

connect 360

BIBLE TEACHING GUIDE

GSI

Gospel Story Investigator

A Study of the Gospel of Luke

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GSI: Gospel Story Investigator (Luke)—Connect 360 Bible Teaching Guide

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How to Make the Best Use of This *Teaching Guide*

Leading a class in studying the Bible is a sacred trust. This *Teaching Guide* has been prepared to help you as you give your best to this important task.

In each lesson, you will find first “Bible Comments” for teachers, to aid you in your study and preparation. The three sections of “Bible Comments” are “Understanding the Context,” “Interpreting the Scriptures,” and “Focusing on the Meaning.” “Understanding the Context” provides a summary overview of the entire background passage that also sets the passage in the context of the Bible book being studied. “Interpreting the Scriptures” provides verse-by-verse comments on the focal passage. “Focusing on the Meaning” offers help with the meaning and application of the focal text.

The second main part of each lesson is “Teaching Plans.” You’ll find two complete teaching plans in this section. The first is called the “Discovery Plan,” which emphasizes discovery learning techniques; and the second is called the “Discussion Plan,” which provides questions and suggestions for dialogue about the Scriptures. Choose the plan that best fits your class and your style of teaching. You may also use and adapt ideas from both. Each plan is intended to be practical, helpful, and immediately useful as you prepare to teach.

The major headings in each teaching plan are intended to help you sequence how you teach so as to follow the flow of how people tend to learn. The first major heading, “Connect with Life,” provides ideas that will help you begin the class session where your class is and draw your class into the study. The second major heading, “Guide Bible Study,” offers suggestions for helping your class engage the Scriptures actively and develop a greater understanding of this portion of the Bible’s message. The third major heading, “Encourage Application,” is meant to help participants focus on how to respond with their lives to this message.

As you begin the study with your class, be sure to find a way to help your class know the date on which each lesson will be studied. You might use one or more of the following methods:

- In the first session of the study, briefly overview the study by identifying for your class the date on which each lesson will be studied. Lead your class to write the date in the table of contents in their *Study Guides* and on the first page of each lesson.
- Make and post a chart that indicates the date on which each lesson will be studied.
- If all of your class has e-mail, send them an e-mail with the dates the lessons will be studied.
- Provide a bookmark with the lesson dates. You may want to include information about your church and then use the bookmark as an outreach tool, too. A model for a bookmark can be downloaded from www.baptistwaypress.org under the “Teacher Helps” tab.
- Develop a sticker with the lesson dates, and place it on the table of contents or on the back cover.

Here are some steps you can take to help you prepare well to teach each lesson and save time in doing so:

1. Start early in the week before your class meets.
2. If your church’s adult Bible study teachers meet for lesson overview and preparation, plan to participate. If your church’s adult Bible study teachers don’t have this planning time now, look for ways to begin. You, your fellow teachers, and your church will benefit from this mutual encouragement and preparation.
3. Overview the study in the *Study Guide*. Look at the table of contents, and see where this lesson fits in the overall study. Then read or review the study introduction to the book that is being studied.
4. Consider carefully the suggested Main Idea, Question to Explore, and Teaching Aim. These can help you discover the main thrust of this particular lesson.

5. Use your Bible to read and consider prayerfully the Scripture passages for the lesson. Using your Bible in your study and in the class session can provide a positive model to class members to use their own Bibles and give more attention to Bible study themselves. (Each writer of the Bible comments in both the *Teaching Guide* and the *Study Guide* has chosen a favorite translation. You're free to use the Bible translation you prefer and compare it with the translations chosen, of course.)
6. After reading all the Scripture passages in your Bible, then read the Bible comments in the *Study Guide*. The Bible comments are intended to be an aid to your study of the Bible. Read also the small articles—"sidebars"—in each lesson. They are intended to provide additional, enrichment information and inspiration and to encourage thought and application. Try to answer for yourself the questions included in each lesson. They're intended to encourage further thought and application, and you can also use them in the class session itself. Continue your Bible study with the aid of the Bible comments included in this *Teaching Guide*.
7. Review the "Teaching Plans" in this *Teaching Guide*. Consider how these suggestions would help you teach this Bible passage in your class to accomplish the teaching aim.
8. Consider prayerfully the needs of your class, and think about how to teach so you can help your class learn best.
9. Develop and follow a lesson plan based on the suggestions in this *Teaching Guide*, with alterations as needed for your class.
10. Enjoy leading your class in discovering the meaning of the Scripture passages and in applying these passages to their lives.

