

The Gospel of Luke, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 1: The Births Foretold: Gabriel, Zechariah, and Mary

Luke 1:1-56

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

A great deal is at stake doctrinally in this opening lesson, and the teacher should feel its weight. Luke begins by grounding the entire Gospel in eyewitness testimony and careful investigation (1:1-4), which means our faith is not a leap into the dark but a response to things that actually happened. Then Luke moves immediately to two claims that the modern world finds scandalous and that some religious groups deny outright: that Jesus was conceived of a virgin by the Holy Spirit, and that the child so conceived is the Son of the Most High whose kingdom will never end. This lesson must affirm the virgin birth and the deity of Christ clearly and joyfully, against every view that reduces Jesus to a merely great man, an adopted son, or a created being.

There is also a kingdom note to handle with care. Gabriel says God will give Jesus “the throne of his father David” and that “of his kingdom there will be no end” (1:32-33). Help students see that this throne is the throne Christ now occupies at the right hand of the Father, reigning over His church, and not a promise of a future earthly political kingdom. The reign began with His ministry and was established when the church began at Pentecost. There is no thousand-year earthly reign still being awaited.

At the same time, this passage was never meant only to settle arguments. It is here to form humble, believing hearts. Set Zechariah's cautious demand for proof beside Mary's open surrender, and let students examine their own response to God's word. Aim at both targets every week: send students home surer of who Jesus is, and softer toward the God who chooses the small and the overlooked, who keeps His promises across decades of silence, and for whom nothing is impossible.

Question 1

Student Question:

Luke says he wrote “an orderly account” after “having followed all things closely for some time past” so that Theophilus would have “certainty” (1:1-4). What does this opening tell us about the nature of the Gospel record and the foundation of our faith, and how is this different from a faith based merely on personal experience or sincere feeling?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Begin where Luke begins, with his stated method. Luke is a careful writer who has “followed all things closely” and consulted those “who from the beginning were eyewitnesses” (1:2-3). The Greek behind “orderly account” and “certainty” is the language of a careful inquiry, not of pious

imagination. This matters enormously, because it tells us what kind of book we are holding. The Gospel does not ask us to believe in spite of the evidence but because of it.

Help students see the difference between a faith grounded in fact and a faith grounded merely in feeling. Feelings rise and fall. A faith built only on a warm experience will collapse when the experience fades or when suffering comes. But a faith built on what God actually did in history, supremely in the death and resurrection of Jesus, has a foundation that does not move. Luke wrote so that Theophilus, and we, could have certainty.

Connect this to the authority of Scripture. If Luke investigated carefully and wrote accurately, then his record carries the weight of God's own testimony, and we are not free to pick and choose which of its claims we will believe. The same Luke who tells us about taxes and governors and named officials also tells us about angels and a virgin conception. He presents both as sober history.

Land the point pastorally. Many believers carry a quiet worry that their faith is just wishful thinking. This opening verse is a gift to them. We follow a Lord whose story can bear the full weight of honest investigation.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The reliability and inspiration of Scripture as careful, eyewitness-based testimony (2 Timothy 3:16–17; 2 Peter 1:16)
- The difference between faith grounded in historical fact and faith grounded merely in feeling or experience
- The completeness and authority of the New Testament record as our standard for belief and practice
- The reasonableness of Christian faith, which responds to evidence rather than ignoring it
- The danger of a selective faith that accepts some of Scripture's claims and rejects others

Discussion Prompts

- Why does it matter that the Gospels are presented as investigated history rather than as religious legend?
- How would you answer a friend who says faith means believing without any evidence?
- What part of your own faith rests on feeling, and how could you ground it more firmly in what God has actually done?

Question 2

Student Question:

When Gabriel announced the birth of John, Zechariah responded, "How shall I know this?" and was left unable to speak (1:18–20), while Mary asked "How will this be?" and was given a sign and a blessing (1:34–38). Looking honestly at your own heart, where are you more like

Zechariah, demanding proof before you will trust God, and where might God be inviting you to simply believe?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the first self-examining question, and the goal is honesty rather than information. Luke deliberately sets the two responses side by side. Zechariah is a priest, schooled in Scripture, standing in the temple, and he answers Gabriel with “How shall I know this?” (1:18). Mary is young, unknown, and untrained, and her “How will this be?” (1:34) is not doubt but wonder, a request to understand, not a demand for proof.

