate us.⁷² He has dealt mercifully with our ancestors and remembered his holy covenant—⁷³ the oath that he swore to our father Abraham, to grant that we,⁷⁴ having been rescued from the hand of our enemies, would serve him without fear⁷⁵ in holiness and righteousness in his presence all our days.⁷⁶ And you, child, will be called a prophet of the Most High, for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,⁷⁷ to give his people knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins.⁷⁸ Because of our God's merciful compassion, the dawn from on high will visit us⁷⁹ to shine on those who live in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.

⁸⁰ The child grew up and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness until the day of his public appearance to Israel.

There is a lot of material in these 80 or so verses but to zero in on the **Key Point to Learn from this Glorious Story.**

God Always Has A Plan & He Always Has A Unique Way of Revealing It To Us & Including Us In That Plan. Our Proper Response to That Plan Is Vital.

In this case God uses an Angel to bring His message. Actually, it is a familiar one. In the Old Testament God uses Angels as His messengers in several incidents. By using this familiar method, God authenticates the coming of Christ as truly coming from Him and is the extension or completion of His work with His people in the Old Testament. Whether, through an angel, prophets, teachers, preachers, His Holy Spirit or His Word (the Bible, God is serious and consistent in His desire to reveal His Will and Himself to us.

God is in the communication business, and He still seeks to communicate and connect with us today. Our job, as was that of the characters in today's story reveals, is **How Should We Respond?**

Let's briefly look at each of the three main characters and how God reached out to them and how they responded.

1. **Zechariah & Elizabeth:**
2. **Mary**

➤ **Zechariah & Elizabeth:**

We don't have very much background on these two, except that Zechariah was a Priest, and Elizabeth was also a member of a priestly family and descendent of Aaron. These two were obviously very religious and dedicated to God and faithful their whole lives. Which would lead us to assume that they would have been greatly blessed. I am sure they were greatly blessed in many ways but they had one major heartbreak, they were barren and had been for many years. In those days couples who were barren could easily think that God was unhappy with them, but that was not and still is not the case. We all face heartaches and disappointments at some point in our lives. The issue is not WHEN we will face them, but HOW we will respond when they inevitably come and HOW we will act while we wait for the joy to return.

Zechariah gives us a mixed bag of how to respond.

1st we find him being faithful and serving God even in his ongoing sadness. He was doing his duty as a faithful priest. In the process of his service God speaks to Him through an angel.

Lesson for Us Today: Whether we are in the valley of heartaches and disappointments or on the mountain of blessings our job is the same... Be faithful, in season and out, no matter what our circumstances we must choose to be faithful and obedient.

2nd we find Zechariah wavering in his faith when told of God's coming blessing. Let's try and be understanding here, Zechariah has waited and prayed all his life and now when they were too old to have a child an angel comes with the news that God has chosen to give them that child. You might say "I can't believe that Zechariah didn't just jump for joy and believe without a doubt". Well, let's be honest, we all have had times of doubt when we are going through extended times of disappointment and wondering if God is ever going to bring us out.

Lesson for us Today: When you find yourself wavering in faith chose to trust God, pray and keep praying and believe that God will answer in His time and in His way. God will come through, don't doubt no matter how hard or long your valley seems to be.

3rd we see a little further down in the passage that God was faithful even when Zechariah doubted. (Even though he did suffer from his lack of faith – no voice for 9 months) God was still faithful and blessed him. In response Zechariah sang praise to God in thankfulness.

Lesson for us Today: Keep being faithful, avoid doubting God and when He comes through for you Give Him the Praise due Him. Be Thankful.

➤ **Elizabeth:** She was a spiritually discerning and faithful woman who trusted God, believed His Word and stood faithful. She understood the call of God on her promised son, John, but also on the Son of Mary. When the two women met, she understood the deep spiritual

impact of her son, but most importantly of Mary's Son, Jesus. We also see her brave faith as she stated that the baby will have the name John, not Zechariah, which was the custom to name the son after the father.

Lesson for us Today: Regardless of how others respond to God's call, be faithful, trust Him and bravely stand in His Will.

➤ **Mary** – Our last person in this story today in Mary, the Mother of Jesus. In Mary we see a portrait of humble, obedient faith

She Was A Pure & Righteous Woman...

She was Chosen by God For a Mission

She Was Honest With God About the Mission

She Was Submissively Faithful To God

Lesson for us Today: Choose to Respond to God in Faith. Believe that God will bring about His will for your life, whether you are in a valley or on the mountain. Be consistent, be faithful, serve, love, obey, trust, and always have a heart of praise and thanksgiving in all circumstances.

There is so much more that can be said, but let's close out and move into our time of RESPONSE. As I mentioned at the beginning of the message we need to respond properly to God when He speaks. He is speaking to you, how are you going to respond both now and in the days ahead? Choose now to respond in humble obedient faith and service through the bad and the good times.