

# lesson 14

## Christmas Lesson

# Mary, Did You Know?

### MAIN IDEA

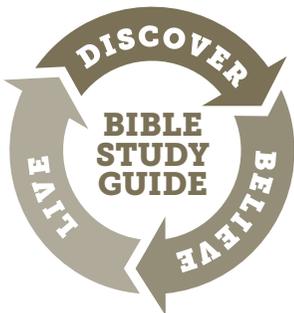
Jesus didn't take on human flesh so He could just be an adorable baby. He took on human flesh to die, the one thing God was incapable of doing.

### QUESTION TO EXPLORE

Do I really believe that nothing is impossible with God?

### TEACHING AIM

To lead adults to understand that Jesus was veiled in human flesh so we could relate to Him



## Bible Comments

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### Understanding the Context

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The Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts were originally meant to be read together as two volumes of the same book. They were written to a man named Theophilus. Many have debated if this is an actual man or a rhetorical device, however, more agree that he was indeed a man of some reputation. Luke called him “most excellent Theophilus” (1:3). His name was not a Hebrew name, but a Greek name which served as a clue to the audience Luke geared his gospel. This book was written to Gentiles and their Hellenistic worldview. However, Luke was careful to build his case for the Messiah from the Old Testament.

Luke explained that he had written an “orderly account” (1:3). He was a learned man and took particular care to accurately pen even subtle observations of eyewitness accounts. Luke was also careful to get key details correct. In that sense, this gospel is an impressive piece of history. Luke’s orderly approach and attention to detail assures his readers of the accuracy of his claims.

Therefore, the Gospel of Luke is indeed good news. In fact, it is good news not just for the Jews but also for the Gentiles. Luke’s account is to be read as good news for all peoples. The beginning of the good news is seen in Luke 1 as the promised Messiah is coming in the baby Jesus. This baby is the gospel. Jesus is the good news.

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### Interpreting the Scriptures

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#### Special Message to Mary (1:30-33)

The angel announced the coming of the prophesied Messiah. This was Jesus’ birth announcement. His message was that Mary would conceive and bear a son. This Boy would be unique in that He would have the divine essence of

God the Father as His only begotten Son. He also had the position of ruling with God the Father. His throne would be the Davidic throne, but unlike David His rule would never end. Related, unlike David, His rule was perfect and had no limitations. Unlike David, Jesus accomplished all that He set out to accomplish.

Therefore, the angel's message to Mary was, "do not be afraid." It would have been natural for Mary to be afraid. Angels are frightening and they tend to have to start their message with "do not be afraid." Further, an unmarried virgin having a baby brought incredible cultural pressures upon Mary that would radically alter the direction of her life. Teenage unwed mothers in our society face scary scenarios, but Mary's were more extreme. The reason the angel gave for Mary not to be afraid was that she had "found favor with God" (1:30). Mary was not the source of the favor. Rather, God was giving her favor. Mary as the recipient of God's grace not the giver of grace. When God is the source of something, we can have confidence even if it does not make sense in the eyes of the world.

But, as wonderful as Mary was, she was not the good news. Jesus is the gospel. He is good news because He will save His people from their sins (Matthew 1:21). Jesus' name means "Yahweh saves." His name cuts to the heart of His mission. He brings salvation. His salvation is coming from God Himself.

Further, the angel explained that Jesus is the "Son of the Most High" (1:32). Jesus relates to God the Father as His son. They share a family relationship including a shared divine essence. Even though they are distinct persons, they are one God. We also know from John 3:16 that Jesus is uniquely the Father's Son as His only begotten Son. Christians are sons and daughters of the Father, but in a different way than Jesus. Further, we know from Philippians 2:5-7 that Jesus humbly submitted to the will of His Father. Finally, this status as the Father's Son was a ruling and reigning position.