Be careful and fair with Zechariah. His request was not unreasonable on its surface, and God treated him with great gentleness, giving him a sign even in the discipline of silence. But the contrast Luke draws is real. Religious knowledge and a long history of service did not, by themselves, produce a believing heart. It is possible to know a great deal about God and still hesitate to trust Him.

Invite students to locate themselves honestly. Most of us are a mixture. We trust God in the areas where trusting Him is easy and demand guarantees in the areas where it is costly. Help the group name specific arenas, finances, health, a wayward child, an unanswered prayer, where they tend to ask for proof before they will move.

Point toward the remedy without scolding. Zechariah’s tongue was loosed when he finally aligned himself with God’s word and named the child John (1:63–64). Surrender, not certainty, was the doorway back to praise.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The difference between honest questions that seek understanding and unbelief that demands proof
- That knowledge about God does not automatically produce trust in God
- God’s gentleness even in His discipline of His people
- Faith as active trust in God’s word rather than the absence of all questions

Discussion Prompts

- Where in your life are you currently asking God for proof before you will obey?
- What is the difference between Mary’s question and Zechariah’s question?
- How can a person who knows a lot about the Bible move from information to genuine trust?

Question 3

Student Question:

Gabriel tells Mary that the child will be “great” and “will be called the Son of the Most High,” that the Lord God will give him “the throne of his father David,” and that “of his kingdom there

will be no end” (1:32–33). What does this announcement teach about who Jesus is and the nature of the kingdom He came to establish?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Gabriel’s announcement is dense with meaning, and every phrase deserves attention. The child will be “great,” will be called “the Son of the Most High,” will receive “the throne of his father David,” will “reign over the house of Jacob forever,” and “of his kingdom there will be no end” (1:32–33). This is the language of the Davidic covenant from 2 Samuel 7, now reaching its fulfillment in a way David could never have imagined.

Teach the title “Son of the Most High” carefully. This is not a claim that Jesus is merely a specially favored human being. As verse 35 will make explicit, He is the Son of God in the fullest sense, sharing the nature of the Most High. Luke is laying the foundation for the full deity of Christ from the very first chapter.

Handle the kingdom with precision, because this is where premillennial error often enters. Gabriel speaks of a throne and a reign that has no end. An earthly political kingdom lasting a thousand years cannot be a kingdom with no end. The throne in view is the throne Christ now occupies, having been raised and seated at God’s right hand. Peter makes exactly this point in Acts 2:29–36, declaring that Jesus is even now seated on David’s throne, reigning as Lord and Christ. The kingdom arrived with Jesus and was established when the church began at Pentecost (Mark 9:1; Colossians 1:13).

Bring it home. The One announced to Mary is reigning now. We do not wait for His kingdom to begin someday on earth. We live in it, under His present lordship, as citizens of a kingdom that will never fall.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The deity and divine sonship of Jesus, the Son of the Most High (Luke 1:35; John 1:1)
- The fulfillment of the Davidic covenant in Christ (2 Samuel 7:12–16; Acts 2:29–36)
- The kingdom of God as Christ’s present reign from the right hand of the Father, not a future earthly political reign
- The everlasting nature of Christ’s kingdom, which cannot be a thousand-year earthly empire (Daniel 2:44)
- Christ’s lordship over His church, which is the visible expression of His reign on earth

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean that Jesus is reigning right now rather than waiting to begin His reign?
- How does the phrase “of his kingdom there will be no end” speak against the idea of a temporary earthly kingdom?
- How should Christ’s present lordship shape the way we live this week?

Question 4

Student Question:

Mary answered the angel, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word" (1:38), even though saying yes would cost her reputation and reorder her entire life. What is one area where God is asking you to surrender your own plans to His word, and what makes that surrender hard for you right now?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Mary's answer in verse 38 is one of the great moments of surrender in all of Scripture: "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." The teacher should help students feel the cost hidden in those words. An unmarried pregnancy in her world meant suspicion, possible divorce from Joseph, the loss of her reputation, perhaps worse. Mary says yes anyway.

