

John, the Herald, Is Born

SESSION IN A SENTENCE: God appointed John to be the herald of the Most High and to prepare the people for Jesus' arrival.

BACKGROUND PASSAGES: Luke 1:5-24,57-80

Trust is an important part of making big purchases. When looking for a home, a car, or even a computer, the hurdle is high for people and products to gain our trust. Our ability to trust correlates directly with our view of a person or product. If we hold them in high esteem (or we know of several others who do), we are more likely to trust them with our money. However, if people have a negative view of a particular brand or specific product, then it's going to take a steal of a deal for us to give them a chance, if we give them one at all.



How have you had your trust in a product or brand affirmed or eroded?

Group Time

Point 1: Trusting God's Word leads to praise (Luke 1:59-66).

The priest Zechariah and his wife, Elizabeth, were righteous people, known by their faithful obedience to the law of God; they were also old and sadly without children (Luke 1:6-7). One day, the angel Gabriel appeared to Zechariah with incredible news: Elizabeth, in her old age, would have a child—a great servant of the Lord (vv. 8-17)!

Angels: In the original languages of the Bible, the word *angel* carries the meaning of a _____, which indicates one of their primary _____ for existence.

Gabriel directed the frightened priest to name his forthcoming son John. However, Zechariah responded not in praise but in **doubt**. Instead of receiving this glorious news with faith, forgetting the power of the God of Abraham, Zechariah questioned the ability of God to do this miracle. Because of his faithless response, Zechariah lost his ability to speak until all of Gabriel's words came true (vv. 18-20).



Why do people often give into the thought that God can do miracles in other people's lives but not their own?


⁵⁹ And on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child. And they would have called him Zechariah after his father, ⁶⁰ but his mother answered, "No; he shall be called John." ⁶¹ And they said to her, "None of your relatives is called by this name." ⁶² And they made signs to his father, inquiring what he wanted him to be called. ⁶³ And he asked for a writing tablet and wrote, "His name is John." And they all wondered. ⁶⁴ And immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, blessing God. ⁶⁵ And fear came on all their neighbors. And all these things were talked about through all the hill country of Judea, ⁶⁶ and all who heard them laid them up in their hearts, saying, "What then will this child be?" For the hand of the Lord was with him.

Zechariah learned his lesson. The prophecy was fulfilled, just as the angel Gabriel had promised, and Zechariah's response was as it should have been all along: a declaration of trust and praise to God. Once we have seen and known the goodness and depth of God's grace, the natural next step is always praise.


Point 2: Trusting God's Word leads to salvation (Luke 1:67-73a).

⁶⁷ And his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied, saying,
⁶⁸ “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people
⁶⁹ and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David,
⁷⁰ as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old, ⁷¹ that we should be
saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us; ⁷² to show the mercy
promised to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant, ^{73a} the oath that he
swore to our father Abraham,

Centuries had passed since God made an everlasting covenant with the forefather of the Hebrew people: Abraham. The prophets of old had proclaimed the coming of a King in the line of David who would rescue His people from bondage and make them into a great nation once again. Zechariah, now a prophet himself, declared by the Holy Spirit that this King had come. The waiting was over—God had not forgotten His promises.

 How would Jesus' experience of humanity have changed if He had been born into a palace instead of Mary's family?

Notice the tense Zechariah used in his proclamation: God *has visited* and *has raised up a horn of salvation*. Zechariah understood that the long-awaited Messiah had already come. Through the Holy Spirit, Zechariah proclaimed that the prophecies he and generations of Jews had waited to be fulfilled were indeed coming to pass in Mary's unborn child. The tiny life in Mary's womb was the Christ. Rescue had come. Redemption was within reach. Right around the corner was victory and salvation.

 How would you summarize your salvation story (or part of it) in a few sentences?

Point 3: Trusting God’s Word leads to serving others (Luke 1:76-79).

⁷⁶ And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, ⁷⁷ to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins, ⁷⁸ because of the tender mercy of our God, whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high ⁷⁹ to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.”

