



Journey
through
the Bible

Today's Bible Story

Angels visit Mary and Elizabeth; Mary celebrates it with a song

Matthew 1:18–25;
Luke 1:1–56

The Larger Picture

Matthew 1;
Luke 1:1–56

The Memory Verse

"Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word."

(Luke 1:38b)



Angel's Announcement

Where We're Going

During this session participants will:

- explain the role of barrenness in the story of the angel visitation
- compare and contrast the angel's visitations to Joseph, Zechariah, and Mary
- interpret God's message in our contemporary situations of need

How We're Going to Get There

Hearing the story

Preparing to hear the story

1 Read paragraphs 1-6 of the "Bible Background," page 54. *From the way each Gospel author begins his account, what can we say about his intent or purpose? How do they differ?*

Reading and interpreting the story

2 Select people to read the following parts: narrator of Matthew, narrator of Luke, angel (in Matthew), prophet, Gabriel (angel in Luke), Zechariah, Elizabeth, Mary. Read in these various voices Matthew 1:18–25 and Luke 1:5–56. If you do not have enough readers for the parts, combine the narrators, angels, or other parts.

For a Jew at this time, barrenness was a tragedy. William Barclay explains, "The Jewish Rabbis said that seven people were excommunicated from God and the list began, 'A Jew who has no wife, or a Jew who has a wife and who has no child.' Childlessness was a valid ground for divorce" (William Barclay, *The Gospel of Luke*. The Westminster Press, 1956, p. 4).

Discuss questions such as: *How does the meaning of barrenness in Jewish life shape this story? What kind of people are Zechariah and Elizabeth? Why do you say that? How do you interpret their responses to the angel's visit in light of their life "tragedy"?*

Focusing on the angel's visits

3 Examine in more detail the angel's visits to the three persons: Joseph (Matthew 1:18–21), Zechariah (Luke 1:11–20), and Mary (Luke 1:26–38). Identify the similarities and differences in the visits. Look at the situation of the persons addressed, the greeting, the description of the mission of the coming child, the response of each

person to the angel, as well as other similarities and differences you see. Record your findings below and as a group on a chalkboard or on newsprint.

Similarities

Differences

After listing your findings, discuss questions such as:

- *What do you find striking about the angel visits to the three?*
- *What do you find to be curious? encouraging? provocative?*
- *What accounts for the differences?*

Turn to Luke 1:46–55. Reflect upon Mary’s hymn of praise in light of the angel’s announcement. *What connections do you see between the angel’s announcement (verses 30–37) and Mary’s song?*

Making the story your own

Hearing the angel speak to us

4 Individually, reflect on your life and your experience of barrenness, lowliness, or anxiousness. On a piece of paper write a conversation/dialogue between you and God’s angel/messenger. *What would you have the angel say to you?*

After a few minutes, share with one or two other persons whatever you feel comfortable telling about your dialogue.

Thinking about angels today

5 Discuss your ideas about the role of angels today. Some see their role as guardian angels who rescue people from car wrecks and other tragedies. Others wonder how this theory works when tragedy does happen.

Some advocate methods to get in touch with their “own” angels, while others see this as an attempt to locate and control God. Some view angels as supernatural beings, while others emphasize that we can be angels to one another as we offer assistance and care to people in need.

What do you think? What stories have you heard about angels? As you discuss, remember to *listen* to one another as well. The purpose of your discussion is not to find the “right” answer, but to listen to the variety of opinions.

Praying together

6 Have one person read the following paragraph to the group.

We often wish that a message from God would come to us. In Shaw’s play, *Saint Joan*, Joan hears the voices from God. The Dauphin is annoyed. “Oh, your voices, your voices,” he said, “Why don’t your voices come to me? I am the king not you.” “They do come,” said Joan, “but you do not hear them. You have not sat in the field in the evening listening for them. When the angelus rings you cross yourself and have done with it, but if you prayed from your heart and listened to the thrilling of the bells in the air after they stop ringing, you would hear the voices as well as I do.” (Barclay, p. 5)

Pray a prayer asking God to empower us to hear the angel’s message in our lives.

A little bit extra

- **Creating a symbol.** Use pipe cleaners to create a symbol illustrating the barrenness, lowliness, or anxiousness in your life. Share it with one or two others. In your sharing, name what it is you would have the angel say to you.
- **Hearing another version of the story.** Read Clarence Jordan’s Cotton Patch version of this session’s story. In small groups write a contemporary paraphrase of the story in similar fashion to the Cotton Patch version. Read your version to the total group.

Looking Ahead



As you read about the birth of Jesus for the next session, think about the images of God in the story. You will need a chalkboard or newsprint and pencils. Decide if you will need to write out verses 61 and 66 for Activity 2. If you plan to use an activity in “A little bit extra,” make the needed arrangements.