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FREE! Downloadable teaching resource items for use in your class are available at www.baptistwaypress.org. Watch for them in the “Teaching Plans” for each lesson. Then go online to www.baptistwaypress.org and click on “Teaching Resource Items” under the “Teacher Helps” tab for this study. These items are selected from the “Teaching Plans.” They are provided online to make lesson preparation easier for handouts and similar items. Permission is granted to download these teaching resource items, print them out, copy them as needed, and use them in your class.

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GSI: Gospel Story Investigator

A Study of the Gospel of Luke

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lesson 1

Two Miraculous Promises

MAIN IDEA

The promise of two miraculous births was part of God's redemptive plan for humanity.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

For what miracle are you waiting?

TEACHING AIM

To lead adults to trust God's provision and his timing



Bible Comments

Understanding the Context

The Gospel of Luke historically anchors the story of Jesus and explains its divine message. Luke, like any good storyteller, takes us back to the moment when the news first broke to humanity: God was ending a four-century silence and keeping his promise to his people. The waiting period for the fulfillment of God's redemptive plan was over. An angelic announcement broke the long silence.

First came the announcement of the birth of John the Baptist, whom the prophet Malachi had foretold. He was a new Elijah, sent to prepare Israel for the redemption of God. To the aged parents of John the Baptist, the birth of their child was a reminder of God's provision for his faithful people. God was fulfilling the long-anticipated miracle.

Then came a second announcement, delivered to a quivering Jewish girl in a village in Nazareth by the angel Gabriel. She was undoubtedly astonished to discover she had been chosen to bear the child who would fulfill ancient prophecy and promise. This child would be Israel's Messiah, and his birth would be miraculous. After all, Mary was a virgin.

For more than half a millennium, the Jewish people had held on to God's promise of an anointed descendant of David who would take the throne. However, the child born in Bethlehem would be more than an anointed king (or Messiah). He would rule over a kingdom that would never end. He would be more than the baby of Joseph and Mary. For when the Holy Spirit overshadowed Mary, a miracle would take place. She would become pregnant with a boy who was the Messiah and the Son of God.¹

Interpreting the Scriptures

Introduction (1:1–4)

Most scholars believe Luke had written his Gospel before he penned the Book of Acts, which ends with Paul in Rome in A.D. 62. Luke was Paul's travel

companion (Colossians 4:14; Philippians 24; 2 Timothy 4:11; Acts 16:10–17; 20:5–15; 21:1–18; 27:1–28; 28:1–16), and wrote with obvious skill. Luke laid out his purpose for writing his Gospel to help his readers have certainty about what they were reading in regard to the events of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection.

1:1. Luke referred to “many others” who had attempted to write accounts of the life of Jesus. Typically, a writer in Luke’s day would seek to disparage others and explain why he was the better author. Luke did not do this. Instead, he described his investigative process to ensure the veracity of his message.

1:2. Luke explained that he wrote on proper authority because his words were based on eyewitness testimony.

1:3. Luke carefully investigated the facts before he wrote his “orderly account.” This order does not mean he wrote a chronological account but rather a “logical and artistic arrangement.”² Luke wrote for Theophilus, which in Greek means “a lover of God.” Theophilus was a particular person, or Luke used the name to denote a God-fearing reader. If Theophilus was an individual, then the epithet “most excellent” indicates official rank (perhaps a governor or a high-ranking officer).

1:4. Luke’s use of the term *informed* (Greek *katēcheō*, a word for catechism; cf. Acts 18:25; 1 Corinthians 14:19) reveals Luke believed that “Christianity is true and capable of confirmation.”³

The Birth of John Foretold (1:5–25)

1:5–6. The birth of Jesus (the true king) would juxtapose King Herod the Great (37–4 B.C), who, despite his reputation as a builder, was infamous for his cruelty (e.g., the edict to have the babies killed in Matthew 2:16).