Notice the order. Mary does not first secure her future and then obey. She places herself at God's disposal as His servant and entrusts the consequences to Him. This is the posture every disciple is called to, and it runs against the grain of a culture that treats personal autonomy as the highest good.

Guide students toward concrete application. Surrender is rarely abstract. It usually has a name: a relationship we are clinging to, a plan for our career, a comfort we will not release, a sin we keep negotiating with. Ask students to identify the specific place where God's word is pressing against their own preferences.

Reassure them that surrender to God is not loss but trust. Mary's yes placed her at the center of God's redemptive work. The path of obedience is the path of blessing, even when it begins with a cost.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Discipleship as surrender of our own plans to the word and will of God (Luke 9:23)
- The lordship of Christ over every area of life, not merely the religious part
- The contrast between the world's gospel of self-determination and the call to be servants of the Lord
- Faith expressed in obedient action rather than mere agreement

Discussion Prompts

- What did Mary risk by saying yes to God?
- What is one specific plan or comfort God may be asking you to surrender?
- Why do we so often try to control the outcome before we will obey?

Question 5

Student Question:

When Gabriel explains how Mary, a virgin, will conceive, he says, "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" (1:35). Why is the virgin birth essential rather than optional to the Christian faith, and what would be lost if Jesus were merely a great man specially used by God?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Here the lesson reaches one of its central doctrinal claims, and the teacher should handle it with both clarity and reverence. Gabriel explains that the conception will be the direct work of God: "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" (1:35). There is no human father. This is a creative act of God.

Explain why the virgin birth is essential and not a peripheral curiosity. It safeguards the identity of Jesus as truly God and truly man, the eternal Son taking on human flesh. It connects to the promise of Isaiah 7:14 that a virgin would conceive and bear Immanuel, God with us. And it underlines that our salvation originates with God, not with human achievement. The Savior is given, not produced.

Address the views that reduce Jesus. Some treat Him as a great moral teacher only. Some treat Him as a created being, the first and highest of God's works, but not God Himself. Some treat Him as an ordinary man whom God later adopted. Luke's account, read with the rest of Scripture, rules out all of these. The child conceived in Mary is the Son of God, sharing the divine nature, eternally one with the Father (John 1:1-14; Colossians 2:9).

Show what would be lost if this were not true. If Jesus were merely a great man, His death could not atone for the sins of the world, and His words would carry no more final authority than any other teacher. Because He is God in the flesh, His life, death, and resurrection have the power to save. The manger holds the Maker of the universe.

End in worship, not just argument. The right response to the incarnation is not only correct belief but awe. The God who flung the stars into place entered His own creation as a helpless infant in order to rescue us.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The virgin birth as essential to the gospel, not an optional belief (Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:18-25)
- The full deity and full humanity of Christ, the eternal Son made flesh (John 1:1-14; Colossians 2:9)
- Salvation as God's gift and initiative rather than human achievement
- A clear answer to views that reduce Jesus to a created being, an adopted son, or merely a great teacher

- The incarnation as the proper ground for worship and awe, not only for doctrine

Discussion Prompts

- Why does the gospel depend on Jesus being both fully God and fully man?
- How would you lovingly respond to someone who says Jesus was only a good teacher or a created being?
- What does it stir in you to know that the One in the manger is the Son of God?

Question 6

Student Question:

Zechariah and Elizabeth are described as “righteous before God, walking blamelessly” (1:6), and yet they carried the ache of unanswered prayer for many years. How do you tend to interpret long seasons of waiting or disappointment, and what does this couple teach you about remaining faithful when God seems silent?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Return to the quiet, faithful couple at the start of the chapter. Zechariah and Elizabeth were “righteous before God, walking blamelessly” (1:6), and yet Elizabeth had carried the reproach of childlessness for a lifetime. Their story corrects a stubborn lie that says faithfulness is always quickly rewarded and that unanswered prayer is a sign of God’s displeasure.

Help students see that the silence was not abandonment. God had heard Zechariah’s prayer long ago (1:13), and He was working on a timetable far larger than one family’s longing. John would be the forerunner of the Messiah. The waiting was woven into a purpose Zechariah could not yet see.

Invite honest reflection on how students interpret their own waiting. Some assume God is punishing them. Some quietly conclude He is not listening. Some grow bitter. Elizabeth and Zechariah kept walking with God in the dark, continuing to serve faithfully even when the deepest desire of their hearts went unmet.

