

Week 1

Day 2

Luke 1:5-7

5 When Herod was king of Judea, there was a Jewish priest named Zechariah. He was a member of the priestly order of Abijah, and his wife, Elizabeth, was also from the priestly line of Aaron. 6 Zechariah and Elizabeth were righteous in God's eyes, careful to obey all of the Lord's commandments and regulations. 7 They had no children because Elizabeth was unable to conceive, and they were both very old.

I was a rule follower when I was a kid. I wanted to make sure that I didn't disappoint anyone. If a teacher asked for volunteers, my hand was up first. If my mom asked me to set the table, I would do it as quickly as I could. I worked really hard to make sure I did all the things I was supposed to do. I was such a good kid, surely I would get extra dessert every night, a toy every time we went shopping, and heaps of Christmas presents under the tree...

Nope! I got the same amount of gifts as my brother, I rarely got a toy during shopping trips, and my scoop of ice cream was no bigger than anyone else's. How is that fair? I did all the right things and I received nothing extra for it?

Elizabeth and Zechariah might have felt the same way. They loved God and made good choices. The Bible tells us they obeyed all of God's commandments and followed all the rules of their time. They were doing all the right things and how were they rewarded? By not having any children. Now this might seem like not a big deal to you, but in Zechariah and Elizabeth's time, this was the HUGEST deal. In those days, having a baby meant that God was pleased with you and you were doing all the right things.

Sometimes, we think this way in our relationship with Jesus. We think that if we pray lots and read the Bible enough our lives will be miraculously blessed and we'll always be able to hear God's voice. When this doesn't happen it can be easy to think God has forgotten us.

Do you think Elizabeth & Zechariah wanted to stop following God when they didn't get the thing they wanted most? Do you think I stopped following the rules when I didn't get the extra things I thought I deserved? When we only act the right way to get what we want, we're not acting out of love.

God gave us an amazing example of love. He keeps showing us love even when we mess up, even when we say we don't want His love. God has promised to never leave us, but that doesn't mean everything will be perfect in our lives. Even when things are not going so great, God is with you and He loves you!

Zechariah and Elizabeth stayed committed to God and to following the rules, even though they did not have the thing they wanted most in the world. Now that they were very old, God was going to do something in their lives that would leave them filled with wonder and leave one of them speechless!

Questions

1. What does it feel like when you don't get something you think you deserve?
2. Does doing all the right things mean everything will go perfectly? Why do you think that?
3. What is something you are looking forward to?

Day 3

Luke 1:8-15

8 One day Zechariah was serving God in the Temple, for his order was on duty that week. 9 As was the custom of the priests, he was chosen by lot to enter the sanctuary of the Lord and burn incense. 10 While the incense was being burned, a great crowd stood outside, praying. 11 While Zechariah was in the sanctuary, an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing to the right of the incense altar. 12 Zechariah was shaken and overwhelmed with fear when he saw him. 13 But the angel said, “Don’t be afraid, Zechariah! God has heard your prayer. Your wife, Elizabeth, will give you a son, and you are to name him John. 14 You will have great joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, 15 for he will be great in the eyes of the Lord.”

What do you do to countdown to Christmas? Some families make paper chains and tear one off every day. Others might open advent calendars with toys or candy each day until Christmas morning. My family loves advent calendars. Whether it's chocolate or fidget toys, we are always excited to see what the next day will bring. When we open up that last little window on Christmas eve, we know that in the morning we will be celebrating Christmas morning with family! It's nice to know when something will happen, we can look forward to it and get excited. But what if we didn't know when the event was going to happen? What if the advent calendar always had more windows to open? Zechariah and Elizabeth had some idea of that. They had been praying for years for a Baby and there didn't seem to be any baby in their future.

As you read the verses for today, can you imagine what it would have been like to be in Zechariah's shoes? He's just an old guy, doing his job, all alone, the same as he's done for years and suddenly... BAM! He sees an angel! Maybe Zechariah fell down, maybe his knees started shaking, maybe his mouth fell open & he started crying. We don't know exactly what he did, but we do know he was "shaken & overwhelmed with fear."

Have you ever been startled by someone sneaking up on you? Maybe a little brother or sister decided to hide in the closet and jump out to scare you, or maybe your friend walked up behind you without you noticing. I know I've given a little scream and a jump more than once in my life. Now imagine that instead of a friend or family member suddenly appearing, it's an ANGEL! I think I would definitely be, "shaken and overwhelmed with fear." The angel that appeared to Zechariah responded to his fear and I think it is the same response we would get, "Don't be afraid."

The next part of this story gets really wild. The angel tells Zechariah that the prayers he has prayed for so many years have been heard. Elizabeth will have a baby boy! This is very exciting news! Zechariah and Elizabeth have been praying for a baby for so long and now God is answering their prayers. Not only will there be a baby, but he will be "great in the eyes of the Lord". This wouldn't be an ordinary baby!

Zechariah had a hard time believing this news, but we'll save that for tomorrow.

Questions

1. What is some of the best news you have ever heard? What made it so great?
2. Is there something you've been praying about for a long time, but haven't received?
3. Why is it hard to wait for God's timing?

Day 4

Luke 1:18-20

18 Zechariah said to the angel, “How can I be sure this will happen? I’m an old man now, and my wife is also well along in years.”

19 Then the angel said, “I am Gabriel! I stand in the very presence of God. It was he who sent me to bring you this good news! 20 But now, since you didn’t believe what I said, you will be silent and unable to speak until the child is born. For my words will certainly be fulfilled at the proper time.”