Zechariah, a priest who served two nonconsecutive weeks a year, was chosen (“by lot”) to go into the temple to burn incense (cf. 1 Chronicles 24:7–18, esp. v. 10). His wife was Elizabeth, who was also from a priestly family

(“daughter of Aaron”), and according to the law, she had to be an Israelite virgin (Leviticus 21:14).⁴

1:7. Although blameless and righteous, the couple remained barren—a condition regarded as punishment for covenant infractions (cf. Deuteronomy 7:12–14), not unlike the great patriarch Abraham and his wife Sarah (Genesis 21). The couple lived in the Judean hill country, and therefore Zechariah would have lodged in the temple precincts during his duty in the temple.⁵

1:8–10. A priest would perform this honor once in a lifetime.⁶ It probably took place in the afternoon service around 3:00 p.m. (the “ninth hour.”)⁷ Incense was burned in the Holy Place in the morning and afternoon (Exodus 30:7, 8; 1 Chron. 23:13; 2 Chron. 29:11; Psalm 141:2). However, the latter time was more likely (cf. Exod. 29:38–42; Numbers 28:1–10).⁸

The process of burning incense involved two assistants taking burning coals from the great altar into the chamber of the Holy Place to the altar of incense. This altar was made of acacia wood overlaid with gold, and it measured one-and-a-half feet wide by three feet high with four protruding horns. (See Exod. 30:1–10.) The altar sat in the center of the room. The assistants would then leave the priest alone, and he would put incense on the coals at the signal of the presiding priest and prostrate himself in prayer.⁹ While this happened, worshippers waited outside in the outer court and prayed (cf. Exod. 30:34–38).

1:11–18. An angel appeared on the right side of the “altar of incense” (or the “golden altar”), probably between the altar and the golden candlestick.¹⁰ The angelic message was comforting (“Do not be afraid”) and announced the name of Zechariah’s future son as “John” (Hebrew *Yohannan*, “the Lord is gracious.”) John was not to drink wine, which reflected a Nazarite vow (Num. 6:3; Judges 13:4), but there is no mention of him not cutting his hair. Although John could not drink, Luke told of Jesus “drinking wine” (Luke 7:33–34).

John’s ministry would “bring back many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God” in the “spirit and power of Elijah” (cf. Mark 9:13), which

was an allusion to the prophecy by Malachi of a future Elijah-like prophet (Malachi 3:1; 4:5[f]).

1:19–22. Zechariah’s response was demonstrably faithless (“How can I be sure of this?”) His incredulity, which reminds the reader of Abraham and Sarah (Gen.15:8), was rewarded with a sign—a punitive silence until the birth of his son. Meanwhile, the worshippers standing outside were waiting for the service to conclude with the benediction and were surprised by Zechariah’s delay.¹¹

1:23–25. Zechariah completed his week of service at the temple and returned home. Elizabeth became pregnant and went into seclusion for five months. Despite her seclusion, she was delighted because God’s favor had removed her “disgrace among the people” (cf. Deut. 7:12–14), as she recognized and confessed that “The Lord has done this for me.”

The Birth of Jesus Foretold (1:26–38)

1:26–27. The angel Gabriel visited Mary in Nazareth (cf. Daniel 8:15–17; 9:21). She was a virgin, pledged in marriage to Joseph, a descendant of David. Her pledge with Joseph was a binding betrothal agreement, broken only by a legal divorce, which her pregnancy would have provided just cause for (cf. Deut. 24:1; cf. Matt. 1:18, 20). However, Mary’s conception was not due to infidelity but was a miraculous conception.

1:28–30. Mary was “highly favored” (a better translation than “Hail Mary, full of grace”), but the news of her pregnancy had the opposite effect on her; she was “greatly troubled.” The angel told Mary, “Do not be afraid.”

1:31–33. Gabriel told Mary she would have a son and to give him the name “Jesus” (Hebrew for *Joshua*, “Yahweh saves”; cf. Matt. 1:21). He would be the “Son of the Most High” (or the “Son of God”). The promise that a Son of David would be the future anointed king (or Messiah) was fulfilled in Jesus (2 Samuel 7:14; cf. Ps. 2:7; 89:27). However, Jesus would not merely take David’s throne to rule over a united Israel for a lifetime, but would possess a kingdom that would never end.¹²

1:34–35. Mary questioned, “How will this be since I am a virgin?” Mary’s doubt was not unlike Zechariah’s, but different in that she did not demand a sign. Gabriel explained that Mary would become pregnant through the “Holy Spirit.” Luke’s language “rules out crude ideas of a ‘mating.’ ”¹³ Although Mary’s unusual pregnancy sounds salacious, its existence is a testimony to its historical reliability; after all, who would have made up such a story and then recorded it in the Gospel of Luke? The extraordinary account of Jesus’ miraculous conception is theological reality expressed in the Gospel of John when it speaks of the “Word” which was God and then became flesh (John 1:1,14).