We see through this passage that God sent John for a very specific and special purpose. He was ordained to prepare God’s people for some really big news: the Messiah has come! After four hundred years of silence, God’s people needed some prep work for reality to sink in. Some Jews may have given up on the idea that God would speak again. Many probably carried doubts that the promised Deliverer would ever come. God knew this, so He raised up John to go be great before Jesus came on the scene and to prepare the way for Jesus to become greater than he was.

Voices from the Church

“Greatness comes from serving the Lord, not from serving ourselves. Greatness comes when we, like John, say, ‘We must decrease; Jesus must increase’ ... The prophet of salvation never replaces the bringer of salvation.”¹

–Thabiti Anyabwile

 By what means did the Lord prepare you to receive the gospel in faith?

Not only was John called to prepare the way for the Lord, he was also called to proclaim the good news of *why* the Messiah had come. As Zechariah rightly announced, the tender mercies of God had arrived in the Most High, who brought salvation through the forgiveness of sins. John was but a servant to the Savior of the world.

WHAT ARE SOME WAYS YOU CAN PREPARE THE WAY FOR THE LORD IN THE LIFE OF AN UNBELIEVER?

WHO DO YOU KNOW WHO LIVES IN DARKNESS AND THE SHADOW OF DEATH?

My Mission

Because we have experienced the goodness of Christ and new life through Him, we seek to tell others about Jesus so they too might find salvation in Him.

- **What will you do to grow in your trust of God and His Word?**
- **How can your group work together to bless the Lord and His image bearers in light of the coming of the Christ?**
- **What will you do to actively proclaim the truth about who Jesus is to the lost world around you?**

Voices from the Church

“God’s will for your life is that you be faithful as he is faithful. Faithful to him. Faithful to others. Faithful in this moment. Faithful to the end. That which he wills, he also enables.”²

—Jen Wilkin

Notes

Daily Study

Day 1: Read Luke 1:5-24

God the Holy Spirit *indwells* every person who believes in Christ from the moment he or she believes onward, though being *filled* is contingent on our ongoing acts of obedience, as we see in Ephesians 5:18. The Spirit now continually dwells within us as our Helper and Guide, Comforter and Keeper. Though we can never lose Him, we can ignore Him. Our sin and disobedience quenches the work and power of God within us. However, when we pray, read God's Word, sing in worship, confess our sins, and follow God's leading in obedience, we invite the Spirit to fill every part of us. It is through this same filling that we can be as bold and brave as John and live a life dedicated to proclaiming Jesus.

We should confess to God whatever grieving or stifling of the Spirit we might be doing (Eph. 4:30; 1 Thess. 5:19). Consider reaching out to a trusted friend and ask him or her to pray for you in this area of your life.



In what parts of your life are you allowing the Holy Spirit to fill and influence you? In what ways are you stifling His work in certain areas of your life?

Day 2: Read Luke 1:57-66

God asked Zechariah and Elizabeth to go against tradition and culture when He told them to name their miracle baby John. It's easy to imagine that from the time they were newlyweds, they both dreamt of their own little Zech Jr. The expectation from everyone at that naming celebration was that the boy would be named after his father.

Yet Zechariah and Elizabeth chose obedience over tradition. They decided to honor God's ways over cultural expectation. Remember, at this point Zechariah was still mute at the Lord's hand. Yet instead of walking down the road of bitterness, the silent father chose the path of obedience.



Do you think you are characterized more as one who walks in the way of the world or the way of obedience? Spend some time in prayer asking the Spirit to help you make choices of obedience today.

Day 3: Read Luke 1:67-75

Zechariah's prophecy was the first public form of prophecy to God's people in more than four hundred years. The same man who declared his doubt in God just months earlier was now being used by God to be His mouthpiece.


It's so easy to look back on our failures and assume that we've been disqualified from service to God. Interestingly, the very instrument Zechariah used to sin against God—his mouth—was the very tool God later used to bring glory to Himself. You might have seen God do the same in your own life or in the lives of others. There is no mistake so big the power of God's forgiveness—obtained through Christ's sacrifice—cannot overcome.

