



Leader's Notes – Session One

These lessons are meant to serve several different audiences and therefore customized as needed and used with flexibility. The leader does not need to teach everything in the lesson but should choose what is most appropriate or needed for your audience and time. The answers also are included here as additional helps in discussion. The unique experiences and insights of leader and participants will frame what you will actually cover.

Read the Leading the Lessons guide and the Narration sheet for additional help.

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:

...but don't spend too much time here as it is just setting the mood.

- The reason behind the holiday and key figures celebrated.
Example: July 4th Independence Day. The country fought for and won independence. Key figures: George Washington, General von Steuben.
- The different roles people play that make that celebration a reality.
Preparations for parades, fireworks, family parties, purchasing and cooking food.

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?
They would slaughter a lamb and cook it. Prepare bitter herbs (reminder of the suffering), and bread without yeast, (reminder of removal of sin...and to be ready) and clean the house of other yeast. (Initial Passover included using a hyssop branch to paint the blood on the doorposts of the house.)
- How would you answer a child who asks, "Why did the lamb have to die?"
Have participants put into their own words how they might respond. Let them know that by the end of the last lesson this should become clear.

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

- *What struck home most as you watched?*
- *What questions emerge for you?*
(Get brief feedback from the participants. Note comments and questions to weave into the rest of the class.)

Nothing is Impossible with God

For a short time, Mary would play a role in God raising up another leader—the leader 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)?

Let participants express what they would imagine. Was there fear because angels don't normally appear to people or troubled at why such an ordinary person as she would get such a visit—especially in the unlikely place of Nazareth which wasn't held in high esteem from those in Jerusalem?

You may want to point out that the greeting was partially a typical greeting. The translations “Hail, Mary, full of grace” still used by the Catholic church, often play into an exalting and even worship of Mary. “Greetings” (Gr: chaire - rejoice) gets closer to the sense of the words which were a normal greeting rather than the translation “Hail, Mary” (Ave Maria in Latin).

“Highly favored” (Gr: kecharitomene), or one who has been shown God's grace, is a clearer rendition that emphasizes God's selection to show his favor to someone. “Full of grace” opens the door to an impression that God chose her because there was something in Mary that made her intrinsically better than others or more worthy. This was an announcement that God was going to do something great through Mary. For God enters a world that is sinful and unworthy of the presence of God, a world that is sinful and broken.

- 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.

His name would be Jesus (Old Testament – Joshua). He will be great and be called the Son of the Most High God. The Lord will give him the throne of King David and reign over his people forever—his kingdom will have no end. (See 2 Samuel 7:16.)

How would a teenage girl imagine that would be like? Let participants try to put themselves in her shoes. Would she have imagined being overwhelmed with the responsibility? Imagined her life would be lived in a royal setting? Imagined she had to be extra holy with God in her home. Think of the song, “Mary did you know?” This was a journey she could not fully imagine ahead of time.

- “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?

Living in a world where we scientifically and biologically explain basic conception, it is beyond our thinking to grasp how an egg in Mary could develop into a child in her womb without the sperm of a human father. Can we even picture how the Holy Spirit came on her and the power of the Most High overshadowed her in order that the child would be holy, the Son of God? Yet the One who created a world out of nothing, can surely do this impossible thing. It is important to grasp that here God was becoming human. Both elements came together in Mary in a miraculous way—the human and the divine. The fact that she was a virgin is part of the prophecy (e.g. Isaiah 7:14), a sign of God fulfilling his plan, and a recognition that a human father was not involved here. It also underlines the fact that “nothing is impossible with God” (also translated, “No word of God will ever fail”).

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?

It appears this isn't an out-of-character attitude of Mary, but a partial window to her faith and life. Although we know nothing of her childhood, we assume she grew up in a family where the Scripture

was shared, the priority of God was evident in all things, and the Messiah was anticipated. It is also important to realize that when God speaks promises he has the power to work faith in those promises. Her response shows a relationship that puts God at the center for whom we live—calling him our Lord. (Living on his terms in contrast with the self-centered living promoted today.)

Her response is a bit reminiscent of the response to God's call seen in Abraham, Moses (reluctantly), Samuel, Isaiah, the first disciples.

- Compare her response here with your attitude toward life. Where do we struggle with this in our world?

Participants can talk through their own observations about our challenges today to make ourselves available for whatever God desires (slaves). The struggle could come from the hurried pursuit of secular work and recreation; the distractions that excite us; the desire for comfort not challenge; the promotion of "Me" as most important; the total contradiction of the world's values compared to God's. Often, we also act as if we don't trust God's promises, "nothing is impossible with God," or feel we have to handle things our own way.

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 to Elizabeth):

- Discuss the reactions to Mary's greeting when she arrived at Elizabeth's house. What do they tell you (1:41-45)?

When Elizabeth heard the greeting, the baby leaped in her womb. She explains it as a response of joy at the news. What does this say about the life in a womb? And Elizabeth...was filled with the Holy Spirit guiding her response. Before Mary could even tell her, she knew Mary was pregnant with the Savior (even Joseph didn't know yet). Elizabeth also recognized Mary's child would be her Lord. She felt so "favored" or privileged that the mother of her Lord would visit her. Both she and Mary appeared humbled by the event.