1:36–37. News that Elizabeth, Mary’s relative, was going to have a child in her old age may have been a source of encouragement and further evidence that this was the work of the Lord. After all, as the angel stated: “Nothing is impossible with God” (cf. Gen. 18:14; cf. Matt. 19:26).

1:38. Mary humbly submitted to God’s plan, stating that she was “the Lord’s servant.” The word *servant* (Greek *doulē*) means *handmaid* or *slave girl*. She finished her interaction with Gabriel by stating, “May it be to me as you have said” or simply, “Let it be!”

Focusing on the Meaning

The opening of Luke’s Gospel reminds us our faith in Jesus is based on historical events. Luke interviewed eyewitnesses and investigated the matters for himself. He wanted us to be certain of what we believe. Part of this confidence is based on the two figures Luke introduced to us, John and Jesus, and the stories of their miraculous births.

Today, anyone listening to the miraculous birth story of John the Baptist can empathize with the plight of Zechariah and Elizabeth, faithful servants of the Lord who felt disgraced by having no children. Today, although we do not view childlessness through the lens of covenant faithfulness or disobedience, a couple who is struggling with infertility may still feel cursed, ashamed, or even abandoned by God.

In this way, this story speaks to the modern reader about a real problem in our world. It raises the question: How can we respond (or help others respond) to this challenge? It also begs us to embrace how God uses his timing and means to fulfill his purposes. Are you willing to trust his timing? Do you believe “nothing is impossible with God?”

Teaching Plans

DISCOVERY PLAN

Connect with Life

1. Before class time, create on a sheet of paper an acrostic using the word *miracle*. Make a copy for each class member. (A copy of this acrostic is available in “Teaching Resource Items” for this study at www.baptistwaypress.com). During the lesson, distribute the acrostic and encourage class members to use it to describe the meaning of the word “miracle.” After a few minutes, receive the results. Say, *Today we begin a study of the Book of Luke. We will examine the birth, life, and ministry of Jesus the Messiah.*

Guide Bible Study

2. Before class, recruit a church member to portray the physician Luke by presenting the following monologue. (A copy of this monologue is available in “Teaching Resource Items” for this study at www.baptistwaypress.com). You may want to secure a lab coat for him to wear and a legal pad or book as a prop. Introduce Dr. Luke by saying, *Today, we want to welcome a special guest to class.*

Hello, my name is Luke. I am a physician and a historian. My profession requires that I conduct research, collect facts, and identify and examine the evidence. In the writing of the Gospel of Luke, those are the steps I took, along with conducting interviews with those who could give eyewitness accounts of the life and ministry of Jesus. I am the only non-Jewish New Testament author, and although I did not know Jesus during his time on earth, it was important for me to write an accurate account of his life for my fellow Gentiles, and for my patron, Theophilus, whose name means *one who loves God*.

Some might wonder if my scientific and investigative approach as a physician and historian would allow me to believe in

miracles. You will soon learn the answer is *yes*, for I wrote from my faith in Jesus Christ. Join me as we begin today's study by examining two miraculous promises found in the first chapter of my Gospel.

Following the monologue, thank your guest. Ask, *Who do you think the eyewitnesses Luke interviewed might have been? Say, Could they have been the people we will study today who received the promise of the miraculous births?*

3. Form three groups and give the following assignments pre-written on notecards: (A copy of these assignments is available in "Teaching Resource Items" for this lesson at www.baptistwaypress.org).

Group One: Refer to Luke 1:5–25 and "The Miracle of John the Baptist" in your *Study Guide*.

- Prepare to introduce the class to Zechariah.
- What was Gabriel's announcement?
- How did Zechariah respond?

Group Two: Refer to Luke 1:5–25 and "The Miracle of John the Baptist" in your *Study Guide*.

- Prepare to introduce the class to Elizabeth.
- What was her response to her pregnancy?
- This announcement was the fulfillment of prophecy. Read Isaiah 40:3 and Malachi 3:1.

