



Parkway Fellowship

The Hallpark Channel Presents: • A Family Christmas • Luke 1:5-44 • 12/08/2019

MAIN POINT

Don't miss the opportunity to speak about what God is doing in your life and in the lives of others.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

Why do you think God chooses to work in ways that surprise us?

What's one unexpected way God has worked in your life lately? How do you react if you don't sense God working?

Many of us are planners and do not like change or surprises. God's work in our lives, though, can be startling and surprising. As God works in our lives we need to honor and tell others about Him, which includes praising Him even when we do not see Him working the way we expect.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

Luke said he wrote his Gospel to present "an orderly account" (1:3) of God's fulfilling of His promise to provide a Deliverer through whom people can be saved from their sins. The entirety of his Gospel describes Jesus as that Deliverer, the perfect human and Savior. Luke began the narrative with the story found here in Luke 1:5-25.

| Ask a volunteer to read Luke 1:5-22.

What characteristics of Zechariah and Elizabeth made them good candidates

for a special assignment from God? What made them unlikely candidates?

Luke tells his readers that both Zechariah and Elizabeth were persons of strong faith. They demonstrated trust in God by keeping all the commandments and requirements of the Law. The couple put their hearts into their walk with God and received the godly evaluation as righteous in God's sight and living without blame. The pictures painted are of Old Testament saints—much like Abraham and Sarah—who showed their faith by their works (Jas. 2:26). Zechariah and Elizabeth stayed the biblical course even when life appeared to be unfair.

Why do you think God waited so long to answer their prayers?

What do you do when your prayers go unanswered? How is your relationship with God affected?

Waiting faithfully on God is one of life's most difficult experiences. Believers must resist the temptation to disregard faithfulness and give in to despair or disappointment. Such tension should drive us to the available resource of prayer. Those who stay the course find God to be faithful and experience a reward only He can give. What appears impossible with man is always possible with God. He is never overwhelmed by the size of our problem. So we can confidently continue in faithful obedience and telling others about God's goodness in spite of disappointments or unfulfilled dreams.

Why did John the Baptist's parents need to know the work John would do? (sample answers: so they could guide him; so they could nurture the needed qualities in his life)

Either as a parent or a mentor to someone younger, how do you guide others to live out God's call on their lives? Is it difficult or easy for you to discuss spiritual truths with your kids? Why?

Why do you think the angel struck Zechariah silent? Wouldn't it have been better for him to be able to speak about what happened, even if he was uncertain?

When Zechariah raised a question, the angel rebuked him for lack of faith but then reassured him concerning God's work. The angel announced he was Gabriel so John might recognize the mighty messenger before him. A faithful ambassador, Gabriel delivered the good news exactly as it had been given to him. The angel assured the priest he could believe the promise. But Zechariah asked for a sign because he did not believe the words of God's messenger. Thus he would be silent and unable to speak until the promise was fulfilled. God's plans would not be performed on Zechariah's timetable but would be fulfilled in their proper time.

How often does doubt or uncertainty keep you from telling others about Jesus?

| Ask a volunteer to read Luke 1:39-44.

In this week's message, we were encouraged from this passage to recognize the presence of Jesus even when we can't see Him and to not be so wrapped up in ourselves that we don't applaud what God is doing in someone else. Elizabeth named Mary as the most blessed of women. God chose Mary above any other woman for a high purpose. Additionally, Elizabeth acknowledged the unique nature of the Child that Mary would bear. Elizabeth expressed her sense of unworthiness to receive Mary as a guest. Although God worked in a miraculous way to provide a son for Elizabeth, she proclaimed the superiority of the One Mary was carrying. In response Mary burst out in a song of praise (1:46-55).

Surely Mary and Elizabeth had questions, too. Why do you think they were able to speak about what God was doing when Zechariah could not?

Why will some believers tell others about Jesus this Christmas season, while others will remain silent?

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

Who is one person or one life context in which you can tell someone about Jesus this week?

What do you need to do to prepare for that to happen?

PRAYER

Praise God that He made a way for us, through two unexpected births. Ask God to help you trust Him even when you can't see Him at work and to confidently tell others about what He has done and promises still to do.

COMMENTARY

| Luke 1:5-25

1:5-7 Zechariah was of the line of Aaron, Israel's first high priest. Elizabeth, too, was a descendent of Aaron. Luke pointed out that they were upright in the sight of God and not just

in outward appearance. Luke underscored Zechariah's and Elizabeth's dedication by declaring that this couple blamelessly followed both God's commandments and His regulations. This couple had committed themselves to faithfully follow God's will. Luke indicated that they had no children. Zechariah and Elizabeth's childlessness caused them great sorrow and perhaps even produced in them a sense of inferiority. The reference to Zechariah and Elizabeth's childlessness along with their advanced ages points to the human impossibility of the birth of a son and emphasizes the miraculous nature of God's intervention in their lives with the birth of John the Baptist.

1:11-13 Zechariah encountered an angel of the Lord in the holy place. The term translated "appeared" often denotes divine manifestation. Of course, the elderly priest was startled at the angel's sudden arrival. Zechariah also was gripped with fear. The angel, seeing Zechariah's discomfort, quickly told him not to be afraid. Then the angel revealed his reason for being there. The angel told Zechariah that his prayer had been heard and was about to be answered. Both the prayer for a child and the prayer for the Messiah would receive an answer in the same event, for their son would prepare the way for the Messiah. The angel instructed Zechariah to name that son John. John means "the LORD has been gracious." Probably this name underscored God's grace as it was being extended either to Zechariah in giving him a son or, more likely, to Israel in sending the Messiah.