Encourage perseverance. The same God who remembered Elizabeth remembers His people still. Faithfulness in the long, silent seasons is not wasted, and it is often the soil in which God grows the deepest joy.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God’s faithfulness to His people across long seasons of waiting and silence
- That suffering and unanswered prayer are not necessarily signs of God’s displeasure (John 9:1–3)
- Perseverance and continued obedience as marks of genuine faith
- God’s timing and purposes, which are often larger than our immediate desires

Discussion Prompts

- How do you tend to interpret long seasons when God seems silent?
- What helps you keep walking faithfully when a deep prayer goes unanswered?
- How might your present waiting be part of a purpose you cannot yet see?

Question 7

Student Question:

Gabriel declares, "For nothing will be impossible with God" (1:37). Where in the Scriptures and in this passage do we see God doing what is humanly impossible, and how does anchoring our confidence in God's power, rather than in our circumstances, change the way we pray?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Gabriel's words to Mary reach their climax in a sweeping declaration: "For nothing will be impossible with God" (1:37). The teacher should let this land as the theological heartbeat of the whole chapter. A barren woman conceives. A virgin conceives. A forgotten priest becomes the father of the Messiah's forerunner. The impossible becomes ordinary in the hands of God.

Anchor this in the broader witness of Scripture. The God who made something out of nothing (Genesis 1), who opened the sea (Exodus 14), and who raised Jesus from the dead is not limited by what seems possible to us. Be careful, though, to teach this rightly. God's power is exercised according to His character and His purposes, not as a blank check for whatever we want.

Connect God's power to our prayers. When we believe that nothing is impossible with God, we pray boldly and we pray submissively at the same time, like Mary, asking great things while also saying, let it be according to Your word. We stop praying as though everything depends on the size of the obstacle and start praying as though everything depends on the greatness of God.

Apply it to their present circumstances. Ask students to name the situation they have written off as hopeless, and to consider what it would mean to bring it to a God for whom nothing is impossible.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The omnipotence of God, who does what is humanly impossible (Genesis 18:14; Jeremiah 32:17)
- God's power exercised according to His character and purposes, not as a tool for our agendas
- Bold yet submissive prayer that trusts God's ability and His wisdom
- The resurrection as the supreme demonstration that nothing is impossible with God

Discussion Prompts

- What situation in your life have you quietly labeled impossible?
- How do we hold together praying boldly and praying “let it be according to your word”?
- How does the resurrection shape the way you understand God’s power?

Question 8

Student Question:

When Mary arrived, Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and cried out with joy, honoring Mary and her Lord rather than envying the younger woman who carried someone greater than her own son (1:41–45). When God blesses someone around you more visibly than He has blessed you, how do you usually respond, and what would Elizabeth’s gladness look like in your own relationships?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

When Mary arrives, Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, responds with extraordinary generosity of heart. She blesses Mary, marvels that “the mother of my Lord” should come to her, and rejoices that the child in her own womb leaped for joy (1:41–45). Notice what is absent: there is no envy. Elizabeth’s long-awaited son will be great, yet he will be the forerunner of someone greater, and Elizabeth celebrates it.

This is a self-examining question, so guide the group toward honesty about the human heart. Few things expose us like watching God bless someone else more visibly than He has blessed us. Comparison curdles quickly into envy, and envy poisons our joy and our relationships.

Hold up Elizabeth as a model. She was secure enough in God’s goodness to her that she could rejoice wholeheartedly in His goodness to another. Her gladness flowed from the Spirit’s filling, which is a reminder that this kind of generosity is not natural to us but is grown in us by God.

Move toward application. Ask who in the student’s life is easy to envy: the coworker who was promoted, the friend whose family seems effortless, the brother or sister in Christ whose gifts are more visible. What would it look like to genuinely celebrate them this week?

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The sin of envy and the call to rejoice with those who rejoice (Romans 12:15)
- Humility that gladly honors others, even those whom God exalts above us
- The fruit of the Spirit displayed in Elizabeth’s joy
- Contentment grounded in God’s goodness rather than in comparison

Discussion Prompts

- Who is it easiest for you to envy, and why?
- How does Elizabeth’s response model joy without comparison?