-  What are you holding back from God's service due to past failures? How can you fully trust in the work of Christ to cover your guilt and redeem your past?

Day 4: Read Luke 1:76-79

God fulfilled this prophecy through John. John the Baptizer played a powerful and significant role in the plans of God through his obedience. John understood the role he had to play, and he played it to the full. At the height of his personal ministry, where the temptation must have been incredibly strong to bask in the praise of his followers, he declared, “[Christ] must increase, but I must decrease” (John 3:30).


John did just that, right up to his death, when he was beheaded for speaking truth (see Matt. 14:1-12). May we be a people who seek to increase the name of Christ and follow Him in obedience to the furthest extent possible, even if that means physical harm or bodily death.

-  What might it look like for you to “decrease” this week so that the presence and glory of Christ might “increase” in your life?

Day 5: Read Luke 1:80

The waiting seasons of life are often the hardest seasons to walk through. There are so many unknowns and uncertainties. Waiting, in fact, can be emotionally crippling.

John lived in the wilderness for virtually thirty years before God called him into the public ministry. He knew God's specific will from a very early age, yet he had to wait before he could walk forward in that calling. We don't know how John handled that wait, but it would have been excruciating for some people. But as God continues to give us opportunities to wait on His perfect provision and timing, we should strive hard to learn to wait well. God's purpose is always good, His grace is always sufficient, and His plan is always on time, whether things seem that way or not.




-  How do you tend to handle seasons of waiting? With doubt?
With confidence?

Encourage One Another

Join together with 2-4 people from your group, or with your family, sometime during the week to reflect on the session and to share how God is working and you are responding.

Share your thoughts and reflections on the truths from Scripture in this session:

- Trusting God's Word leads to praise (Luke 1:59-66).
- Trusting God's Word leads to salvation (Luke 1:67-73a).
- Trusting God's Word leads to serving others (Luke 1:76-79).

-  How have you responded to these truths from Scripture?
-  When has an encounter with God's Word led you to give audible praise?
-  If we trust that the Bible's testimony about Christ's coming is true, why should this naturally stimulate us to announce the good news to others?

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Trevin Wax

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AUTHOR OF MULTIPLE BOOKS, INCLUDING
*This Is Our Time: Everyday Myths in
Light of the Gospel*

With this volume of *The Gospel Project*, the storyline of the Bible shifts from the Old Testament to the New, and we enter the era in which God begins to fulfill His promise of salvation through the person and work of Jesus Christ. In the sessions that follow, you'll take a closer look at the context surrounding the birth of Jesus, the theological parallels between Adam and Jesus (the last Adam), as well as the early ministry of Jesus.

Some of these stories will be familiar to you and the rest of your group—the Christmas story, for example, or the story of Jesus' temptation. In the familiar stories, we want to help you see aspects of the Gospel accounts that you may have overlooked. In the less familiar stories, we want to help you see the beauty of Jesus' interaction with all kinds of people with all kinds of needs and all kinds of backgrounds.

Our hope as you study the Scriptures is that you will be drawn to worship Jesus as the Savior and Lord who fulfills God's original intention for us as His people. Here we see a Jesus withstanding temptation, calling disciples, loving the unlovable, and battling the evil one. May your worship of this Savior lead you to faithful obedience to His call in extending grace and mercy and the message of salvation to those around you.

UNIT 19

SESSION 1

1. "Sin," in *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, gen. eds. Leland Ryken, James C. Wilhoit, and Tremper Longman III (IVP, 1998) [Wordsearch].
2. Warren W. Wiersbe, *Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the New Testament* (Colorado Springs, CO: Victor Books, 1992), 376.
3. Chrysostom, Homilies on Romans 10, quoted in *Romans*, ed. Gerald Bray, vol. VI in *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2001) [Wordsearch].

SESSION 2

1. Thabiti Anyabwile, *Christ-Centered Exposition: Exalting Jesus in Luke* (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2018), 40-41.
2. Jen Wilkin, *In His Image* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 107.

