



Preparing for Great Events

National or ethnic holidays are part of the annual rhythm of life in many countries and communities. They build a sense of anticipation and excitement. They give a sense of identity around special events everyone looks forward to. Choose a special holiday to talk about and discuss:

- The reason behind the holiday and key figures celebrated.
- The different roles people play that make that celebration a reality.

Different Roles in God's Unfolding Plan

The Passover would have been a festival that young Mary celebrated with her family every year. A lot went into preparing for the event.

- Read Exodus 12:3-13,24-27. Pretend you were the parent in a Jewish household. What would you need to prepare for the annual Passover event?
- How would you answer a child who asks, "Why did the lamb have to die?"

Watch My Son, My Savior – Chapter 1 – The Anticipation of a Messiah

- *What struck home most as you watched?*
- *What questions emerge for you?*

Nothing is Impossible with God

For a short time, Mary would fill a role in God's plan for raising up another leader—the one God had promised.

Read Luke 1:26-38 (Angel Gabriel's Announcement to Mary) and discuss the following:

- Imagine you were Mary. What would you be thinking if an angel appeared to you and greeted you with words like "*highly favored*" (= receiving special, undeserved favor from God), "*the Lord is with you*" (= you have the Lord's special protection and blessing)?
- List some of the descriptions the angel Gabriel used to explain why her son would be different and what a teenage girl might have imagined life would be with such a son.
- "*How will this be since I am a virgin?*" For what reasons might Gabriel's answer to Mary have been a difficult concept to understand, believe, or embrace? Why was it so important?

Mary used the Greek word "doule" in Luke 1:38 in her response to the angel's message. It is often translated "servant" but basically means "I am the Lord's slave." It was a term the apostle Paul often used of himself and Christ-followers. Connected with that, Mary said, "*May your word to me be fulfilled.*"

- What does that imply about the regular relationship Mary must have had with God?
- Compare her response here with your attitude toward life. Where do we struggle with this in our world?

Now, just as the angel told Mary, Elizabeth was already 6 months pregnant with a child who was to be given the name John. He too would be great and have a role in the unfolding plan of God's grace and favor to the whole world.

Read Luke 1:39-56 (Mary's visit with Elizabeth.)

- Discuss the reactions to Mary's greeting when she arrived at Elizabeth's house. What do they tell you? (See Luke 1:41-45.)
- Sort out Mary's perspective about all of this in her response (often called the Magnificat, the Song of Mary).
- Determine what she was recognizing when she said, "*My spirit rejoices in God, my Savior.*"

Later, at the circumcision ceremony of baby John, Zechariah broke into prophecy.

Read Luke 1:68-75:

- Summarize how Zechariah viewed the events that were beginning to happen.

Read on Luke 1:76-80

- Explain what Zechariah saw as the life-calling or grand purpose of his newborn son John.
- Want to dig deeper? Find at least three similarities of his words and the angel's prophecy (Luke 1:13-17) with the prophecy he would have already known from Isaiah 40:1-11, Malachi 3:1; 4:5.

The Challenges of Following the Role God Has for You

By all appearances, Mary would have appeared to be unfaithful to Joseph.

Read Matthew 1:18-25 (Angel Gabriel appearing to Joseph.)

- Envision the struggles that might have gone through Joseph's mind as he tried to figure out what to do with this information that Mary was pregnant.
- Despite how things at first appeared, how did the angel Gabriel dispel Joseph's doubt and lead him to do the right thing—become Mary's husband and legal father of Jesus?
- It is often hard for us to understand and accept our role in God's saving plan. What difficulties do many struggle with, in understanding or following the role or path God has chosen for their lives?
- More than just a name, what are the meanings of these titles and significance for your life?
 - Jesus – _____ Immanuel – _____

Abraham was saved by faith in the promise of a Savior who was to come from his descendants. Mary and other followers of Jesus would discover the same truth for themselves in the Savior who had now come. It is the same way you and I are saved and guides the roles God has designed for us.



Different Roles in God's Unfolding Plan

Throughout history, God was putting people into different roles to prepare for his great historic event. This study follows the faith journey of a young girl over 2000 years ago from a small village of Nazareth, around 100 miles north of Jerusalem. Jewish children were well acquainted with how God, in different places in history, outfitted ordinary individuals in extraordinary ways to fulfill his grand plan.

Mary as a child in a faithful Jewish home would most likely have often heard about Abraham who had lived about 2000 years earlier. It was a story of how God established his covenant (binding promise) with him: *"Look up at the sky and count the stars—if indeed you can count them. So shall your offspring be ... and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you"* (Genesis 12:2-7; 15:1-6; 22:18). Without children that seemed impossible. Abraham had none. Yet, he was shown favor by God. After many years of waiting, at 100 years old, he was blessed with a son born from his wife who up to her 90th birthday had been unable to bear any children. Amazing... but just as God promised.