Group Three: Refer to Luke 1:26–38 and "The Miracle of Jesus" in your *Study Guide*.

- Prepare to introduce the class to Mary
- What was Gabriel's announcement?
- How did Mary respond?

After ten to fifteen minutes, allow time for each group to share their findings. Lead the class in acknowledging that the miraculous announcements present studies in contrast.

Encourage Application

4. Ask, *When was the last time you responded with trust and submission to God's will? Is there an area of your life or a situation where God is speaking to you?* Give each class member a piece of paper and an envelope, along with the following instructions: (A copy of these instructions is available in "Teaching Resource Items" for this study at www.baptistwaypress.com).

Write a letter to God identifying the area of your life where you need a miracle. Then, seal your letter in the envelope, write December 25th on the outside, and place it in your Bible. As you spend time daily with the Lord, bring before him the contents of your letter. On December 25th, open your letter and reflect on God's answer and what he is teaching you.

When class members have written their letters, close in prayer asking God to help each member of the class emulate Mary, who humbly accepted God's plan for her life.

DISCUSSION PLAN

Connect with Life

1. Write the word *miracle* on the markerboard. Ask, *How would you define a miracle?* Instruct the class to read the story of Chad and Lindsay found in the "Introduction" section of the *Study Guide*. Ask, *Would you consider the events in Chad and Lindsay's lives miracles? What are some miracles God has performed in your life?* Make the transition into the Bible study by stating, *Today's lesson highlights the promise of two miraculous births which are recorded in the first chapter of Luke.*

Guide Bible Study

2. Write the following topics on three separate posters and display each as you progress through the Scripture of today's lesson.
 - Recounting the Miracles: Luke 1:1-4

- The Miracle of John the Baptist: Luke 1:5–25
 - The Miracle of Jesus: Luke 1:26–38
3. Display the “Recounting the Miracles” poster. Present a brief lecture on Luke’s investigative work in writing his Gospel, using the “Bible Comments” from the *Teaching Guide*, along with information in the *Study Guide* to acquaint class members with the Book of Luke. Ask, *Why did Luke write his Gospel? Why was it important for Luke to write an orderly, accurate account of Jesus’ life?* Enlist a volunteer to read Luke 1:1–4 aloud. Ask class members, *Do you have a Theophilus in your life who needs to hear a detailed account of the gospel message?*
 4. Before class time, recruit a church member who enjoys research to prepare a three-minute report on the duties of priests. (Refer the member to the *Study Guide* along with Bible dictionaries and commentaries). Display “The Miracle of John the Baptist” poster. Ask your researcher to present the report on the duties of priests, concluding with the reading of Luke 1:5–7. Ask, *What does this passage teach us about Zechariah and Elizabeth?*
 5. Say, *While Zechariah was performing his priestly duties, an angel appeared to him.* Read Luke 1:8–25 aloud. Ask members to respond to the following questions:
 - What was Zechariah’s response to Gabriel’s announcement?
 - What was Elizabeth’s response to Zechariah’s inability to speak? to her pregnancy?
 - What lessons can we learn regarding patience and persistence from Zechariah and Elizabeth?
 - What were the beliefs and challenges of infertility in ancient days?
 6. Display “The Miracle of Jesus” poster. Instruct the class to listen for Mary’s response to Gabriel’s second miraculous announcement, as a volunteer reads aloud Luke 1:26–38. Ask members to respond to the following questions:
 - Mary was betrothed to Joseph. Describe the meaning of betrothal in biblical times.
 - What was Mary’s response to Gabriel’s announcement?
 - In what area of your life do you need to believe that nothing is impossible with God?

Encourage Application

7. Ask, *Are you petitioning God for a miracle?* Direct the class to open the *Study Guide* to the six questions listed in the sidebar entitled “Praying in Faith.” Ask members to bow their heads but to keep their eyes open as they silently read and contemplate their responses to those questions. After a few minutes, say, *We may all find ourselves praying and waiting for God to answer. Then pray, Father, help us to trust you in all areas of our lives and to do whatever is needed to develop our faith. Amen.*

Notes

1. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations in lessons 1–3 are from the New International Version (1984 edition).
2. Leon Morris, *Luke: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 3, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 84.
3. Morris, 84
4. Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), Luke 1:5–6.
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