

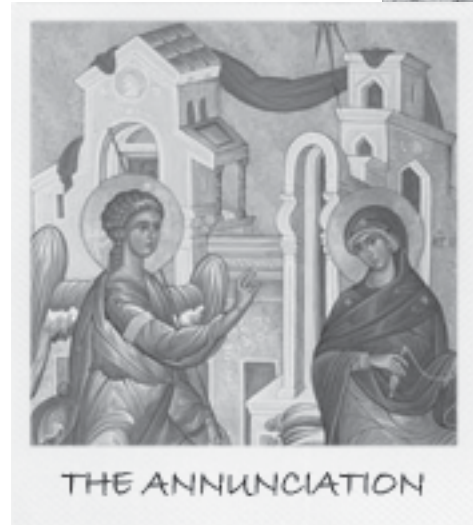


LUKE CHAPTER 1 GROUP BIBLE STUDY WWW.ORTHODOXYOUTH.ORG/LUKE

After his formal introduction, St. Luke begins his Gospel with the announcement of the birth of John the Baptist (1:5-25). St. Luke tells us three important things about John's parents: they were both righteous before God (even more, Zacharias was a priest, and Elizabeth was descended from the High Priest Aaron), both individuals were old, and Elizabeth was barren (meaning that she was unable to have a child) (1:5-7).

While Zacharias burned incense on the altar of incense in the temple - itself an important event in Zacharias' life, because a priest burned incense in the temple only once in his life - an angel appeared beside the altar (1:8-11). In any case, the angel - who identifies himself as the Archangel Gabriel (1:19) - told Zacharias that his wife Elizabeth would bear a son whose name would be John. This son would lead an exemplary life, and would go before the Messiah "in the spirit and power of Elijah...to make ready a people prepared for the Lord" (1:13-17). This is an amazing prophecy: so amazing, in fact, that Zacharias did not immediately believe it (1:18, 20). Because he did not believe, he was made mute until after the birth of John (1:20-21).

At this point St. Luke's focus shifts from the parents of John the Baptist to the parents - and particularly the mother - of Jesus. When Elizabeth had been pregnant for six months, God sent the Archangel Gabriel to Nazareth to speak to a virgin named Mary. Gabriel's opening words to Mary constitute the best-known description of Mary in Christianity: "Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women" (1:28). Mary's fear at this greeting prompts Gabriel to repeat that she has found favor with God (1:30).



Of particular importance is Mary's response to what the Archangel Gabriel said: "Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word" (1:38). Blessed Theophylact restates this response, "I am a writer's tablet; let the Writer write upon it whatever He wishes. Let the Lord do as He wills."

After the Annunciation, Mary traveled to visit her cousin Elizabeth. St. Luke states that Elizabeth's baby leaped in her womb when she heard Mary's greeting (1:41, 44). The reason for this joy is made clear in verse 43, where Elizabeth recognizes Mary as the mother of her Lord.

Be sure to download the quiz for Luke chapter one at <http://www.orthodoxyouth.org/luke/quiz/1quiz.pdf>

St. Luke then gives us the "Song of Mary" (1:46-55), called in the West the Magnificat after the Latin word for "magnifies." The Magnificat begins with a proclamation of praise for God and joy in Him and His salvation (1:47). Mary humbly says that she is lowly, and that it is because of His action that all generations will call her blessed (1:48-49).

Verses 51-53 remind us that these magnificent and heavenly deeds must always be done with a total reliance upon God, as Venerable Bede says by quoting Philippians 4:13, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." Finally, Mary concluded her song by proclaiming that God's great deed in her is a fulfillment of His promise to the descendants of Abraham.

The birth of Zacharias and Elizabeth's child was a cause for rejoicing among their neighbors (1:57-58). When the child was circumcised eight days later, the neighbors were nonetheless shocked when, instead of naming the child after his father, both Elizabeth and Zacharias made clear that they intended to name the child John (which means "grace of God") (1:59-63).

As the Troparion states, Zacharias' speech was restored immediately after naming his son John (1:64). Filled by the Holy Spirit, Zacharius prophesied about the redemption brought by God and the prophetic role to be filled by John (in a hymn called in the West the Benedictus after the Latin word for "blessed").

St. Luke temporarily concludes his coverage of the life of John the Baptist by telling his readers that the child grew strong in the spirit, and spent his time in the deserts until his prophetic ministry began years later.



TEEN SOYO LEADER