SESSION 3

1. John Piper, "God Is Always Doing 10,000 Things in Your Life," *Desiring God*, January 1, 2013, www.desiringgod.org/articles/god-is-always-doing-10000-things-in-your-life.
2. Martin Luther, *The Magnificat*, quoted in *Luke*, ed. Beth Kreitzer, vol. 3 in *Reformation Commentary on Scripture: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2015) [Wordsearch].
3. Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2013), 690.

SESSION 4

1. C. S. Lewis, *God in the Dock*, ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1970), 168.
2. Thomas Becon, *The Sermon of Simeon in the Temple*, quoted in *Luke*, ed. Beth Kreitzer, vol. 3 in *Reformation Commentary on Scripture: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2015) [Wordsearch].

SESSION 5

1. Bernard Gilpin, *A Sermon Preached in the Court at Greenewich*, quoted in *Luke*, ed. Beth Kreitzer, vol. 3 in *Reformation Commentary on Scripture: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2015) [Wordsearch].
2. Gloria Furman, *Missional Motherhood* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 200.

UNIT 20

SESSION 1

1. Eric Mason, *Manhood Restored* (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2013), 1.
2. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, trans. John W. Doberstein (SCM Press, 2015), 91.

EASTER SESSION

1. Basil, *On Humility* 20, quoted in 1-2 *Corinthians*, ed. Gerald Bray, vol. VII in *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2001) [Wordsearch].
2. Russell D. Moore, *Tempted and Tried: Temptation and the Triumph of Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 75.

SESSION 2

1. Jackie Hill Perry, *Gay Girl, Good God* (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2018), 171.
2. Martin Luther, *The Large Catechism*, trans. Robert H. Fischer (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1959), 9.

SESSION 3

1. Trip Lee, *Rise: Get Up and Live in God's Great Story* (Nashville, TN: Nelson Books, 2015), 47.
2. Ambrose, *Concerning Repentance* 1.12.53, quoted in *John 1-10*, ed. Joel C. Elowsky, vol. IVa in *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2001) [Wordsearch].

SESSION 4

1. Chrysostom, *Homilies on Romans* 14.44, quoted in *Romans*, ed. Gerald Bray, vol. VI in *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2001) [Wordsearch].
2. Jerry Bridges, *31 Days Toward Trusting God* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2013) [eBook].

UNIT 21

SESSION 1

1. Fred L. Horton Jr., "Exorcism," in *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2003), 533.
2. Dexter Maben, "Mark," in *South Asia Bible Commentary*, gen. ed. Brian Wintle (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015), 1290.
3. Charles H. Spurgeon, *Morning by Morning* (Alachua, FL: Bridge-Logos, 2000), January 14.
4. Dacher Keltner, "Hands On Research: The Science of Touch," *Greater Good Magazine*, September 29, 2010, http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/hands_on_research.

SESSION 2

1. See *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, by C. S. Lewis (New York: HarperCollins, 1978), 89.
2. St. Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, trans. and ed. A Religious of C.S.M.V. (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1996), 35.
3. Kim Cash Tate, "Rejected by Friends, Loved by Jesus," *Desiring God*, December 29, 2015, www.desiringgod.org/articles/rejected-by-friends-loved-by-jesus.

SESSION 3

1. "Kawasaki Disease and Heart Transplant: Kendall's Story," Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, April 2012, www.chop.edu/stories/kawasaki-disease-and-heart-transplant-kendalls-story.
2. Andrew Murray, *Humility, in Humility and Absolute Surrender* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2005), 42.
3. "John," in *Africa Study Bible* (Oasis International LTD, 2016), 1534.

SESSION 4

1. Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Commentary on John* 24.23-24, quoted in *John 1-10*, ed. Joel C. Elowsky, vol. IVa in *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2001) [Wordsearch].
2. Samuel Ngewa, "John," in *Africa Bible Commentary*, gen. ed. Tokunboh Adeyemo (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 1286.