

'tis the
Season
AN ADVENT SERIES

**V GROUP
STUDY**



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'tis the Season: vGroup Study

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Written by Jordan Hill.

Design, layout, and illustrations by Christopher Wilson.

LUKE 1:5–38

Bashing piñatas, hitting exploding golf balls, releasing balloons into the air, and even participating in the home version of The Jimmy Fallon Show's Egg Russian Roulette game are all examples of something you might witness these days if you go to an expectant couples' gender reveal party. Thanks to the miracles of modern medicine, expectant parents can know with relative certainty whether or not they will be bringing an infant boy or girl into their family. And thanks to the age of social media, expectant parents and families can share with the whole world their joy and hopes for this expectant child.

The fact that we live in a time in history where we can know well before the day of the child's birth whether they will be a boy or a girl is utterly unique in history. No other generation in the history of mankind has had this privilege. But as we read the Bible, we do come across an isolated few instances where parents are given this type of foreknowledge by God. On these rare occasions, we must pay attention because God, through the births of these individuals, is about to shape the course of history and proclaim his eternal promises to humanity.

- What hopes and promises are typically generated in parents with the anticipation of bringing new life into the world?
- Can you think of different prophesied birth stories in the Bible and talk about how these births were used to shape the storyline of the Bible?
- How does Christmas generate a sense of hope or longing in a believer in Christ? How might that hope push the believer to hope for our world even in the midst of suffering and hardships?

This Christmas season, as we celebrate the birth and coming of Jesus, Vintage Church will explore this event as recorded in the Gospel of Luke. Luke is one of the two Gospel accounts (*the other being the Gospel of Matthew*) that records the birth of Jesus.

The four Gospels have a collective dual purpose. First, each accounting of the life of Jesus works to show how his coming is deeply rooted in the Old Testament story. Through his coming, Jesus fulfills the OT narrative. Second, each Gospel shows how Jesus moves that story forward in history. And in doing so, Jesus' coming marks a new age for humanity—the reuniting of heaven and earth under its true King.

So, as we look at Luke 1–2 over the next four weeks, we will see how Luke's recording of Jesus' birth serves these dual purposes. Luke is a masterful storyteller. He uses subtle

phrases and allusions to numerous Old Testament stories to link Jesus' birth to the past (*so be on the look-out for these*) while at the same time using setting and narrative plot to establish how God is bringing about something new through the birth and coming of the Son of God.

¹Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, ²just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, ³it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, ⁴that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.

Luke 1:1–4

Luke opens his Gospel account with a brief preface (v. 1–4). In these verses, Luke reveals **why** (or for what purposes) he wrote this 'orderly account' of Jesus' life as well as **how** (or by what means) he came to accomplish this.

- How (or by what means) did Luke come to write his Gospel account? Who were his sources?
- Why (or for what purpose) did Luke say he wrote this 'orderly account' of Jesus' life?

Following the preface, Luke begins his 'orderly account' of Jesus' life by offering up a set of parallel birth narratives of two important biblical characters—Jesus and his messenger, John the Baptist (v. 1:5–2:20). Each man's birth is foretold followed by two prophetic songs—one from Zechariah the father of John and one from Mary the mother of Jesus. And lastly, we are given each child's birth story.

These stories are intentionally paralleled. Why? For one, it connects these two men's lives and ministries. But also, Luke's parallel structuring works to draw-out his subtle built-in contrasts. These contrasts will go on to be explored and unpacked in greater detail by Luke as he develops the themes of Jesus' ministry (*for example, the gravitation of Jesus toward the poor and humble*) and relates how different people/people groups (*for example, the outcasts vs. the Pharisees*) will respond to both Jesus' and John the Baptist's ministries. For this vGroup study, we will focus in on Luke 1:5–38—the foretelling of the births of Jesus and John the Baptist

⁵In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, of the division of Abijah. And he had a wife from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. ⁶And they were both righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord. ⁷But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were advanced in years.