When I was 8 years old, I joined the local swim team. I knew how to swim, but I'd never competed in anything. This team was a summer league, so every weekday, all summer long, I'd wake up early and be swimming by 7:00. The pool my team used was a fairly new olympic sized pool - 50 meters long. For the first several weeks, I couldn't swim the length of the pool without stopping to hold on to the lane lines to rest. After only a few weeks of practice, we had our first meet. I was so nervous! I remember thinking I wouldn't be able to do it. I was only thinking about how good the other swimmers in my race were and how long the pool was.

Zechariah had some doubt. Instead of listening to the angel and trusting that God would fulfill his promise, Zechariah chose to look at all the reasons it couldn't happen. He knew he was old and so was Elizabeth. The idea of having a baby was bananas! When Zechariah doubted the angel, he was really doubting what God could do. The consequence of him not trusting in God was that he had to be totally quiet for the next 9 months!

Have you ever played the quiet game? Are you usually the winner? You may have guessed this, but I am a talker. I am not good at keeping quiet, even as an adult. Think about all the times Zechariah wanted to say something and he couldn't, he just had to listen. I think during this time, Zechariah also learned how to listen to God. He had a lot of time to think about what the angel had said about his son and he knew he would have to trust God for the future.

My first race wasn't my best race. We have a video of me taking a break with about 10 meters left to swim. But my second and third races that day were better. By my next meet, I didn't ever have to stop and as I kept swimming each summer, I started swimming more and more laps without needing to stop. Swimming that far seemed bananas when I started, but as I relied on my coaches, I realized how much I could do. Things that seemed impossible became possible.

When God is in it, everything is possible. We need to trust that God is always with us, ready to bless us.

Questions

1. Are there things in your life that seem impossible?
2. Have you ever been surprised by something great happening to you?
3. How can you trust God today?

Day 5

Luke 1:21-22

21 Meanwhile, the people were waiting for Zechariah to come out of the sanctuary, wondering why he was taking so long. 22 When he finally did come out, he couldn't speak to them. Then they realized from his gestures and his silence that he must have seen a vision in the sanctuary.

Have you ever played charades? Have you ever played charades with someone who just couldn't guess the right thing? I think that might have been how Zechariah felt. No one understood what he was trying to tell them. They were all waiting for him to talk and all he could do was move his arms around and maybe draw in the dirt.

Take a moment right now, and think about how you would act out the message from Gabriel. First you have to act out that all of this was told to you by an angel. Then you have to tell people that the angel told you, "You'll have a son, you should name him John, and he will be great in the eyes of the Lord" On top of all that, Zechariah would probably have been SO excited! How do you act when you're excited? Maybe Zechariah was the same - bouncing up and down and smiling so big. This is the wildest game of charades ever! I wonder how long it took the people to understand what was going on. Do you think some of the people outside the sanctuary got impatient with Zechariah? Maybe they didn't want to take the time to understand what he was talking about.

Sometimes we do this with God. God wants to tell us how much He loves us, how much He wants to bless us, and how special we are to Him, but we get distracted or impatient. There's too many other things trying to get our attention. This is one of the reasons we sometimes call our daily devotional time, "Quiet Time". If we can turn towards God and away from all the distractions, we can start to hear Him speak. Maybe it won't be a loud voice or an angel standing in front of us. Sometimes we can hear God speak through reading the Bible, or through singing a song. Other times, we can even hear God speak through a beautiful sunset, or a view from high on a mountain. I believe God still speaks to us today, and when we are paying attention, we'll hear Him. That is part of the Wonder of God - He is always speaking to us, we just need to quiet down and listen.

Questions

1. What big news have you been excited to share? How did you tell other people?
2. Have you ever had a time when you felt like God was speaking to you? What did that look like?
3. What are the distractions in your life that keep you from listening for God's voice?

Day 6

Luke 1:23-25

23 When Zechariah's week of service in the Temple was over, he returned home. 24 Soon afterward his wife, Elizabeth, became pregnant and went into seclusion for five months. 25 "How kind the Lord is!" she exclaimed. "He has taken away my disgrace of having no children."

Are you good at keeping your promises? Do you always do what you'll say? I think we all want to say, "YES! I'm amazing at doing everything I promise to do." I bet you're really good at promises that are exciting - Promising to have a fun day at a friend's house, or promising to finish all your ice cream. But it's also probably true that there are promises that are harder to keep. Have you ever promised to spend the day cleaning your room and then you spent the whole day playing instead? Maybe you promised to eat all of your broccoli as soon as your noodles were gone, but then you were too full of noodles to fit the broccoli. Keeping promises can be hard for us.

But keeping promises is not hard for God. There is not a single promise He has made that he hasn't kept or that he will keep in the future. It can be hard to wait for a promise to be fulfilled. Zechariah and Elizabeth were waiting a VERY LONG TIME!

It is hard to imagine how excited Elizabeth was when she heard the news that she would have a baby. This was something she had prayed about for years. She probably felt embarrassed by it and sad every time one of her friends had a baby. It is possible she had nearly given up hope. When it seemed impossible, God was blessing them with a child. He was fulfilling a promise.

God has made promises to you too! He has promised to love you forever. There are so many beautiful things that will come out of that love. We don't need to be embarrassed about things we feel like we're missing, because God's promises are a sure thing. If God promises it, it will happen!

