

*For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon His shoulder, and His name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.  
Isaiah 9:6*

# The First Christmas

She Writes for Jesus Devotional



# Introduction

For me, the best way to celebrate Christmas is to know its meaning. This year, we will celebrate Christmas in a different way-- Christmas parties on Zoom instead of having real parties, celebrating in the comfort of your homes instead of going somewhere for vacation, and even the schedules are less busy than usual. Some people want to cancel Christmas this 2020, it wasn't a good year, anyway. Why would we celebrate if it took so much from us?

But we celebrate Christmas not based on what happened this year, we celebrate it because of what happened two thousand plus years ago. In the town of Bethlehem, the Savior of the world was born.

Let's take this time to go back and reflect on what happened in the events leading to the first Christmas. May this devotional inspire you and give you the same joy that the people who witnessed Jesus' birth had. I pray that this will make you appreciate even more what God has done for us.

God bless you and have a Merry Christmas!

## Study Blueprint

 *Zachariah and Elizabeth*

.....→ *Read:* Luke 1:5-15

 *Mary and Joseph*

.....→ *Read:* Luke 1:26-38

Matthew 1:18-25

 *Birth of Jesus*

.....→ *Read:* Luke 2:1-7

 *The Shepherds*

.....→ *Read:* Luke 2:8-21

*Please read the following verses as we go through the story:)*

## Zechariah and Elizabeth



*Luke's account of the gospel started with the story of this couple named Zacharias and Elizabeth. They are the parents of John the Baptist. Let's see how God showed up in the midst of their situation and what role they have to play in the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. May we be encouraged and reminded that our God is a faithful promise keeper and can work even in the most impossible situation.*

## Who are they?

*In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, of the division of Abijah. And he had a wife from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. And they were both righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord. But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were advanced in years. (Luke 1:5-7)*

Luke 1 gave us a glimpse of who Zechariah and Elizabeth were, it was written that Zechariah was a priest and they were both *righteous in God's eyes*, but they don't have children because Elizabeth was barren and they were both very old that time.

When the Bible described the person as “righteous in God's eyes” it means that these people are not just merely obeying the law for the sake of doing it. The righteousness that they have comes from obedience out of their love to God. In their culture, a woman's value was largely measured by the ability to bear a child, to be without one means to face hardship because of public shame.

Yet despite their situation, they continued serving the Lord. Both of them were faithfully obeying God even though they have no children.

## Thoughts to ponder

- If you are in their shoe, are you still willing to obey and live righteously even when God doesn't seem to bless you?
- Having no children would cause them public shame, do you think that God did it on purpose?
- In what area of your life you can relate to this? Do you feel like God isn't giving you something? How can you wait faithfully on Him?

## The unfolding miracle

*Now while he was serving as priest before God when his division was on duty, according to the custom of the priesthood, he was chosen by lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense. (Luke 1:8-9)*

At that time, there were about 20,000 priests and it was far too many to minister on the temple at once. So they have to divide it into 24 separate groups of about 1,000 each. At that time, Zechariah's division was on duty and out of a thousand people, it was him who was chosen to enter the Holy Place in the temple.

Out of many priests, it was Zechariah who has been chosen by lot. It might look like that it was only by chance that he was chosen to minister that day but it has been clearly *orchestrated by God*. God wants to meet him at that particular time in history because God has chosen him to take part in what's going to happen.

Will you still doubt God's sovereignty? If He is in control over things like these in the past, surely is in control over your life right now. Take heart and trust Him, beloved. What God has for you is always for you.

## God didn't forget His promise

*And there appeared to him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. And Zechariah was troubled when he saw him, and fear fell upon him. But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John."  
(Luke 1:11-13)*

It has been 400 years since God last spoke through the prophets before this happened. 400 years of silence while all of them have been waiting for the promised Messiah. Imagine the long years of *waiting* that they have gone through. Maybe some of the Jews were already doubting if God will ever fulfill His promise, maybe some of them already gave up and decided that it's never going to happen.

But here, for the first time in 400 years, God spoke. The angel delivered a special message to Zechariah concerning the birth of John the baptist-- the one who will prepare a way to the Messiah!

God never forgets His promises. As God was fulfilling His promise of Messiah, He was also fulfilling the promise of having a child to Elizabeth and Zachariah. No matter how long our waiting time will be, we can trust that His promise is as good as done.



Something to encourage you today

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*Waiting on God is  
never a wasted time.  
What He promised,  
He will do. He never  
forgets, He never  
abandons.*

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## John the Baptist's purpose foretold

*And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, and he will go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared. (Luke 1:16-17)*

In Luke 1:14-17, the angel told Zechariah that his child—is to be set apart and he also declared John's purpose for the coming of Jesus. This reminded me of what God said to Jeremiah when He called him to be a prophet to the Israelites. *"I knew you before I formed you in your mother's womb. Before you were born I set you apart and appointed you as my prophet to the nations."* (Jeremiah 1:5)

Both John and Jeremiah have been set apart for God's purpose. And I believe that none of us is here by accident. God has an appointed purpose for each of us. We are SET APART for a PURPOSE!

