

Birth of John the Baptist



Scripture Reference: [Luke 1:5-80](#)

Suggested Theme: God can do impossible things.

Memory Verse: “God can do everything!” [Luke 1:37 ICB](#)

Story Overview:

A priest and his wife were well beyond the years when it was possible to give birth to a child. The angel, Gabriel, gave Zechariah the incredible news that his wife, Elizabeth, would give birth to a son who would become a great preacher. They were to name the baby John. Elizabeth received a visit from her young cousin, Mary, and these two praised God in their shared joy. Soon after Mary left, Elizabeth gave birth to John.

Background Study:

Zechariah and his wife, Elizabeth, were Jews who patiently waited for God to rescue and restore his people. Zechariah was a priest, and he and his wife were from the priestly line of Aaron ([Exodus 28:1, 43; 1 Chronicles 24:19](#)). Though married for many years, this couple had never had a child. Not only was this personally disappointing for Zechariah and Elizabeth, but others saw it as shameful. Jewish society at that time looked down on people who could not have children. They unfairly assumed God was not pleased with them and was consequently withholding the blessing of children.

The priestly groups took turns in temple duties. Zechariah’s group was serving at this time. Within the group, the priests chose lots (similar, in effect, to drawing straws or rolling dice) to decide who was to perform specific temple duties. In today’s story, Zechariah’s responsibility was to burn incense inside the temple. While the priest burned incense, he was to pray. The people worshipping outside in the temple court were to pray also.

Zechariah was supposed to be alone in the temple, but as he prayed, he was suddenly aware of an angel standing near him at the right of the altar. Sensing Zechariah’s fright, the angel told him not to fear. God had heard Zechariah’s prayer for the salvation of Israel.

Zechariah’s and Elizabeth’s personal prayers were to be answered as well. His wife would give birth to a son filled with the Holy Spirit. They were to name him John (which means “the Lord is gracious”).

Poor Zechariah. It was all too wonderful to believe, and he questioned the angel. ([Luke 1:18-20](#)). For this reason, Zechariah became mute. He left the temple and returned to Elizabeth. She became pregnant.

Mary’s Visit:

([Luke 1:26-56](#)) During Elizabeth's pregnancy, her young cousin, Mary, from Nazareth, visited her. When Mary first greeted Elizabeth, the baby inside of Elizabeth's womb "jumped." Elizabeth's unborn child recognised that something special was happening within Mary, too.

It turns out that Zechariah was not the only one who had received a visit from an angel. The angel, Gabriel, had also visited Mary to tell her that she was pregnant with a baby that would be called Jesus.

Two seemingly impossible pregnancies had occurred. One was the pregnancy of an older woman past the age of childbearing. The other was the pregnancy of a virgin. As the angel had assured Mary, "nothing is impossible with God."

Now, at Elizabeth's house, despite one woman being elderly and the other very young, these two women shared a special bond. During Mary's visit and before she returned to Nazareth, these two women shared the fantastic things happening to them and worshipped God. In these verses, we read "Mary's song."

Mary left to return to Nazareth when Elizabeth was nearing her due date.

John is Born:

Elizabeth gave birth to a son. The neighbours had been puzzled by Zechariah's inability to speak. They were even more puzzled when Elizabeth wanted to name the child John instead of after his father or a relative. Even though Zechariah could still not speak, he motioned to others for something to write on. He was handed a wooden tablet and wrote, "His name is John."

It was at this point that Zechariah was again able to speak. He immediately began to praise God and prophesy. First, he praised God for visiting and redeeming His people. Zechariah said the Messiah would soon come to bring salvation to His people. The Messiah would fulfil all the prophecies and covenants.

Zechariah's son, John, was to be the one who would prepare the way for this Messiah.

Later, we will learn that Jesus was the Messiah.

Way to Introduce the Story:

When the children are assembled in the story area, begin moving your lips and gesturing as if telling the story, but do not speak aloud. Act frustrated that they do not seem to understand what you are saying. Continue for another minute. "Oh, I guess you were having trouble understanding me, weren't you? What was the problem? That's right. I was talking, but no sound was coming out."

Listen to our Bible story to discover who else could not talk.

The Story:

Zechariah and his wife Elizabeth were two old people—like grandparents—except that Zechariah and Elizabeth were not grandparents. They weren't even parents. They had no children, and that made them sad. But all their lives, they had followed God's commands, and that had made their lives happy.

Zechariah was a priest who helped in God's temple. One day, a very special thing happened to him. He was chosen to be the one priest to go inside the temple and burn incense while the people stood outside and prayed. Zechariah must have felt especially happy as he entered the temple.

Suddenly, an angel appeared in front of him! Zechariah was terrified. The angel comforted him, "Don't be afraid, Zechariah. God has heard your prayer. Your wife Elizabeth will have a son. You will name him John. He will help people follow God's chosen leader."

That seems impossible. Can old people have babies? Only God could make that happen! Zechariah should have believed the angel and rejoiced. But he didn't. "How can this happen?" he asked. "My wife and I are old."

"I am the angel Gabriel. God sent me to deliver this good news to you. But now, since you did not believe my news, you will not be able to talk until my words come true."

Outside the temple, the crowd was getting impatient. They wondered why Zechariah was taking so long inside the temple. But when he did come out, he couldn't tell them. The angel's words had come true: Zechariah couldn't talk.