God is certainly a WONDER-filled and WONDER-filling God, which we'll continue to see through the Christmas story as God not only makes promises, fulfills promises, but also becomes the promise, wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger.

Questions

1. Has God made promises to you? Talk about those promises and what they mean to you.
2. How can you do a better job of keeping your promises?
3. How can you show others the love that God shows you?

Week 2

Day 9

Luke 1:26-29

26 In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a village in Galilee, 27 to a virgin named Mary. She was engaged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of King David. 28 Gabriel appeared to her and said, "Greetings, favored woman! The Lord is with you!" 29 Confused and disturbed, Mary tried to think what the angel could mean.

Have you ever heard the term, "teacher's pet?" It's usually a term used to describe someone who wants to be the teacher's favorite student. Last week, I mentioned that I was a kid who always followed the rules, so in that sense, I was kind of a teacher's pet. I REALLY wanted my teachers to like me. Now, some teachers really like those kind of students... and some teachers just get annoyed by them. And as much as teachers try not to have favorites, it still happens. Sometimes a favorite student doesn't even know what they did to become the favorite.

That is kind of what happened in our verses today. Gabriel is back on the scene! I think I would have been filled with wonder and maybe a little scared to have this heavenly being appear to me. The last time we saw Gabriel appearing, we learned that Zechariah was "overwhelmed with fear", but this time, it seems like Mary isn't so much scared as she is confused. Gabriel doesn't tell her to not be afraid, he just jumps right in with, "Greetings, favored woman!" Imagine if a new teacher walked into class one day and just said, "Greetings favored students!" That would feel weird. Mary just became God's favored person and she has no idea why or what that even means! She had no idea what the angel was talking about. It's almost like she was just given a nickname and didn't know how to respond.

When God shows up in our life we might feel the same way. We don't know what to do! Should we run away because it's weird and seems scary? Should we stay and learn what God wants us to do? Mary faced a choice and thankfully, she chose to stay and listen to Gabriel's message even if it seemed impossible.

What Gabriel is about to share with Mary is the fulfillment of a promise God made to his people over 500 years before.

Questions

1. Have you ever been confused by something God said?
2. How can you respond when God tells you something new?
3. Do you feel favored by God?

Day 10

Luke 1:30-33

30 “Don’t be afraid, Mary,” the angel told her, “for you have found favor with God! 31 You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. 32 He will be very great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David. 33 And he will reign over Israel forever; his Kingdom will never end!”

Do you know what an oxymoron is? When we put two words together that are kind of opposites, but they make a new phrase, that is an oxymoron. Crash landing, original copy, terribly wonderful, jumbo shrimp, and plastic silverware are all examples of oxymorons. I even know some people who seem like an oxymoron. They are super tall and intimidating, but when you talk to them, they’re very gentle and loving people.

It seems like when humans have a meeting with an angel, they are living in an oxymoron. We could call it, “Fearful Wonder.” Gabriel tells Mary not to be afraid because God is pleased with her. Right away, Mary is learning that God is favoring her, that He loves her and He is happy with her. She might have felt some fearful wonder at learning all of this from an angel who suddenly appeared in her home.

What the angel tells her next is mind-blowing. All of these things she is told about her son are the same things the prophets in the Old Testament said about the Messiah! This is the moment the Israelites have been waiting 500 years for. They were looking forward to the Messiah who would take them out of their oppression. Any Israelite who heard this would have been overjoyed!

Tomorrow, we’ll learn about Mary’s response, but today I want you to take a minute to think about what it means for God’s kingdom to never end. Even though the Israelites thought this meant an earthly kingdom where Israel was in charge forever, we know God was talking about the Kingdom of Heaven. When a kingdom is never ending, it means it is always growing and expanding. We get to be a part of that expansion. When we put Jesus first in our lives and love others, we are bringing more of heaven to earth.

An earthly kingdom that is never ending is another example of an oxymoron. I’m so thankful we are part of a heavenly kingdom with God and by accepting His grace, we can expand His kingdom here on earth.

Questions

1. How would it feel to know that God is happy with you?
2. Is it OK to have Fearful wonder towards God?
3. How can you celebrate the idea of God’s kingdom being forever?

Day 11

Luke 1:34

34 Mary asked the angel, "But how can this happen? I am a virgin."

Have you faced impossible tasks in your life? Sometimes, cleaning my room can seem like an impossible task! Maybe you have something you're learning at school that just won't stick in your brain, it seems impossible! Or maybe you have a dream for the future that seems like it will never happen.

Do you like to run? I am not a big runner, but I have a lot of friends who enjoy running. They track how far and how fast they run and they do all sorts of races. Races have been happening for thousands of years. The ancient Greeks actually invented the marathon! We actually have records of them keeping track of how far and how fast they ran and trying to get better. One goal they had was to run a mile in under four minutes. They tried everything their ancient Greek brains could think of to make athletes run faster - they even had wild animals chase the runners in hopes they would finish faster. But nothing seemed to work. They decided it was impossible for a human to run a mile in under 4 minutes - our bones were too big, our lungs were too small, and a million other reasons.

Then one day in 1954, a man by the name of Roger Bannister did the impossible. He ran a mile in 3 minutes 59 seconds! And for 46 days, he was the fastest man. Within a year, 300 runners had run a mile in less than 4 minutes. Something that seemed impossible became possible.

When God asks us to do something that seems impossible, we usually start by saying, "I can't do THAT!" You're not the only one who has thought that way.

