

Teaching Plan  
EXPLORE THE BIBLE

Date: December 23, 2018  
Lesson Title: "Promise Kept"  
Lesson Passage: Luke 1:26-38

ABOUT THIS LESSON

Our lesson passage describes the angel Gabriel's visit to Mary, telling her that she is to give birth to Jesus, the Son of God. Mary's response emphasizes her submission to God's will, even though this might prove to be costly to her.

TEACHING/LEARNING GOALS

(1) Explain why Gabriel's announcement might have brought consternation as well as joy to Mary. (2) Explain the messianic implications in what Gabriel said to Mary.

BEGINNING THE LESSON

Begin by asking: "How many of you have a nativity scene (or *creche*) among the Christmas decorations in your home? Then tie this in with the lesson: The assortment of animals, angels and shepherds varies from one nativity scene to another; but three central figures are always there--Mary, Joseph and the baby Jesus. This week's lesson focuses on one of these key actors in the Christmas drama--Mary. Add these thoughts: Baptists disagree with the religious tradition that venerates Mary as the "Mother of God." But we should be careful not to discount the significant role Mary played in the miracle of the incarnation. Our Bible passage for this lesson reminds us that this modest young woman from the village of Nazareth deserves to be counted among the outstanding heroines of the faith.

TEACHING PROCEDURES

1. Introduce Luke 1:26-35 with these comments: (1) Nazareth was an obscure town in the hill country of the province of Galilee, an unlikely setting for an announcement that would change the course of human history. (2) The name of the angel in this story, Gabriel, means "man of God." (Recall that Gabriel had previously announced the birth of John the Baptist to Zechariah in Jerusalem--see Lk. 1:19). (3) Mary is described as a virgin in Luke 1:26. (This point, repeated in v. 34, is compatible with the information that she was betrothed to Joseph, for though betrothal was a legal relationship as binding as marriage, it involved no sexual relationship.) (4) Though Joseph was not the biological father of Jesus, he was considered to be his legal father in the Jewish society of that day; therefore, since Joseph was a descendant of David (Lk. 1:27), Jesus, too, was "of the house of David" (*Compare Luke 1:32.*)

2. *Explore the personal implications of Gabriel's announcement to Mary in Lk. 1:30-33:* The assumption that a person who is "right with God" will never have to endure hardship is a naive misunderstanding. Mary's experience suggests that this isn't always the case. Gabriel said to her, "thou hast found favor with God." But consider the price Mary would have to pay: (1) She would face the embarrassment of being pregnant before consummating her marriage, and would run the risk of being "put away" by her betrothed (Mt. 1:19). (2) In the advanced stages of her pregnancy, she would endure a grueling 80-mile journey over rough terrain to Bethlehem, where she would experience the pains of childbirth, not in the sterile atmosphere of a hospital, but in a filthy stable. And there would be no place for her baby except a crib where oxen ordinarily fed. (We tend to romanticize this; but it was a hard, harsh place to have a baby.) (3) She would later go through the terrible experience of fleeing to Egypt) through a scorching, barren wilderness, to save her baby from a murderous king (Mt. 2:13-14). (4) She would eventually see her son leave home and go into a hostile world where many hated him; and, finally, she would suffer the grief of seeing him brutally executed on a cross. (5) Mary's response in Luke 1:38 required deep faith and dedicated courage.

3. *Comment on the content of the angel's announcement in 1:32-35. Note three references to the messianic expectation in these verses:* (1) The angel's words in v. 31 are virtually a quotation of Isa. 7:14, except for the substitution of "Jesus" for Isaiah's "Immanuel." (NOTE: The name "Jesus" means "The Lord is salvation" or "The Lord is Savior.") (2) "Son of the Most High" (v. 32) was recognized as a messianic title among the Jews. (3) "The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever" is another messianic allusion, recalling the promise of an everlasting dynasty from the house of David (see 2 Sam. 7:13-16).

4. Explain the significance of the angel's reference to Elizabeth in vv. 36-37: Mary did not ask the angel to authenticate his message as Zechariah had done (Lk. 1:18); but the pregnancy of such an elderly kinswoman as Elizabeth was a striking demonstration of the fact that "with God nothing is impossible."

#### CLOSING THE LESSON

Concluding comments: Mary's response in Luke 1:38 required deep faith and dedicated courage. Mary undoubtedly felt blessed to be chosen of God; but she knew the blessing would not be without pain. Today, some Christians seem to want to enjoy God's favor without inconvenience or obligation. For instance, contemporary social research reveals that only 20 percent of the members of a typical church are willing to assume a leadership role or give a tithe of their income. (Researchers sometimes refer to the other 80% as "free-loaders.") Have they really heard Jesus say, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up the cross? (Mt. 16:24)."