The angel explained that Jesus would rule God's People as the eternal Davidic King. Second Samuel 7:11-16 prophesies about the Davidic King. God promised David that his monarchical line would last forever. Of course, not only did David die but his lineage ceased to rule Israel and then there was no king of Israel and eventually there was not a kingdom of Israel. Today there is a country called Israel existing on key portions of the promised land, but

they do not have a King. Rather, the angel explained that Jesus is the eternal Davidic King. Jesus is a better King because His rule is heavenly not earthly, His reign is eternal not temporal, and His ways are perfect not corrupt. The good news of Christmas is that Jesus has come and His kingdom will have no end and His rule will be perfectly just as well as perfectly merciful.

### **Nothing Is Impossible (1:34-37)**

Even though Mary is not the good news of Christmas, she is significant. Particularly, the fact that she was a virgin when she birthed Jesus is extremely significant. The virgin birth was actually prophesied in Isaiah 7:14. Much ink was spilt over the significance of the virgin birth during the fundamentalist liberal debates of the previous century. The conservatives were right to advocate for the significance of the virgin birth. The Bible views the virgin birth as a historical fact and we need to understand it has profound theological implications. If Mary was not a virgin, it calls into question the claims about Jesus as well as the efficacy of His atoning sacrifice on the cross. Simply, if Mary was not a virgin then Jesus was not God and His sacrifice on the cross does not pay for our sins.

However, there was another significant person involved in the birth of Jesus. The Holy Spirit played a role in the virgin birth. Like we see throughout the Bible, the Spirit always gives life. The angel used a delicate expression in order to communicate that nothing crude or sinful or even sexual happened to Mary. Rather, he explained the divine agency and origins of the pregnancy. Clearly, as a result of this miracle Jesus has divine essence.

After explaining the nature of Jesus, the angel referenced Mary's cousin Elizabeth. The comparison to Elizabeth and Zechariah made the scene even more profound. Like Mary, Elizabeth experienced somewhat of a miracle in the birth of her own son even though she had been barren her entire life. The angel put these two accounts together and concluded "nothing will be impossible with God" (1:37). No doubt this was a worshipful statement. However, no doubt, this truth also bolstered Mary's faith. These historical accounts should lead Christians at Christmas to worship as well as walk in great faith.

## Faithfulness on Display (1:38)

The conclusion of this account is a glorious example of faithfulness. Mary was humble in all the meanings of the term. She was of lowly rank in her society. She was young, a woman and thus wrongly treated as a second-class citizen, from a peasant family, and from a conquered oppressed nation. However, due to being favored by God she was brought into God's redemptive plan. Thus, through faith in the Word of God, she displayed wisdom beyond her years and became the mother of the divine King.

Mary's response was the opposite of Zechariah's response. He doubted God, yet she responded in faith. Due to his lack of faith, God did not allow Zechariah to have the last word and took his words. But, in this account, we see Mary had the last word. Hers as a perfect and exemplary conclusion to the degree the angel saw fit to depart. Her response was a quiet submission. She willingly submitted herself to the Lord no matter the trials it would bring. She believed in God, trusted He knew best, and followed His Word wherever it led her.

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### Focusing on Meaning

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Mary is a remarkable figure in the Bible. Most of the Bible's significant characters are marked by serious flaws. However, we don't see many flaws in Mary. She is highly esteemed for her great faith. We need to be clear that Mary was not immaculately conceived as our Roman Catholic friends claim. However, that should not lead to another error of diminishing her. Mary is someone to emulate. She demonstrated beautiful faith, even when it did not make sense and even when it would likely bring her harm in this world. Mary was not the hero of Christmas, but she was a hero to emulate.

We should never rush past the doctrines about Jesus we learn in the Christmas accounts. These doctrines are beautiful. Many in our generation believe doctrines only divide. They can divide. However, those divisions can be both valid and good as well as invalid and bad. For example, Baptists believe in the authority of the Bible and thus should reject teaching that denies

the virgin birth. The doctrines established at the first Christmas should lead to a spirituality that marvels at Jesus. In the end, these doctrines should be so embedded in our minds and hearts that we believe nothing is impossible for God. The Christmas doctrines birth a spirituality of worship and faithfulness. Marvel that nothing is impossible with God!