- ~Sarah thought she was too old to have a baby
- ~Moses thought his stutter would get in the way of leading
- ~Jeremiah thought he was too young to be a prophet
- ~Isaiah thought he was too sinful to share God's words

But in all these people, God showed he was greater than their weaknesses. Sarah gave birth to Isaac in her old age, Moses led God's people out of Egypt, Jeremiah & Isaiah became two of the most famous prophets in all of Israel. The impossible is always possible with God. The best part is, He is with you when you think the thing is impossible and he is with you to help you do the impossible thing.

Questions

1. Have you felt God calling you to do something that seems tough or even impossible?
2. What can you do to focus on God instead of on what seems impossible?
3. Can you trust God to help you do impossible things?

Day 12

Luke 1:35-37

35 The angel replied, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the baby to be born will be holy, and he will be called the Son of God. 36 What's more, your relative Elizabeth has become pregnant in her old age! People used to say she was barren, but she has conceived a son and is now in her sixth month. 37 For the word of God will never fail."

Do you have a person in your life who is just the best at knowing what you need? It might be a friend who can always tell when you need a hug, or a parent who always has what you need to finish a school project. I'm blessed to have a couple of these people in my life, but one of the most important ones is my mom. When I was a kid, she always had our favorite foods to put in lunches, she helped with school projects, and costumes for plays. And even as an adult, she always has encouraging words to say when I'm having a rough day. Having people who love you and take care of you is a great blessing from God.

God made sure Mary had a person like this in her life. She didn't have to go through this impossible thing alone, she would have Elizabeth, her family member to support her and help her. Elizabeth would be there to encourage Mary. What an amazing gift! God is so good!

The next part of Gabriel's message is a reminder to all of us as much as it was to Mary; "The word of God will never fail" This is a reminder that we need to hear all the time. Throughout the Bible, we see God reminding us that He always keeps his promises, and that He can do anything.

We serve a God who keeps his promises, even if it takes longer than we think it should. Our job is to trust that God is with us and that he will fulfill his promises even if they seem impossible. The Bible is full of impossible promises that God kept, so trust in Him, find someone who can help you when you struggle, and be ready for impossible things to happen!

Questions

1. Who do you have in your life that can help you when you are having a hard time?
2. How can you help someone else who needs to be encouraged?
3. What are some ways you can remember that God keeps his promises?

Luke 1:38

38 Mary responded, "I am the Lord's servant. May everything you have said about me come true." And then the angel left her.

I used to have a hard time with the word, "servant." I didn't want to be anyone's servant, in fact I'd prefer to make my little brother be my servant and bring me snacks while I sat on the couch watching TV. Then I started learning about what it meant to be a servant of God. It isn't about doing things for God that He's too lazy to do himself, it's about following what He says, and trusting that He has the best plans for my life.

Even though Mary was young and she just got a whole bunch of information, she chose to be God's servant. I don't think she knew exactly what she was saying yes to. Do you think she pictured her baby boy healing blind men, walking on water, or feeding 5,000 people? I don't think she could have known all that God had in store for her or her baby, but she knew that God's plans were good and even if they didn't make sense in the moment, God would be with her.

This past summer, I got really into the Paralympic games. Not only were the athletes amazing, but their stories were so inspiring. One of my favorites to watch was the track events. I watched and cheered on runners of all abilities as they raced for their country. I was especially impressed by the runners with visual impairments. These runners can't see what is in front of them, where the track curves or where the finish line is, but you know who can? Their guide. Each athlete has a guide who can see that runs next to them for the entire race. They have trained together and they are in perfect sync. The blind athlete has complete trust in their guide to lead them in the right direction and keep them safe.

I pray that each of you will be able to trust God fully to lead you to do impossible things for Him. By listening for His directions, we can achieve the impossible!

Questions

1. What does it mean to you to be a servant of God?
2. How can you trust God with your life today?
3. How can you be more in sync with God today?

Week 3

Day 16

Luke 1:39-48

39 A few days later Mary hurried to the hill country of Judea, to the town 40 where Zechariah lived. She entered the house and greeted Elizabeth. 41 At the sound of Mary's greeting, Elizabeth's child leaped within her, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. 42 Elizabeth gave a glad cry and exclaimed to Mary, "God has blessed you above all women, and your child is blessed. 43 Why am I so honored, that the mother of my Lord should visit me? 44 When I heard your greeting, the baby in my womb jumped for joy. 45 You are blessed because you believed that the Lord would do what he said."

46 Mary responded, "Oh, how my soul praises the Lord. 47 How my spirit rejoices in God my Savior! 48 For he took notice of his lowly servant girl, and from now on all generations will call me blessed.

How excited are you for Christmas? It's almost here! I LOVE Christmas. I love decorating, I love buying presents for my loved ones, I love having time off of school and work, I love Christmas lights, I love Christmas cookies, I love Christmas movies, and I love Christmas pajamas! I'm so excited for the season and the special day to spend with my family. How do you act when you are excited for an event?

There are 3 people in this part of our story and all of them are at level 1000 excitement. Mary couldn't wait to go and see Elizabeth to congratulate her in person. Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and couldn't believe Mary was there to visit her. And maybe the most wild part of this story, Elizabeth's baby, John, heard Mary's voice and got so excited he moved around in his mom's belly! Nobody in the room could contain their joy and excitement.

I wonder if you ever feel that kind of excitement, the kind of excitement that makes it feel impossible to hold still. Have you ever felt that kind of excitement when you think about Jesus? Elizabeth and her son had that kind of joy. They knew the baby Mary was carrying was the messiah, sent by God to rescue the people he loved so much.