Abraham
and Moses
Genesis 12-22
Exodus 1-14
Acts 7:1-53

Hundreds of years later a famine forced Abraham's descendants to move to Egypt, the wealthy superpower of the day. Within several generations they went from being welcomed guests to harshly mistreated slaves (Exodus 1:1-14). The situation seemed hopeless. They cried out to God for rescue. God remained true to his covenant by protecting little baby Moses from the murderous plan of the pharaoh. Appearing within a burning bush, God explained to Moses that he was Jahweh, the great "I Am" who had for years been molding Moses into the leader to deliver the people from slavery. Moses at age 80 began his role in the next episode of God's saving activity. Before launching their 40-year escape to the Promised Land, God had them experience the unforgettable Passover event. It was connected with the 10th plague that God would inflict on Egypt, the death of the firstborn of each family. Embedded in the Passover celebration was the expectation of a future Messiah who would bring a greater freedom from a greater slavery and death.

Nothing is Impossible with God

Throughout history, God continued to choose many seemingly ordinary individuals to accomplish great things, like the young shepherd boy who became the great King David. Those individuals were highly favored by God when he chose them for unique tasks for that moment in time. They were singled out not because they were so superior to others, but because God had determined long ahead of time to equip them to accomplish the next steps of his saving plan (Deuteronomy 7:7-8). The Jews at Mary's time were looking for God to show up and rescue them. They were feeling downcast, forgotten, and downtrodden by the Romans, the wealthy superpower of their day.

For a short time, Mary would fill a role in God's plan for raising up another leader—the one God had promised. Mary, however, may have been distracted with her own exciting event. As a young teenage girl (probably between 12 and 15 years old) she had already spoken her betrothal vow which promised her in marriage to Joseph. Her immediate attention and conversations may have been focused on the day Joseph would come to parade her into the home he had finished for them to live as husband and wife and start their own family. Those plans changed when the angel Gabriel appeared to tell her of the special child she would bear, conceived in her not by Joseph but through the Holy Spirit.

Mary couldn't wait to share the news with her older relative Elizabeth, the wife of the priest Zachariah. It was additional proof for Mary that *"nothing is impossible with God."* Elizabeth's situation was a unique story of its own (Luke 1:5-25). God had sent the angel Gabriel to tell Zechariah that God was about to do something special. Elizabeth had been barren and was well beyond childbearing years, but God was going to bless them

with a son—a special son who would “*be filled with the Holy Spirit even from birth.*” Now, just as the angel told Mary, Elizabeth was already 6 months pregnant with a child who was to be given the name John. He too would be great and have a role in the unfolding plan of God’s grace and favor to the whole world. Mary stayed at Elizabeth’s home for about three months.

Mary’s Song “Magnificat”

This is the title given to Mary’s words (taken from the first words in Latin) and has become a song of the Christian church. See similarities with Hannah’s words in 1 Samuel 2:1-10.

The Challenges of Following the Role God Has for You

Many had been looking for freedom from the Roman’s rule over them, but God would provide freedom from a greater slavery than which their ancestors had endured in Egypt. We too are born as slaves—enslaved to the sinful nature passed down to us from our forefathers. Jesus said, “*Everyone who sins is a slave to sin*” (John 8:34). But God does not sit idly by and watch us struggle and suffer. He enters our world. Paul wrote that we were *foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy ... so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life* (Titus 3:3-7). Most didn’t recognize how the kindness and love of God had appeared in the events connected with these two special babies.

But the exciting news of a baby came with new challenges. By all appearances, Mary would have appeared to be unfaithful to Joseph. The story was bound to become public in the small village of Nazareth. Who would believe her story? She would be seen as a sinner who should be stoned to death for adultery, as stated in the laws of Moses, or may have received other harsh reactions from those who saw themselves as enforcers of purity.

Faith and Hope Go Hand in Hand

How many seemingly hopeless or impossible situations have you witnessed or experienced in life? Know that when God makes a promise, he is giving us a window to his plan which is often far beyond the limits of our senses and experience (Isaiah 55:8-11). *Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see* (Hebrews 11:1). To Abraham’s doubt the LORD gave assurance: “*Is anything too hard for the LORD?*” (Genesis 18:13-14) and to Mary, “*Nothing is impossible with God.*” The Creator of the universe who made this intricate world out of nothing can certainly do this. He can suspend his laws of nature to do the impossible, a miracle. *Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations ... being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised*” (Romans 4:18,21). Scripture tells us, “*Abraham believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness*” (Genesis 15:2-7, Galatians 3:6-11). Therefore, he is called “*the father of all who believe*” (Romans 4:2, 11-12) so that those who believe are children of Abraham and blessed along with him.

Abraham was saved by faith in the promise of a Savior who was to come from his descendants. Mary and other followers of Jesus would discover the same truth for themselves. It is the same way you and I are saved—faith in that Descendant who was promised and has already come. That faith and hope also help us live out the roles God has designed for us to carry out his purposes in this window of time.

Put it into Practice:

- Rethink Mary’s reaction to what God was going to have happen to her. What obstacles do you see in being willing to put God’s Word into practice in your life? Consider how to address them.
- Revisit how God may have been equipping you in life. Daily consider what role he may have for you to carry out his saving purposes for those around you.

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