

An open book is shown from a top-down perspective, lying flat. The pages are a light cream color, and the dark binding is visible in the center. The book is set against a dark, textured background.

Week 1

The Waiting and the Announcement:

Prophecies and Promises

Sunday Morning Bible Study
07 December 2025
Presented by: Dr. David Utzke

Theme: The waiting of God's people and the angelic announcements that set the stage for Jesus' birth.

Key Scriptures:

- Prophecies: Isaiah 7:14; Micah 5:2
- Announcement to Zechariah: Luke 1:5–25
- Announcement to Mary: Luke 1:26–38

Key Topics

- Discuss the nature of prophecy and God's promise to send a Messiah
- Analyze the fear and doubt of Zechariah compared to Mary's faith.
- Reflect on the "impossible" nature of the announcements and God's power to overcome human limitations



Point 1: The Nature of Prophecy and God's Promise

- **The Nature of Prophecy and the Waiting:**

- *Isaiah 7:14* foretells that a virgin will conceive and bear a son named Immanuel ("God with us").
- *Micah 5:2* specifies Bethlehem, an insignificant town, as the birthplace of the ruler of Israel.



Point 1: The Nature of Prophecy and God's Promise

- God's Prophecy and the Promise of a Messiah: Throughout the Old Testament, God promised to send a Messiah, an "Anointed One," who would be a descendant of King David, who would restore God's people, and whose kingdom would last forever.

The Old Testament contains numerous prophecies about a future deliverer, or Messiah. These prophecies are not mere predictions but serve as promises from God, outlining the characteristics and destiny of the promised Savior.



Point 1: The Nature of Prophecy and God's Promise

- **Prophecy as Foreshadowing:** Prophecy is a key aspect of this promise. Old Testament prophets like Isaiah and Micah made specific predictions about the Messiah's birth, lineage, and destiny.
- **Fulfillment in Jesus:** The New Testament presents Jesus' birth as the fulfillment of these prophecies. For instance, Matthew explicitly links Jesus' birth to Isaiah 7:14, stating it fulfilled the prophecy that "the virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" (meaning "God with us").

These prophecies are seen as having been fulfilled in Jesus Christ's life, death, and resurrection, providing a historical and theological framework for Christian belief. Key prophecies include Isaiah 7:14 (virgin birth), Micah 5:2 (birth in Bethlehem), and Isaiah 9:6-7 (the nature of the ruler).



Point 1: The Nature of Prophecy and God's Promise

- **The "400 Years of Silence":** After the prophet Malachi, a period of 400 years passed without a new prophetic voice in the Old Testament. For the Jewish people, this period was marked by a longing and expectation for the fulfillment of God's promises, creating a "waiting" period for the coming of the Messiah (Malachi 4:5-6; Amos 8:11).

The 400-year gap between the Old and New Testaments is known as the Intertestamental Period, and it represents a time when, according to many interpretations, God was silent and no new prophets emerged.

However, the period was far from uneventful, filled with significant political, cultural, and religious changes like Greek and Roman conquests, the rise of sects like the Pharisees and Sadducees, and the writing of books like the Maccabees and Dead Sea Scrolls. This era helped shape the world into which Jesus was born.



Point 1: The Nature of Prophecy and God's Promise

Discussion Questions:

- What do these specific details (a virgin mother, a birthplace in Bethlehem) tell us about God's deliberate and sovereign plan?
- How does understanding that these prophecies were thousands of years old change your perspective on God's patience and faithfulness?
- In what ways do you see parallels between the waiting of God's people then and the "waiting" we experience in our own lives or for Christ's second coming?



Point 2: The Angelic Announcements: Zechariah's Doubt vs. Mary's Faith

The Gospel of Luke sets the stage for Jesus' birth by first announcing the birth of his forerunner, John the Baptist, to Zechariah and Elizabeth, an elderly, righteous, but childless couple. Six months later, the angel Gabriel appears to Mary in Nazareth. The angel Gabriel appears to two different people with two miraculous announcements. Zechariah, an old priest, and Mary, a young virgin. Their responses highlight the human struggle with the seemingly impossible and the power of faith.

The theme of waiting and angelic announcements is central to the birth of Jesus, where Old Testament prophecies like Isaiah 7:14 (a virgin birth) and Micah 5:2 (born in Bethlehem) foreshadowed the Messiah's coming. The New Testament accounts show this waiting period fulfilled by angelic announcements to Zechariah and Mary in Luke 1:5-25 and Luke 1:26-38. Zechariah's doubt led to a period of silence, while Mary's faith led her to accept the "impossible" promise of conceiving through the Holy Spirit, demonstrating God's power to overcome human limitations.



Point 2: The Angelic Announcements: Zechariah's Doubt vs. Mary's Faith

Announcement to Zechariah (Luke 1:5-25): The angel Gabriel appears to the priest Zechariah while he is serving in the Temple and promises a son, John. Zechariah's advanced age and Elizabeth's barrenness made this seem impossible by natural means.

- **The Prophecy:** Angel Gabriel announced to Zechariah that he and his elderly wife, Elizabeth, would have a son, John the Baptist, who would go before the Lord.
- **Zechariah's Doubt:** Zechariah, like many, was filled with doubt and questioned the angel's words, saying, "How can I be sure of this?".
- **The Consequence:** As a result of his doubt, Gabriel punished Zechariah by making him mute until the prophecy was fulfilled.



Point 2: The Angelic Announcements: Zechariah's Doubt vs. Mary's Faith

Announcement to Mary (Luke 1:26-38): Gabriel is sent to Mary, a young virgin betrothed to Joseph, and announces she will conceive a child by the Holy Spirit, who will be the Son of God and reign on David's throne forever.