Mary is so overwhelmed by God's goodness, she has to let out a song. She couldn't contain herself either! Our scripture today only contains a part of her song. In this first part of her song, she realizes what a big job God has blessed her with and how important that job is. Mary's song continues and if you have a chance, I invite you to read it with your family. Her words are beautiful and show how the whole Bible is about God wanting to be with us and by sending Jesus, He gave us a way for us to be with Him forever. His love for us is higher and deeper than we could ever imagine!

Questions

1. Have you ever been so excited about something that you couldn't keep your body still? What made you so excited?
2. What is one of your favorite Christmas songs? Why do you love it?
3. Think of a gift you got that you REALLY wanted. How did it feel to get that gift? What do you do when you received it?

Luke 1:57-64

57 When it was time for Elizabeth's baby to be born, she gave birth to a son. 58 And when her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had been very merciful to her, everyone rejoiced with her.

59 When the baby was eight days old, they all came for the circumcision ceremony. They wanted to name him Zechariah, after his father. 60 But Elizabeth said, "No! His name is John!"

61 "What?" they exclaimed. "There is no one in all your family by that name." 62 So they used gestures to ask the baby's father what he wanted to name him. 63 He motioned for a writing tablet, and to everyone's surprise he wrote, "His name is John." 64 Instantly Zechariah could speak again, and he began praising God.

Names are pretty important in our time. Maybe you got your name because it means something special to your parents. Maybe you were named after a family member or a book character. Whatever the story behind your name, it is important. Our names are how we are recognized and how we show the work that we do.

If you think names are important now, you won't believe how important they were in Zechariah and Elizabeth's time. Sometimes, what a name meant was even more important than the actual name. Zechariah's name means "God has remembered" and Elizabeth means, "God is my oath". We don't know much about their families, but we can be sure that when Zechariah and Elizabeth were born, they were given names that honored God. It was expected that they would name their baby boy after someone in their family - most people probably thought they'd name the baby after his dad and call him Zechariah.

But Elizabeth & Zechariah had a more important instruction than what their neighbors thought. I'm sure as the baby was growing, Elizabeth asked what they should name the baby and Zechariah remembered what the angel had said to him. They honored that instruction that God had given them. In a way, they were showing their gratitude for the amazing gift God had given them. And don't worry, the baby's name has a special meaning too, John means "God is gracious." This baby was a reminder to everyone who learned his name that God is full of loving kindness and grace.

I always found it interesting that Zechariah couldn't speak as soon as the baby was born. Little baby John was 8 days old when his father could finally speak again. What were the first words out of his mouth? Did Zechariah finally tell his neighbor how annoying he was or did he tell Elizabeth that he was hungry? NO! The first thing he did was begin to praise God! Just like we learned yesterday, when you are excited about what God has done in your life, you can't keep it in. Zechariah finally had the opportunity to share with those around him all the amazing things God would do because of their son, John. and he had nothing but praise to share.

Questions

1. What does your name mean? Take a moment to look it up if you don't already know.
2. Have you ever had a story you couldn't wait to tell someone? How did you act when you finally had a chance to get the words out?
3. What can you praise God for today?

Day 18

Luke 1:65-66

65 Awe fell upon the whole neighborhood, and the news of what had happened spread throughout the Judean hills. 66 Everyone who heard about it reflected on these events and asked, "What will this child turn out to be?" For the hand of the Lord was surely upon him in a special way.

It is amazing to me that even as a tiny baby, John was making an impact on people. This helpless little baby was filling a whole neighborhood with awe and wonder. I'm going to let you in on a little secret: Parents ask this same question today, "What will this child turn out to be?" We parents are always wondering what things our children will do and become. Every parent thinks their kid is special and has amazing gifts, but we still wonder how our kids will use those gifts, what job they'll have in the future, and how God will use them.

Zechariah and Elizabeth knew a few things about what John would become and how God would use him. The angel had told Zechariah back in Luke 1: 15-17 that the baby would be great in the eyes of the Lord, that he would be filled with the Holy Spirit, that he would have the power of Elijah, and that we would prepare the people for the coming Messiah. That's a whole lot more information about their kid's future than most parents get! Still I bet it was a bit hard for them to imagine their tiny, perfect baby boy doing all those things. But they had trusted God to give them their son and He had, so now they had to trust God to help them make the right decisions about how to raise John to be a man of God.

God also has a plan for your life. He knows the amazing things you can do and accomplish as long as you trust in Him. That can seem scary. You might wonder how you'll know when God asks you to do something. Maybe you're not sure God even has a plan for you. Trust me, He does. He loves you more than you can imagine- more than your mom or dad or grandpa or grandma or aunt or uncle or any other family member loves you. Because He loves you, He is always with you, guiding you and there to help when you feel scared or lost. All you have to do is follow Him.

Questions

1. Have you thought about what you want to be when you grow up? Talk about how you can show God's love in that career.
2. Have you ever been amazed by something? Talk about it and share what made it so special to you.
3. Take a moment today to thank God for having a plan for your life and ask Him to help you listen to His directions each day.