## Zechariah's doubt

*And Zechariah said to the angel, "How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years."  
(Luke 1:18)*

This was Zechariah's response to the angel's news to him seeing their circumstances. I believe that his doubt was understandable because the news seems impossible. But then, **God works best in the impossible.** Circumstances and the reality doesn't stop Him from accomplishing His intended purpose. And sometimes, He wants to show up in situations that cannot happen without His help because in that way, we will see His work and not ours.

Allow God to work in the impossible situations by believing that nothing is impossible for Him!

## Thoughts to ponder

How can we overcome unbelief?

I am sure that in our human limitations, there are times that we find it hard to fully believe that God will come through.

*“Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!”* (Mark 9:24) This was an honest confession from a man in Mark 9, he humbled himself to God as if to say "Lord, I can't get rid of this, but I know You can, help me."

And that's what we do.. we confess it to God and ask Him to help us in the moments where we are doubting Him.

## Mary and Joseph



*We may be familiar with them but sometimes we forget to dig into their story. We sometimes overlook their struggles as they both obey the most wonderful yet also the hardest call of God not just for Mary but also for Joseph. Let us once again read their story and be inspired by their obedience.*

## Who is Mary?

*And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call His name Jesus. (Luke 1:28-31)*

Gabriel, the same angel who appeared to Zechariah, appeared to Mary to tell her that she will conceive and give birth to the Messiah. Mary was young, poor and female, those characteristics in their time would make her most unlikely to be chosen for a great task. Yet God chose her to fulfill His word in Isaiah 7:14 *"All right then, the Lord himself will give you the sign. Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel (which means 'God is with us')"*

Again, this shows us how God chose not based on the worldly standards. He can use anyone that He desires to, regardless of the status, age and situations that the person is in. He can use you for His purpose.

Something to encourage you today

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*God's way of choosing the people to accomplish His great purpose was not based on this world's standard. He chose you simply because He chose you. He called you not because of what you can do but because of what He can do through you.*

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## Mary's response: Obedience

*And Mary said, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her. (Luke 1:38)*

Though at first, Mary was curious about how it would happen since she was a virgin, after Gabriel explained that the Holy Spirit would come on her so she would get pregnant, Mary then believed and obeyed.

It may seem like it was an easy task but to be pregnant at that time without a husband is punishable by **death**. And if she would tell the people that she was pregnant because of the Holy Spirit, she may risk being considered crazy. She could lose Joseph, the man that she would be marrying, as well. Imagine the risk that she would take yet she obeyed.

You see, the process between promise and its fulfillment might be hard and sometimes risky. May we all have the same faith as Mary has.



## Thoughts to ponder

- Mary was actually risking her life when she said yes to God, sometimes obeying God comes with trusting that He will be going to protect you, even in that possible death.
- What are the risk that you might be taking when you follow God? What are the things that you might going to lose? Are you willing to trust God on it?

## Who is Joseph?

*Joseph, to whom she was engaged, was a righteous man and did not want to disgrace her publicly, so he decided to break the engagement quietly. (Matthew 1:19)*

Matthew's gospel recorded who Joseph was. Maybe all we know about him is that he is Mary's betrothed (fiancée). But here, we can see that Joseph struggled too and he has taken his part of obedience in this story.

Joseph was a righteous man, meaning he is faithfully obeying God. Knowing that Mary was pregnant and knowing that he was not the father, gave Joseph two options: to divorce Mary quietly or to have her stoned to death. Because according to the Jewish civil law, Joseph has the right to divorce her, and the Jewish authorities could have had her stoned to death (*Deuteronomy 22:23-24*)

So here, we can see that what Joseph has to go through was not that easy. It takes faith and *humility* in his part to submit to God.

## Joseph Obeyed God

*As he considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. “Joseph, son of David,” the angel said, “do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. For the child within her was conceived by the Holy Spirit. And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” When Joseph woke up, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded and took Mary as his wife. But he did not have sexual relations with her until her son was born. And Joseph named him Jesus.*

*(Matthew 1:20-21, 24-25)*

Instead of allowing Joseph to struggle on his own, God showed up to Joseph’s dream and gave him the third and best option. First, the angel of the Lord confirmed that Mary has not been unfaithful to him and explained that the child within her was the Messiah.

Secondly, he was given a command to take Mary as her wife. Joseph, like Mary, believed and obeyed God. Not only that, he also honored Mary’s virginity until Jesus was born. He humbly obeyed God. He could’ve divorced Mary and not take part in the struggles that they have to go through, yet he willingly chose obedience.

What are the things that you needed to give up in order to obey God? What they did was an act of self-denial, and we are called to do the same thing for God and His purpose. That’s what being His follower means.