1:14-17 Then the angel informed Zechariah of the effect of his son's ministry. John would be a joy and delight to his father and mother. Further, many others would rejoice because of his birth. The people of Israel longed for a prophetic voice for they had not heard one for centuries. John would be that voice. The Savior about whom John would witness would bring and still is bringing joy to people throughout the world. The angel then stated certain characteristics that would lie behind John's effective ministry. John would be filled with the Holy Spirit even from birth.

1:18-20 Zechariah asked for some assurance regarding the truth of the angel's message. He protested that he and his wife were too old to produce a child. This expression of unbelief strongly displeased the heavenly messenger. The angel insisted he, Gabriel, had come to the temple from the presence of God to tell Zechariah "this good news." Gabriel announced that Zechariah would be unable to speak until the day when the imparted prophecy had been fulfilled.

1:21-22. The people waiting for Zechariah to come out of the sanctuary were surprised because he did not emerge when expected. Since Gabriel had rendered him speechless (v. 20), Zechariah was unable to pronounce the traditional Aaronic blessing (Num 6:24-26) upon the crowd. They realized he had seen a vision, likely because they noted his facial

expressions and the excited signs he made with his hands.

1:3. Since each priest was only on duty for a week at a time, Zechariah would have been able to go home soon after his encounter with Gabriel (vv. 10-20). His home was located in the Judean hill country, not far from Jerusalem (v. 39).

1:24-25. Elizabeth withdrew and kept herself in seclusion for five months after she miraculously conceived. Why did she do this? Some speculate that she feared miscarrying during the early months of pregnancy. More likely she recognized that her unusual pregnancy would draw unwelcome attention if it became widely known. Better to have a restful start to a pregnancy that came so late in life.

1:39. The time notice (literally “In these days”) serves primarily as a literary link tying what follows to the previous account (cf. 6:12; Acts 1:15). The phrase “went with haste” (ESV) should not be interpreted as an attempt to prevent Mary’s neighbors in Nazareth from knowing that she was pregnant. Rather Luke here described Mary as a model believer eagerly responding in obedience to the heavenly message of Luke 1:36. Judea refers here to the Roman province in contrast to 1:5, where it refers to Palestine. The name of the city is not given.

1:41. Just as John the Baptist in his ministry was to be Jesus’ precursor and prepare his way (1:17, 76), so even here he prepared the way, i.e., he announced the Messiah’s presence by leaping in his mother’s womb. Compare Genesis 25:22 for an OT parallel. (For leaping for joy, see 2 Sam 6:16; Mal 4:2.) This prenatal cognition is meant to attest to the truth and fulfillment of Gabriel’s prophecy in Luke 1:31-33, 35. In 1:44 Elizabeth would explain the significance of her child’s action. What was promised to Zechariah (1:15) was now fulfilled. John and Elizabeth were filled with the Holy Spirit even before John’s birth. Thus they were the first persons to realize that Mary’s child is the Messiah. That the hymn that follows conveys a correct Christological understanding is evident from the character description of Elizabeth in 1:6 and from the fact that she was filled with the Holy Spirit as she spoke.

1:42. The expression “in a loud voice” (NIV) is frequently used to describe an inspired utterance (cf. Mark 9:24; John 1:15; 7:28, 37; Rom 8:15; 9:27; Gal 4:6). The first two lines of Elizabeth’s blessing found in this verse possess poetic parallelism, but the rest do not. “Blessed are you among women.” This is a Semitic way of saying “most blessed.” What God had done in Mary outshone even what God had done in Elizabeth. Mary was blessed here not because of her faith, as in Luke 1:45; rather her blessedness depended entirely on her son and his greatness. A similar beatitude is repeated in 11:27. “Blessed is the child you will bear.” “The child you will bear” is literally the fruit of your womb (cf. Gen. 30:2; Lam. 2:20; cf. also Deut. 7:13; 28:4). The Lord had already been conceived. Although the two blessings

stand essentially parallel, the first stands logically in subordination to the second. Mary's blessedness was based on the blessedness of the child she would bear. This fits an OT pattern in which the second blessing gives the cause of the first (cf. Gen. 14:19-20; Deut. 7:14; Ruth 2:20).

1:43. "My Lord" indicates that the focus in this account is upon Mary's child more than Mary herself. Here "Lord" is clearly a Christological title and refers to Jesus. The title is used in our account (and in Luke 1–2 in general) both for God (1:46) and Jesus (1:43; cf. Acts 2:36), and it reveals the greatness of Mary's child already before His birth. Whereas the title "Lord" is used for Jesus only six times in Mark, it is used more than twenty times in Luke. To these can be added the nineteen times Jesus is addressed in the vocative as Lord. It is above all by the resurrection that Mary's child is recognized as Lord (Acts 2:36), although this verse indicates that from His conception He was already Lord. The use of the title "Lord" indicates that Luke understood Jesus as standing on a different level from others. He, like God, is deserving of the title "Lord."

1:44-45. This is a partial fulfillment of Luke 1:14. For a similar expression of joy on Mary's part, cf. 1:47. Even as Elizabeth rejoiced in her subservient role to Mary, so later John would also rejoice in his subservient role in preparing for Jesus (John 3:29). Elizabeth's praise both begins and now ends with a reference to Mary's blessedness. The blessedness of Mary's faith stands in contrast to Zechariah's lack of faith in 1:20. Her blessedness is a present state (cf. 6:20-22). Again Mary serves as an example for the believer. Indeed Luke sought to maximize Mary's role as a model believer. In Acts 1:14 he mentioned that Mary and her other children were among the inner core of disciples. Mary is "blessed" here for her faith but is "most blessed" in Luke 1:42 for the privilege of being the mother of God's Son.