Day 19

Luke 1:67-79

67 *Then his father, Zechariah, was filled with the Holy Spirit and gave this prophecy:*

68 *Praise the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has visited and redeemed his people. 69 He has sent us a mighty Savior from the royal line of his servant David, 70 just as he promised through his holy prophets long ago. 71 Now we will be saved from our enemies and from all who hate us. 72 He has been merciful to our ancestors by remembering his sacred covenant —73 the covenant he swore with an oath to our ancestor Abraham. 74 We have been rescued from our enemies so we can serve God without fear, 75 in holiness and righteousness for as long as we live.*

76 *And you, my little son, will be called the prophet of the Most High, because you will prepare the way for the Lord. 77 You will tell his people how to find salvation through forgiveness of their sins. 78 Because of God's tender mercy, the morning light from heaven is about to break upon us, 79 to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, and to guide us to the path of peace."*

For most of my life, I've been considered a talkative person. I've always had a story to tell or a conversation to start. My grandma tells a story about me falling asleep mid-sentence. I was in the middle of a story or some other super important 6 year old information and apparently I got tired because I just fell asleep. She also likes to say that when I would wake up, my eyes and mouth would open at the same time. There was too much to share! I couldn't keep it in! Now, as an adult, I've learned to control it a little bit better, but if you were to ask my friends and family, they would agree, I'm still a talker! The quiet game was never my strong suit.

Zechariah has just had 9 months of no talking! I don't know how he did it! Think of all the amazing stories he would have to share after 9 months of telling no stories! Let's not forget that this whole story starts with him seeing an angel and he hasn't been able to describe to anyone what he saw or what the angel looked like. Think of the interesting clouds he saw that he couldn't tell anyone about. What about the time he saw that dog eating a hot dog? He couldn't share that! Ok, maybe he didn't see that last one and maybe clouds weren't Zechariah's thing, but I'm sure he had some fun things to share stored up.

But instead of telling all the stories, he begins prophesying and praising God. What Zechariah says in the first part of these verses is another reminder to those listening (and to us today) that God made a plan to send a savior. I imagine the people had gotten tired of hearing that God would *eventually* send the messiah. Maybe some had even thought God had abandoned them. They were looking for a savior and it didn't seem like one was coming. Do you ever feel that way today? Do you feel like Jesus is never going to return? We may have more in common with the ancient Israelites than we think! But just like Zechariah and Elizabeth had to wait for God to do something amazing, the people of Israel had to wait for God's perfect timing to fulfill the promise He had made over 500 years before. And if he fulfilled that promise, we can trust Him to fulfill the promise He's made to return to take us to Heaven to be with Him forever.

Questions

1. If you couldn't talk for 1 full day, what would be the first thing you said when your day was over?
2. Do you believe God will fulfill His promises? Why or Why not?
3. Think about going to Heaven. What do you think your first words to Jesus will be?

Day 20

Luke 1:80

80 John grew up and became strong in spirit. And he lived in the wilderness until he began his public ministry to Israel.

I have so many questions. Where did John live in the wilderness? Did he go to school before he moved out there? Did his parents come visit him? Did they wish he would live in a house like a normal person? Does strong in spirit mean he was stubborn or does it mean that the Holy Spirit was strong in him? What did he do in the wilderness? Was he just praying and talking to God or did he learn other things? SO MANY QUESTIONS!

Imagine reading a biography of someone you really admire. It starts with their family and when they were born and then it just says, "Then they grew up, and hung out in the desert for a while before they started working" You'd feel pretty cheated. You'd probably want the rest of the story! Luke does eventually tell us a little more about John and his ministry in chapter 3, but I think it's important to remember that even though he is super important, John isn't the main character of the story. His whole job, given by God, is to get people ready for Jesus, the actual main character.

This last verse of Luke 1 is really the bridge into the 2nd chapter. John has been born, the promise God made to Zechariah and Elizabeth has been fulfilled and the person who will prepare Israel for the Messiah is here. Now everyone is waiting for the next miracle to occur. As we read this story, we know that John becomes known as John the Baptist. We already know that he will call people to repent and turn to God. We know that Jesus will be born to Mary and we know that Jesus is the promised Messiah, but if we were living in those days, we wouldn't know what was coming next. We couldn't be prepared for the amazing and wonderful things that were about to happen.

So we wait. We wait for the next amazing thing.

Questions

1. What is something you had to wait a long time to get? How did it feel when you finally got it?
2. If you could ask John a question, what would it be?
3. Even though you have to wait, how can you still be excited for Jesus coming back to take us to Heaven?

Week 4

Day 23

Luke 2:1-7

1 At that time the Roman emperor, Augustus, decreed that a census should be taken throughout the Roman Empire. 2 (This was the first census taken when Quirinius was governor of Syria.) 3 All returned to their own ancestral towns to register for this census. 4 And because Joseph was a descendant of King David, he had to go to Bethlehem in Judea, David's ancient home. He traveled there from the village of Nazareth in Galilee. 5 He took with him Mary, to whom he was engaged, who was now expecting a child.

6 And while they were there, the time came for her baby to be born. 7 She gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him snugly in strips of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no lodging available for them.

Do you know how far the journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem was? I was curious so I looked it up - 90 miles! Mary & Joseph didn't have a car or a train to take them on this journey. They were likely walking most of the way. If they had a donkey, Mary may have rode for a bit, but probably that donkey's job was carrying their supplies. Mary and Joseph spent at least a week walking, camping, and walking some more. I don't know about you, but I can walk a couple miles, but 90 seems like an impossible distance to cover, and I'm not about to have a baby! Mary was probably extra tired, extra uncomfortable, and maybe even extra scared.