- **The Prophecy:** The angel Gabriel told Mary she would conceive and give birth to a son, Jesus, who would be called the Son of the Most High, and whose kingdom would have no end.
- **Mary's Faith:** Mary, a virgin, responded with faith, asking, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?". When the angel explained that the Holy Spirit would cause the conception, she submitted, saying, "I am the Lord's servant. May your word to me be fulfilled".



Point 2: The Angelic Announcements: Zechariah's Doubt vs. Mary's Faith

Both Zechariah and Mary received "impossible" announcements, yet their responses differed significantly, highlighting the importance of faith and humility.

Both Zechariah and Mary were faced with seemingly impossible situations—an elderly couple having a child, and a virgin conceiving a son—which brought about fear and doubt.

- **Zechariah's Response:** Zechariah's response was to question the promise itself, leading to a consequence that forced him to believe. He asked for a sign to know that the message was true: "How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years" (Luke 1:18). As a seasoned priest, he might have been expected to have unwavering faith in God's power. His doubt led to a rebuke; Gabriel silenced him, making him unable to speak until John's birth, which served as a sign to both him and the community.



Point 2: The Angelic Announcements: Zechariah's Doubt vs. Mary's Faith

Analysis of Zechariah's Doubt vs. Mary's Faith: Both Zechariah and Mary received "impossible" announcements, yet their responses differed significantly, highlighting the importance of faith and humility.

- **Mary's Response:** Mary's response was to trust and submit to God's plan, demonstrating faith that God's will could overcome any human limitations. Her faith allowed the prophecy to move forward without interruption. Mary, a humble young woman, was also troubled by the angel's presence and greeting. Her question, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?" (Luke 1:34), was not a demand for proof but an inquiry seeking an explanation of the means by which God's will would be accomplished. Her response, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word" (Luke 1:38), demonstrated profound faith and submission to God's plan.



Point 2: The Angelic Announcements: Zechariah's Doubt vs. Mary's Faith

Reflection on God's Power to Overcome Human Limitations: The "impossible" nature of both announcements—a barren, elderly woman conceiving and a virgin conceiving through the Holy Spirit—underscores God's power to overcome human limitations and natural laws.

The narratives in Luke 1 showcase that God uses the humble and seemingly insignificant to accomplish His great purposes, fulfilling ancient promises in unexpected ways and in His perfect time. God's plan of salvation was at work, defying human logic and demonstrating that with God, nothing is impossible (Luke 1:37).



Point 2: The Angelic Announcements: Zechariah's Doubt vs. Mary's Faith

Reflection on God's Power to Overcome Human Limitations

- **The "Impossible" Nature:** The announcements of the virgin birth and the birth of John the Baptist to an elderly couple highlight God's ability to act in ways that defy human understanding and logic.
- **God's Power in Action:** The events demonstrate that God's power is not limited by human biology, age, or circumstance. His ability to work through the Holy Spirit to cause Mary's conception showcases His divine power.
- **Overcoming Limitations:** Zechariah's and Mary's account serve as a reminder that faith in God allows us to overcome our own limitations and trust that His promises will be fulfilled, even when impossible, with Mary's "yes" contrasting Zechariah's temporary muteness for his doubt, reinforcing that trust in God's divine power brings miracles and fulfillment, even when circumstances seem insurmountable.
- **Fulfillment of promises:** The announcements were the critical starting point for the fulfillment of the prophecies and a testament to God's faithfulness over the long wait for His people.



Point 2: The Angelic Announcements: Zechariah's Doubt vs. Mary's Faith

Discussion Questions:

- Compare the two announcements. Why do you think Zechariah questioned Gabriel's message (Luke 1:18) while Mary asked for clarification on the mechanics ("How will this be?", Luke 1:34) without doubting the possibility?
- Zechariah was rendered mute as a sign because of his unbelief (Luke 1:20). What can we learn from his consequence about how God views doubt versus faith?
- Mary's response was, "Let it be with me according to your word" (Luke 1:38). How can we cultivate this type of surrendered faith in our own lives?



Point 3: God's Power to Overcome Human Limitations

Both scenarios presented "impossible" situations by human standards: an elderly, barren woman conceiving a child (Elizabeth) and a virgin becoming pregnant by the Holy Spirit (Mary). These events underscore a core biblical truth: with God, all things are possible.

These announcements were intended to show God's power to overcome human limitations and the natural world to fulfill His promises. Gabriel's words to Mary, "For no word from God is impossible" (Luke 1:37), directly address this theme.



Point 3: God's Power to Overcome Human Limitations

Discussion Questions: Reread Gabriel's declaration in Luke 1:37, "For nothing will be impossible with God."

- What "impossible" situations or human limitations are present in your life right now?
- How do the stories of Elizabeth and Mary serve as powerful reminders of God's ability to supersede natural laws and human limitations?
- How does the Incarnation itself—God becoming a human baby—demonstrate God's ultimate power to bridge the gap between the divine and the human?



Week 1

The Waiting and the Announcement - Closing

Closing Reflection

The period of waiting for the Messiah was long, but God's timing was perfect. The announcements of Gabriel shattered the silence and the status quo, reminding everyone that God is always at work, often in ways that defy human logic.

Takeaway Challenge

This week, take time to reflect on God's faithfulness in fulfilling ancient promises. Identify one "impossible" situation you are facing and pray for the faith of Mary, trusting that nothing is impossible with God.

