

Bi132 The Gospels

Lesson Bi132-3 Jesus' Birth Foretold

As a part of God's plan, most people will marry at some time in their lives. A wedding is almost always an exciting event. Both the bride and groom have much to prepare and plan, including special food, decorations, guest invitations, and furnishings for the future home. Mary and Joseph, the earthly parents of Jesus, were preparing their wedding, when something unbelievable happened. It turned out to be a great thing, for they were both people of faith and obedience. Listen and you will see it was all part of God's good plan for their lives.

In our last lesson you learned how Elizabeth and Zechariah were promised a son. When Elizabeth was six months pregnant God sent the angel same angel, who had appeared to Zechariah, to give a message to another person. The girl's name was Mary and she lived in Nazareth, a town in the part of Israel called Galilee. She was engaged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of King David.

The angel Gabriel said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored. The Lord is with you." Mary was surprised and wondered what this meant.

Gabriel continued, "Don't be afraid; you have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great; the Son of the Most High and God will give him the throne of his father David. He will reign over Israel and his kingdom will never end."

"How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"

The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on you and so this holy child will be called the 'Son of God.' Now Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child, even though she is old. She is now in her sixth month. For nothing is impossible with God."

"I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "Let this happen just as you have said" (Luke 1:26-38). Then the angel left her.

After the angel left, Mary went to visit her cousin Elizabeth. As soon as she heard Mary's voice, the baby inside her leaped for joy, and she was filled with the Holy Spirit. She said, "Mary, you are blessed among women, and your child will be blessed. How unworthy I am to have the mother of my Lord visit me!"

Mary stayed with Elizabeth for three months, learning from her and receiving encouragement. Afterwards she went home to face her family.

Consider this question for a moment: We have just heard Mary's part of this story; next we will hear Joseph's. If you were in Joseph's position, how would you respond to the news of Mary's pregnancy?

Mary was engaged to be married to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. Joseph, her fiancé, was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace. He intended, therefore, to divorce her quietly. In that time, people considered engagement to be so binding on the two people, that to end it before the actual marriage required a divorce.

While considering this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. What is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to name him Jesus, which means ‘the Lord saves,’ because he will save his people from their sins” (Matt 2:20-21).

All this happened to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet Isaiah: “The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” (Isa 7:14), which means ‘God with us.’

When Joseph woke up, he obeyed the angel and took Mary home as his wife. But he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. And he named the child Jesus.

This lesson is the first to draw the full story from two different gospel writers. Luke tells us only about Mary’s encounter with the angel and the special favor she had from the Lord. She would be the earthly mother of the Messiah, the promised King of Israel. Matthew gives the story as Joseph experienced it. When he was first told of Mary’s pregnancy, he did not know it came about through the Holy Spirit. In those days when people were engaged to be married, they were not allowed to be alone together. He knew this was not his child. Joseph wanted to obey God’s law and at the same time to show love to Mary by protecting her from shame and danger. It was only after his message from the angel that he began to understand who this child would be.

Matthew here shares the first of over 40 Old Testament quotations that show how Jesus’ life fulfills the words of the ancient prophets. Matthew wants us to know that these events are actually signs pointing to a truth about Jesus. All these fulfilled prophecies point to Jesus being the Messiah, the promised Deliverer for all people.

This story is **important** because it demonstrates how God works through ordinary believers to accomplish his great plan for this world. In this case God spoke to both people involved, Mary and Joseph.

The **main truth** of this story is that God accomplishes his will and plans through ordinary means, but with supernatural power. Jesus did not come as a conqueror out of heaven; he came as a child through a supernatural conception.

Let’s **review** this lesson—

1. Who did God send in advance to direct both Mary and Joseph concerning the birth of Jesus?
 - A. [Pause for 5 seconds.] If you said, “God sent the angel Gabriel to both Mary and Joseph before Jesus was born,” you are correct.

2. What did the angel say to both Mary and Joseph about how Jesus was conceived?
A. [Pause for 5 seconds.] If you said, “In both cases the angel said Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit,” you are correct.
3. What is the meaning of the name ‘Jesus?’
A. [Pause for 5 seconds.] If you said that the name ‘Jesus’ means ‘The Lord saves,’ you are correct.

Your assignment for this lesson is to learn this story well enough to tell it by memory to someone who has not heard it before. After you finish telling them the story, ask this question: “What is the real meaning of the name of Jesus in your life today?”