There are some special reasons for this journey. The Bible tells us Joseph was a descendant of King David and because of this, when the emperor wanted to count everyone, Joseph had to go to the City of David, Bethlehem. We already know that God has everything under control, but just in case you were worried, hundreds of years earlier, the prophet Micah gave a prophecy from God that said Bethlehem, even though it was small, would be the city where the Messiah was born. Everything was happening in God's perfect time.

I wonder what kinds of things Mary and Joseph talked about as they walked. They didn't have iPads, podcasts or music to keep them occupied so they probably had a lot of conversations. What do you think they talked about? They might have talked about how excited or scared they were about the baby being born. Maybe they tried to guess what he would look like. They may have even started talking about who would be in charge of changing diapers and who would be waking up when the baby cried in the night. I'm sure what was coming for their lives and the lives of this baby seemed overwhelming, but they chose to have faith that God's plan was perfect. They said yes to God, and I'm so glad they did!

When Jesus was born, he didn't arrive in a palace or in the best hotel room in town. He was born in a barn - probably a stinky barn, but those beginnings don't change the wonder of what happened that night. God came to earth and completely changed everything. No longer would we be doomed to destruction. The king of the universe had arrived to save us all!

Questions

1. Have you ever felt that a task was too big and too overwhelming? How can you rely on God to help you?
2. How can you say Yes to Jesus today?
3. How does it feel that God came to earth to save you and show His love for you?

Luke 2:8-20

8 That night there were shepherds staying in the fields nearby, guarding their flocks of sheep.

9 Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared among them, and the radiance of the Lord's glory surrounded them. They were terrified, 10 but the angel reassured them. "Don't be afraid!" he said. "I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people. 11 The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David! 12 And you will recognize him by this sign: You will find a baby wrapped snugly in strips of cloth, lying in a manger."

13 Suddenly, the angel was joined by a vast host of others—the armies of heaven—praising God and saying, 14 "Glory to God in highest heaven, and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased."

15 When the angels had returned to heaven, the shepherds said to each other, "Let's go to Bethlehem! Let's see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."

16 They hurried to the village and found Mary and Joseph. And there was the baby, lying in the manger. 17 After seeing him, the shepherds told everyone what had happened and what the angel had said to them about this child. 18 All who heard the shepherds' story were astonished, 19 but Mary kept all these things in her heart and thought about them often. 20 The shepherds went back to their flocks, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen. It was just as the angel had told them.

I love this part of the Christmas story! Imagine being a shepherd - it's night time so your sheep are probably asleep, but you still have to pay attention to them because, you know, sheep aren't that smart and they might just wander off following a piece of fuzz. But still, as their shepherd, you might be getting a little bored, maybe you'd even start to doze off. But once the Angel showed up, there was no chance of sleeping! They were surrounded by the radiance of the Lord's Glory! I wonder if it was brighter than the sun. That had to be terrifying! But once again, the angel tells them there is nothing to be afraid of, in fact, he is delivering the best news ever! The savior had been born and they, the lowly shepherds, were among the first to know. What happened next has to be the most amazing choir concert the world has ever heard!

When you hear good news, what do you want to do first? Do you run to tell your best friend? Do you celebrate in private? The shepherds ran first to find the Messiah, they left their sheep and hurried to find Jesus. They knew that this baby was special, God had shown them that He was fulfilling His promise. They were so excited, it seems like they told everyone what had happened! I doubt they slept at all that night.

You might have trouble sleeping tonight too. Tomorrow is an exciting day! While we are celebrating, let's not forget to celebrate the greatest news that was ever shared - Jesus is here! He loves you! He can't wait to be with you forever!

Questions

1. Imagine you were sitting in the field with the shepherds. What kinds of things do you imagine happened when the angels appeared?
2. How can you celebrate the Good News that Jesus came to save us?
3. Who would you like to share this Good news with?

Day 25

Luke 2:25-35

25 At that time there was a man in Jerusalem named Simeon. He was righteous and devout and was eagerly waiting for the Messiah to come and rescue Israel. The Holy Spirit was upon him 26 and had revealed to him that he would not die until he had seen the Lord's Messiah. 27 That day the Spirit led him to the Temple. So when Mary and Joseph came to present the baby Jesus to the Lord as the law required, 28 Simeon was there. He took the child in his arms and praised God, saying,

29 "Sovereign Lord, now let your servant die in peace, as you have promised. 30 I have seen your salvation, 31 which you have prepared for all people. 32 He is a light to reveal God to the nations, and he is the glory of your people Israel!"

33 Jesus' parents were amazed at what was being said about him. 34 Then Simeon blessed them, and he said to Mary, the baby's mother, "This child is destined to cause many in Israel to fall, and many others to rise. He has been sent as a sign from God, but many will oppose him. 35 As a result, the deepest thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your very soul."

The holidays can be a time of beauty and togetherness. They can also be a time of weirdness. As a kid, it seemed like there was always some old relative that we didn't see often and they would just go on and on about how big I'd grown, or how they remembered me from when I was a baby. It was always so weird! The thing that always made me roll my eyes was when they'd say, "We're going to have to put a brick on your head to stop you from growing!" I remember thinking, "That's not how any of that works!" As weird and annoying as it can be, these people are showing love and admiration for how you're growing.