## The Birth of Jesus, The First Christmas

*She gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him snugly in strips of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no lodging available for them. (Luke 2:7)*



The Jews may have been expecting that the Messiah would have a grandeur entrance, in the nicest place and clothed in splendor. But the Savior of the world was laid in a manger (feeding through).

The first Christmas was far from perfect, it was very unlikely. However, may what happened on the first Christmas serves as a reminder that we serve a Humble yet powerful King.

The simplicity of the first Christmas does not make its message any less-- it's still the greatest plot twist in the history because for the first time, God became man and dwelt among us for our salvation.

Through Jesus' birth, God showed how much He is willing to save us from our sins and how far He would go just to reconcile us back to Him.

Don't cancel Christmas this year just because a pandemic happened. If we will celebrate it in the simplest way, be reminded that the first Christmas was simple too. Let our hearts focus on the message of Hope that it brings. **There's hope because there's Jesus.**

## PRAYER

Lord,

Thank You for making Christmas possible. May we never forget that the reason for Christmas is You providing our greatest need of salvation. May we never be too busy in this season that we forget about all the things that You have done. Lord, thank You for all the steps that You have taken just to meet us where we are.

Lord, may I have the same faith as Mary. Her willingness to obey You despite the risk that she may be having is so inspiring. I pray that I will have that same boldness in obedience. An obedience that is ready to take a great risk for Your purpose, trusting You in every step. May I also be as obedient as Joseph, humbly obeying You even though it would cost him his comfort.

Lord, You are indeed the Author of the whole story.

Amen

## The Shepherds



*“Off to one side sits a group of shepherds. They sit silently on the floor, perhaps perplexed, perhaps in awe, no doubt in amazement. Their night watch had been interrupted by an explosion of light from heaven and a symphony of angels. God goes to those who have time to hear Him—and so on this cloudless night he went to simple shepherds.” -Max Lucado*

## The Birth of Jesus Announced

*And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. (Luke 2:8-11)*

Like everything that happened from Mary, Joseph and the birth of Jesus-- which was very unlikely and it is something that the world would not be expecting God would do when He sends the Messiah to the world, but it didn't stop there. God chose the **Shepherds** to be the first people who will hear the good news!

During their time, the Shepherds were seen as rough, uncultured, untrustworthy fellows. Because of their poor credibility, shepherds weren't allowed to testify in court. Even though the Shepherds were needed at that time because the Jews needed the lambs for offerings, they were still considered as insignificant members of the society. The Shepherds never expected it yet it was God who chose them. It came to them without an effort.



Something to encourage you today

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*Do you feel insignificant?  
Rejected? Or have you  
ever felt that you are  
unimportant?*

*Remember that God sees  
you!*

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## GRACE, GRACE!

*And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. (Luke 2:9)*

God's grace was also very evident in the lives of the Shepherd because when the good news about Jesus came to them, it was just all of the *sudden*. They did not expect it, they did nothing to earn that great privilege to be the first people to know about Jesus and it was God who initiated all of it!

And that's exactly what grace is, it is something that we can't ever deserve, nor can be earned. It is also God who initiated it, before we even utter that we repent, God has already taken a step towards us.

*For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9)*

## Praise

*And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!” (Luke 2:13-14)*

Right after the angel gave the good news to the shepherds, the heavenly hosts cannot contain the joy they burst into song! The armies of heaven can't help but rejoice.

Finally, the fulfillment of God's long awaited promise has come and heaven has been anticipating that day as much as the people of God do. And this is the essence of Christmas even today. To rejoice and be glad. To sing for joy because the promise was fulfilled.

Today, be reminded that the greatest gift we can ever receive has arrived. And the rightful response to it was PRAISE.

## The good news that is worth sharing!

*After seeing Him, the shepherds told everyone what had happened and what the angel had said to them about this child. All who heard the shepherds' story were astonished, but Mary kept all these things in her heart and thought about them often. (Luke 2:17-19)*

Remember that the shepherds were so disregarded by the society, they were not even allowed to testify in the court because of their poor credibility. Yet after seeing Jesus, the shepherd told everyone about it. And people *believed* them.

The good news is never meant to be kept.

We may find excuses not to do it because we see our weaknesses. Maybe not being a good speaker discouraged you from sharing the good news about Jesus, maybe it was your age or maybe it was because of the fear of being rejected. But remember, like what God did to the Shepherds, it was never about the messenger-- it is about the Message, Jesus Christ.


## Thoughts to ponder

- Christmas is the perfect season to share the good news about Jesus, may we have the boldness and courage to share this to the people that we love.
- The good news is this: Jesus came to give us life. He became like us-- human. He lived a perfect life we should have lived but we can't. He died the death we should have died, He died to pay the price that we cannot afford. He resurrected and proved that He is the Son of God. Today, we can choose to fully surrender to Him and repent from our old ways.

*Thank you for reading this! If you have been blessed and learned something from this, don't forget to share this to someone.*

*God bless you!*

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