*"**Blessed** are you among women and blessed is the child you will bear!" The word here is "eulogemene" which implies being granted gifts/blessings from God's grace (rather than the concept that she was intrinsically more worthy than others or one who is the giver of blessings). The same word for blessing is also used in passages like Luke 2:34; Matthew 21:9, 25:34; Luke 24:50; Galatians 3:8-9; Ephesians 1:3.*

*Another Greek word is used when Elizabeth finishes with, "**Blessed** is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished." And Mary says, "all generations will call me **blessed** for the Mighty One has done great things for me." This Greek word is "makaria" the same word as used in the "Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:2-12) as well as Luke 11:27, 28 "Blessed is the mother who gave you birth." It also is in Matthew 11:6, 13:16, 16:17, Romans 4:7-8, Revelation 20:6, 22:14. It implies a state of happiness under God's favor, recognizing how privileged by God. Elizabeth's comments match those of Jesus' teachings "blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" (Luke 24:29)—a blessing the Holy Spirit provides through the working of the gospel in hearts.*

- Sort out Mary's perspective about all of this in her response (often called the Magnificat, the Song of Mary).

Mary's song is similar to Hannah's in 1 Samuel 2 when God granted her the child she had been praying for or Jeremiah 9:23. Mary recognized...

- *The glory all goes to God for what is happening—she doesn't exalt herself, but God. The focus is on God's activity, not hers.*

- *She sees God as her Savior and rejoices over that (compared to the concept of Mary being sinless).*
 - *God regards, or is mindful of, her lowly estate—he sees our need and misery and will lift us up to experience his love and grace—recognizing the “bare goodness of God.”*
 - *People for generations will call her blessed—will tell this story of the privilege God had given Mary to be the one he chose to give birth to Jesus.*
 - *She identifies with the poor and broken people yearning for God’s redemption—no one is worthless and despised in God’s eyes.*
 - *God’s justice and mercy will turn the order of this world upside down—a status reversal. You must fear if you are mighty and take comfort if you are lowly.*
 - *God is the Mighty One who does great things; brings down the proud and arrogant and lifts up the humble and fills them with good things—just as is doing to lowly Mary; praises the unconditional grace of God who reaches out to her despite her lowly state—making it clear that it is God’s work at play her—he actions of creating out of nothing.*
 - *God is keeping his covenant to Abraham—all the people of the earth would be blessed through his offspring.*
- Determine what she was recognizing when she said, *“My spirit rejoices in God, my Savior.”*
Mary recognizes that she too needs a Savior from sin. Mary becomes a witness to the way God acts.

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

Read Luke 1:68-75:

- Summarize how Zechariah viewed the events that now are beginning to happen.
He saw this as the beginning of the fulfillment of the promise of God to redeem Israel—the sending of the Messiah that the prophets foretold. It was God “remembering” or putting into play the covenant to Abraham. It would be a rescue from the hand of the enemies, so they could serve God without hindrance.

Read on ... Luke 1:76-80:

- Explain what Zechariah saw as the life-calling or grand purpose of his newborn son John.
He would be a prophet of the Most High to prepare the way for the Messiah, to give the people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins; to shed light on truth in a world living in darkness.
- 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.
The Jewish marriage was a two-step process – a) the betrothal—the couple exchanged vows before witnesses but lived apart; b) a while later (around a year for some...when the home was ready) there would be a grand party as the husband parades her into his home and begins marital relations with her. Mary and Joseph had only gone through the first step (which was still recognized as a commitment of marriage).

Joseph may have been troubled by the thought of Mary's unfaithfulness, the reputation she would now have as an unwed mother, the potential that she would be stoned to death for adultery (Deuteronomy 22:20-12,24; Leviticus 20:10). What was he to believe? What was he to do? You can picture his head swimming and his heart conflicted about how to righteously handle the situation with the one he loved and also wanted to protect.

- 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?

The angel appeared to Joseph. That in itself would have gotten his attention. The angel explained why he should not be afraid to take her home— “what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.” But he also went back to the Scriptures to point out the prophecies (especially Isaiah 7:14).

- 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?

Let participants put their view into this. It could be our selfish plans and desires that get in the way or failing to see what value we can bring. If we, however, don't know God's saving plan, don't know his mindset, it will be hard to know where you fit and what to do. Growing through the study of Scripture is important to know the mind and will of God.

- More than just a name, what are the meanings of these titles and significance for your life?

- Jesus—*God (Jahweh) saves* Immanuel—*God with us*

In that child God had come among us to save us. He still is Immanuel (with us) and Jesus (savior).

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.

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.

ADVENT: Songs to consider that express similar messages to this lesson.

You may want to refer people to the messages in these songs

- O, Come, O Come Emmanuel: *The root of Jesse who frees us from Satan's tyranny and depths of hell.*
- The Angel Gabriel from Heaven Came: *the message announced to Mary*
- Of the Father's Love Begotten: *This is he whom heav'n-taught singers sang of old with one accord; whom the Scriptures of the prophets promised in their faithful word.*
- Mary, Did you Know: *that your baby boy will someday walk on water? ...save your sons and daughters?*

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