⁸Now while he was serving as priest before God when his division was on duty,
⁹according to the custom of the priesthood, he was chosen by lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense. ¹⁰And the whole multitude of the people were praying outside at the hour of incense. ¹¹And there appeared to him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. ¹²And Zechariah was troubled when he saw him, and fear fell upon him. ¹³But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. ¹⁴And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, ¹⁵for he will be great before the Lord. And he must not drink wine or strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. ¹⁶And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, ¹⁷and 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."
¹⁸And Zechariah said to the angel, "How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years." ¹⁹And the angel answered him, "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. ²⁰And 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." ²¹And the people were waiting for Zechariah, and they were wondering at his delay in the temple. ²²And when he came out, he was unable to speak to them, and they realized that he had seen a vision in the temple. And he kept making signs to them and remained mute. ²³And when his time of service was ended, he went to his home.
²⁴After these days his wife Elizabeth conceived, and for five months she kept herself hidden, saying, ²⁵"Thus the Lord has done for me in the days when he looked on me, to take away my reproach among people."

Luke 1:5–25

- What is the setting of these verses?
- In verses 5–7, how are Zechariah and Elizabeth described to us?
 - What Old Testament couple(s) is/are brought to mind by this description?
- How does this subtle Old Testament allusion prepare us for what might be about to happen?

Explore the angel Gabriel's words about John to his father Zechariah in verses 11–17.

- Describe the flow of the words spoken to Zechariah. (Hint: from personal to global)
- How is John described? What will he be to his parents? What will he be to Israel?
- In verse 15, what is the significance of mentioning both John's abstaining from fermented drink and being filled with the Holy Spirit from birth?
- In verses 16–17, for what purpose will John be uniquely set apart to accomplish?
- How does Luke use references to [Malachi 3:1 and 4:4–6](#) to link John the Baptist to the story of the Old Testament?

Explore Zechariah's response to the angel Gabriel's message in verses 18–20.

- How would you describe Zechariah's response overall?
- How is Zechariah's response to the angel's message here similar to that of Abraham and Sarah's response to an angelic message about the birth of their son in [Genesis 18](#)?
- What is the irony of his response given where he is currently standing and given his occupation?

Explore Elizabeth's response to her pregnancy in verses 23–25.

- Look up what the name of John means in Hebrew. How is the meaning of John's name reflected back in praise by Elizabeth?

²⁶In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, ²⁷to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" ²⁹But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. ³²He 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, ³³and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

³⁴And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?"

³⁵And the angel answered her, "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. ³⁶And 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. ³⁷For nothing will be impossible with God." ³⁸And Mary said, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.

Luke 1:26–38

- What is the setting of these verses? Contrast this to the setting of the previous verses.
- What Old Testament language or phrases are used in verses 26–27 to ready us for what might be about to happen? (Hint: see [Isaiah 7](#) and [2 Samuel 7](#) for clues)
- The narrative flow moves from talking about John (and who he will be) to talking about Jesus. How does the narrative work to implicitly claim Jesus to be the Lord God of the Old Testament?

Explore the angel Gabriel's words about Jesus to Mary in verses 28–33.

- Describe the flow of the words spoken to Mary. (Hint: personal to global)
- How is Jesus described?
- What will Jesus' mission/ministry be?
- Based on verses 34–37, how would Mary come to conceive or become pregnant?
- How is the triune personage of the God of the Bible on display in these verses?
- What Old Testament language or allusions are made in these verses?

Explore Mary's response to the angel Gabriel's message verse 38.

- How would you describe Mary's response overall?
- How does her response contrast that of Zechariah's?
- How might these contrasting responses to the work and plans of God foreshadow what is to come in the Gospel of Luke?

Every year, during the four weeks leading up to Christmas day, Christians worldwide celebrate the Nativity (or birth) of Jesus Christ. This church season is designated as Advent after the Latin word for 'coming'. While joyfully commemorating the birth of Jesus that occurred 2,000 years ago, Advent also serves as a time for reflecting on God's promises. Jesus came to earth the first time as God incarnate to establish God's eternal reign and rule over the whole world. In Luke 1–2, we read about the birth of hope itself. And as such, the birth of Jesus points us forward, in hope, for the day of the Lord when Jesus will come again. At his Second Coming, Jesus will not come as a babe, but rather as the resurrected King—to bring justice to the nations, to gather the faithful remnant unto himself, and to establish forever the new heaven and new earth. God was faithful to send us a Savior. He will be faithful to send us a King!

- What might we be hoping or longing for this Advent/Christmas season? Where do those hopes or longings find their source—in the flesh or in Christ?
- What practical steps can we take this Christmas to help align our hopes for this world, our community, and our lives with the plans and purposes of God?
- This Christmas season, how are we going to respond to the promises of a faithful God as revealed in his word? Are we going to be a Zechariah or a Mary?