I think Mary & Joseph may have felt a little awkward at first when Simeon came to them and just took Jesus in his arms. "Um, excuse me sir, that is our baby!" But Simeon wasn't just some random old guy. The Bible tells us he was filled with the Holy Spirit. I don't know how he knew that Jesus was the promised Messiah, maybe God spoke to him, maybe The Holy Spirit gave him a sign, but whatever the way, Simeon knew. He had been waiting his whole life for this moment and he was filled with wonder.

Mary and Joseph were amazed at what Simeon had to say. Clearly, this was a man of God. I think they were still a little unsure of what it meant to raise a baby who was also the creator of the universe. When they heard Simeon talk about their baby as the salvation of Israel, they had to feel overwhelmed. They had to trust that God would be with them, even when they didn't understand and when they were unsure. God had promised to walk with them every step of the way. He makes the same promise to you. When you are unsure or you don't understand, God is with you, ready to lead you on the best path for your life, all you have to do is follow where He leads.

Questions

1. Have you ever met someone who shows you God's love in an amazing way? What is it like to be around them?
2. How can you remember that God is with you during the difficult times in your life?
3. Do you trust God to lead you on the best path for your life? Why or why not?

Luke 2:36-38

36 Anna, a prophet, was also there in the Temple. She was the daughter of Phanuel from the tribe of Asher, and she was very old. Her husband died when they had been married only seven years. 37 Then she lived as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the Temple but stayed there day and night, worshiping God with fasting and prayer. 38 She came along just as Simeon was talking with Mary and Joseph, and she began praising God. She talked about the child to everyone who had been waiting expectantly for God to rescue Jerusalem.

On my Christmas tree, there are 6 very special ornaments. They are not full of glitter, they weren't expensive, and they're not huge. But they are priceless. My Granny was always making things. She did a lot of crochet and sewing. One of the things she made was snowflakes. They are delicately crocheted, no 2 of them are exactly the same - different shapes, different patterns. I love them! Every year, when I'm decorating my tree, I take them out and I remember Granny and what a loving lady she was. I love that I get to have a piece of her work to add to my tree.

Anna lived a life devoted to God. Luke tells us she never left the temple and she prayed day and night. She was in communion with God, so when she heard Simeon, she knew that this baby was the Messiah, sent to rescue Israel. And her reaction was the same as nearly everyone else's - she praises God! This Baby was the fulfillment of a promise. Anna put God first in her life and because she stayed faithful and focused on Him, she was able to see the Messiah.

Have you noticed there seem to be a bunch of old people in these stories? Zechariah, Elizabeth, Simeon, & Anna are all described as being old, but they are all brought together by something very young - a baby... The baby! Jesus came into this world as a brand new life and his arrival was celebrated by nearly everyone around him, young and Old. It's as if God is telling us we can all come together to worship, praise, and celebrate the birth of our savior.

My snowflake ornaments made so lovingly by my granny may not be the flashiest things on my tree, and I certainly have lights and glitter, and sparkly decorations. By combining something old with something new, I have a tree that reminds me what God is doing in my life. Isaiah tells us that God is making something new. God takes what is old and doesn't discard it. He makes it better! The age of the people in this story remind us that no matter how long we've been alive, God can use us to do amazing things. Today and everyday, I hope you are reminded that by focusing on God, he will make you new as well. You'll still be you, but you will be the version of you that God has been planning for.

Questions

1. Is there someone in your life who you always go to for advice?
2. What do you have that reminds you of your history or of your older family members?
3. How can you show your devotion to Jesus today?

Luke 2:39-40

39 When Jesus' parents had fulfilled all the requirements of the law of the Lord, they returned home to Nazareth in Galilee. 40 There the child grew up healthy and strong. He was filled with wisdom, and God's favor was on him

Have you ever kept a diary or a journal? A couple years ago, when I was visiting my parents, I happened to come across a diary that I wrote when I was about 11 or 12 years old. Oh boy, those were some embarrassing entries! There were entries about what I ate for lunch and what boy I thought was cute. There were sentences about how much my brother was annoying me and about how much allowance I had earned that week. The most bizarre thing is that some of those things, I totally remember and a lot of those things, I 100% forgot. There was one entry that was written as though I'd always know what it meant and as an adult, I had zero clue what I was talking about! The more details we have about things that happened years ago, the more likely we are to remember it.

So, we've arrived at the end of this part of the story. Luke gives us just a little bit of information about what Jesus was like as a child - healthy and strong and filled with wisdom. I wonder what kind of kid Jesus was. Did he fall and skin his knees? Did he have a favorite game to play with the other children of the neighborhood? And the big question, When did he know that he was the Son of God? Did he just always know? Once again, Luke gives us very little information about the childhood of a special baby and we have so many questions left unanswered. I kind of wish we had a diary written by Mary or Jesus to tell us all these things!

But for all the questions we have, Luke has made sure to tell us the very important parts - Jesus is the Messiah. He came to save us all because of his great love for us. I would encourage you to read more of the book of Luke. The very next chapter tells us about what John was doing to prepare people for Jesus. Whatever questions we still have about Jesus as a child, we know we can read ahead in the Bible and learn what happens next.

A devotional journal is a great way for you to keep track of all your questions about the Bible. You can write down things that make you excited and things that confuse you. There are lots of grown ups in your life that would love to help you learn more about Jesus.

As we end this series, I hope that you will continue to ask questions and be excited to learn about Jesus. He loves you so much and more than anything, he wants to be with you.

Questions

1. What kinds of things do you wonder about Jesus as a kid or teenager?
2. What part of the story we studied this month is your favorite?
3. What are you most excited for when Jesus comes to take us to Heaven?