- What would it look like to genuinely celebrate someone God has blessed more visibly than you?

Question 9

Student Question:

In the Magnificat, Mary calls God “my Savior” (1:47), rejoices that the Mighty One “has done great things” for her, and celebrates a God who “has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate” (1:46–55). What does this song teach about God’s character, about salvation, and about Mary’s own need for a Savior, and how does it guard us against either ignoring Mary or exalting her beyond what Scripture allows?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The Magnificat is the doctrinal high point of the lesson, and it rewards careful attention. Mary’s song is saturated with Scripture, echoing Hannah’s prayer in 1 Samuel 2 and the language of the Psalms. It reveals a young woman whose mind is steeped in the word of God, and it overflows with theology about who God is.

Begin with what the song says about Mary herself. She calls God “my Savior” (1:47). This is a crucial detail. Mary, the most honored woman in history, openly confesses her own need for a Savior. She is a recipient of grace, not its source. This guards us against two errors at once: the error of ignoring Mary, whom “all generations will call blessed” (1:48), and the error of exalting her into a place that belongs to Christ alone. Scripture honors Mary as the faithful servant of the Lord; it never directs worship or prayer to her.

Then trace what the song says about God. He is mighty, holy, and merciful. He scatters the proud, brings down the powerful, and lifts up the humble (1:51–52). He fills the hungry and sends the rich away empty (1:53). This is the great reversal that runs through Luke’s whole Gospel. The kingdom of God overturns the world’s order, exalting the lowly who trust Him and humbling the self-sufficient who do not.

Connect the song to salvation. Mary celebrates that God “has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy” (1:54), keeping the promise made to Abraham. The coming of Jesus is the fulfillment of God’s long covenant faithfulness. Salvation is God’s initiative, flowing from His mercy, reaching its climax in the child Mary carries.

Close by drawing the heart upward. Mary teaches us how to respond to grace: not with pride, but with a song that magnifies the Lord and rejoices in God our Savior. The right response to being blessed by God is worship that points away from ourselves and back to Him.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Mary's own confession of God as "my Savior," showing her need for grace (Luke 1:47; Romans 3:23)
- A balanced view of Mary, honored as blessed yet never an object of worship or prayer
- God's character as mighty, holy, and merciful
- The great reversal of the kingdom, which exalts the humble and brings down the proud (Luke 1:51–53; James 4:6)
- Salvation as the fulfillment of God's covenant faithfulness and mercy (Luke 1:54–55; Galatians 3:16)
- Worship as the proper response to grace, magnifying God rather than self

Discussion Prompts

- Why is it significant that Mary calls God "my Savior"?
- How does Scripture honor Mary while still reserving worship for God alone?
- Where do you see the great reversal of the kingdom at work in your own life?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across the whole passage, from Luke's careful prologue to Mary's song of praise. God moves through old priests and young peasant girls, through silence and song, to bring His salvation into the world. Name one specific way you sense Jesus forming you through these verses. What is the single truth from Luke 1:1–56 that you most need to carry into this coming week?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Use this final question to gather the threads of the whole passage. Luke has shown us a God who builds His salvation on solid historical ground, who works through forgotten priests and unknown peasant girls, who keeps promises across decades of silence, and who enters the world as the virgin-born Son of the Most High.

Resist the urge to add new content here. The aim is integration and response. Give students space to name what God has actually stirred in them, whether it is fresh confidence in who Jesus is, conviction about a place of needed surrender, or hope in a long season of waiting.

Press gently toward specificity. A vague intention to trust God more rarely changes a life. Ask each person to name one concrete truth and one concrete response they will carry into the week.

Close the session in a way that lifts eyes to Christ. The whole chapter has been moving toward Him. Let the final word be worship of the One whose kingdom will have no end.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Integration of the lesson's themes: the reliability of Scripture, the deity and virgin birth of Christ, surrender, and God's faithfulness
- The transforming purpose of God's word, which aims at changed lives and not merely informed minds (James 1:22)
- Personal response and obedience as the goal of studying Scripture
- Worship of Christ as the fitting climax of the passage

Discussion Prompts

- What single truth from this passage do you most need this week?
- What is one concrete way you will respond to what God has shown you?
- How has this passage changed the way you see Jesus?