And more of the angel's words came true. Zechariah and Elizabeth soon discovered that they were going to have a baby. The neighbours and relatives rejoiced along with the parents. And when the baby was born, it was a boy, just as the angel had said.

When the baby was eight days old, many friends and relatives of Zechariah and Elizabeth came for a party to give the baby his name. As people gathered for the party, they talked about how the baby would be named Zechariah after his father. But Elizabeth heard them and said, "No, his name will be John!"

The guests were surprised. "But none of your relatives have that name."

They turned to Zechariah and gestured for him to show what he wanted the baby to be named—he still could not talk. He asked for a writing tablet, and on it was written, "His name is John."

All of a sudden, Zechariah realized that he could talk! He began praising God for the wonderful way He had kept His promises. He explained to the people that John, indeed, was a special baby, and God had a special plan for him: John would prepare people to follow Jesus (who would soon be born.)

Zechariah and Elizabeth were excited to have a son after all these years. But they were even happier that God had chosen them as the parents of a boy who would grow up and help others follow God's own Son.

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Ways to Tell the Story:

This story can be told using various methods. Always remain true to the facts found in the Bible, but help children connect to its meaning by using drama, visual aids, voice inflection or other group participation.

Be selective. Each teacher is unique, so only use the illustrations that best relate to how YOU tell the story in THIS lesson. Too many illustrations can be confusing, so eliminate any that cover other stories or details you do not wish to emphasise in this lesson.

[Click here for visual aids and more storytelling methods.](#)

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Review and Reflection Questions:

Review questions help children remember and know the facts of a story. Reflection questions encourage them to internalise the meaning and implications for their lives. Asking at least one of each type of question can help strengthen a child's spiritual development and help them connect to God. [Click here to learn more about review and reflection questions.](#)

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Review:

- Who were the parents of John the Baptist? (Zechariah and Elizabeth)
- Who told Zechariah that Elizabeth was going to have a baby? (The angel Gabriel)
- What did the angel tell Zechariah to name their baby? (John)

- What happened after Zechariah heard the angel's message? (He became mute)
- What was so unusual about Zechariah and Elizabeth having a baby? (They were old)
- What was special about Zechariah and Elizabeth's baby? (He would help the people be ready to follow the Messiah, who is Jesus)
- Quote Luke 1:37. ("God can do everything!") (ICB))
- What do you think Zechariah learned from his experience in the temple and having a son?
- What do you think Elizabeth learned from all of this happening to her?
- What do you learn about God from this story?

Reflection:

- What do you think the temple smelled like when Zechariah got to serve and take care of the incense?
- What is something you wonder about in this story?
- What part of this story did you find most interesting?
- How do you think Zechariah or the people felt when they realized he was mute?
- How do you think Elizabeth and Zechariah felt about having a baby when they were old?
- What do you think Elizabeth and Zechariah's friends and family thought about them receiving a message from an angel and having a baby at an old age?
- If you were Elizabeth, how would you feel about having your son be part of God's promises about the Messiah?
- What is something impossible you wish you could see God do?
- Have you seen God do something impossible? Have you heard any stories of God doing impossible things?

Prayer:

It is important to guide children in learning how to pray. In prayer, children can connect with God and learn that He hears and answers them. God can become a lifelong friend who is with them every moment of their lives. Try using a variety of prayer methods from time to time so that the children can learn to connect with God in different ways. Note that you can pray at any time throughout your lesson. [A variety of prayer methods are found here.](#)

Song Suggestions:

- [My God is So Big Song](#)
- [He's Got the Whole World in His Hands Song](#)
- [Our God is an Awesome God Song](#)
- Refer to the [Song Page](#) on this website for more song options.

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Activities and Crafts:

- [How to choose the best learning activities for my teaching situation.](#)

- [Visit the activities and songs pages for additional activities and crafts.](#)

Activities:

- To help reinforce the fact that God's power made it possible for an elderly couple to have a baby, show a magic trick. After performing the trick, then explain how the trick worked. Talk about the difference between magic tricks and God's power (magic tricks are just "tricks," but God's power is real.)
- Memorize Luke 1:37. A fun way to do this is to write words like "fast, slow, baby talk, bass voice, opera singer, etc., on small cards. Children can draw cards and then say the memory verse according to the card they choose. Example: Child draws a card with "opera singer" on it so they sing the verse as an opera singer would. Another child might draw a card that says "whisper the verse." After hearing and repeating the verse a number of times, all the children will learn it.
- Hide baby items around the room and have children find them.
- If you plan on teaching about [The Birth of Jesus](#) in the next few weeks, then ask children to bring baby photos so that they can be used as an introduction to that story.

Invite the children to respond to this story using the adaptable "God's Story" printable reflection page. [Free printables for this story.](#)

Crafts:

- Obtain birth announcements and have children fill them out for John the Baptist.
- Younger children can practice writing "His name is John" (verse 63).

Print and use these free bookmarks, trading cards or timelines. [Free printables for this story.](#)

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Other Online Resources:

- [Colouring page and puzzle worksheets about the birth of John the Baptist \(Calvary Curriculum\)](#)
- [Colouring page and puzzle worksheets about Zechariah and Elizabeth \(Calvary Curriculum\)](#)
- [Colouring Page and Worksheets about Mary's visit to Elizabeth \(Calvary Curriculum\)](#)

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Date

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