

HEARING THE WORD



NIGEL BARGE

Luke 1¹ – 2²⁰
Leader's Guide

Hearing the Word Luke 1:1 – 2:20 Leader's Guide

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Nigel Barge, December 2011

Scripture Quotations taken from THE HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION
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Resources

The *New Bible Dictionary* 3rd edition, published by Inter Varsity Press
The *New Bible Commentary* 21st century edition. A commentary on every Bible book, IVP
www.blueletterbible.org

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LEARN – What does it *mean*?

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- 1) What does it show about God,
(Father, Son, Holy Spirit) :
 - a) His nature and character?
 - b) His grace*
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- 2) What should I do?

* God's undeserved generosity is evident throughout the Bible, and it is perfectly expressed in Jesus.

** The Bible, from 'the fall' onwards, describes God's plan of salvation through his Son. Thus, *all* the Scriptures speak in some way of Jesus (Luke 24:27).

Reading Narrative

In seeking to hear the Word of God throughout the Bible, we need to take into account the *type of literature* in which each part is written. Exodus is mainly narrative (story), the most common type. To approach narrative correctly we need to keep in mind the following principles.

1 In General: It is *God's story*

The whole Bible recounts the story of God's dealings with humankind. After creation and the fall in Genesis, the rest describes how God works out his unfolding plan of salvation for humanity in Jesus. The OT prepares for the arrival, life, death and resurrection of Jesus. The NT recounts these and looks forwards to his return at the end of time. It is *all* about Jesus. Therefore:

a) Every part relates to Him (Luke 24:27; John 5:39).

So as we read, we should be asking – ‘what does this show about Jesus; what is He doing?’

b) Everything is relevant.

In a film every scene plays some part in the overall story. Often we are shown things in the early stages that make no sense until later. The Bible is the same. So as we read Bible narrative – knowing how it ends – we should be asking ‘what relevance has *this* part of the story to the *main* story?’

2 In particular: ‘Follow the camera angle’

A film director focuses the viewer's attention on particular shots to tell ‘his story’. In the same way each narrator in the Bible is selective about what to tell us. They leave out much general detail, only giving us what is relevant to what they are trying to convey.

As we read we should therefore be asking the question, ‘Why is he telling me this and in this particular way?’

3 Warts and all

Human beings often get things wrong. The Bible narrative faithfully records errors, even by people who are elsewhere commended. For instance, Moses murdered a man, King David committed adultery, and Peter, who was praised for realising Jesus was the Christ, was minutes later roundly scolded when he tried to stop Jesus being the Christ through suffering! (Exodus 2:12; 2 Samuel 11; Matthew 16:16-23)

So we can't treat every thought or action in a narrative as something to copy, just because ‘it's in the Bible’. We must ask the Holy Spirit to use the rest of Scripture to discern good examples to follow, and bad ones to avoid.

Background to Luke's Gospel

The Author

Luke was a doctor and friend of the apostle Paul, who calls him 'the beloved physician' and 'fellow worker' (Colossians 4:14; Philemon 1:24). He began to travel with Paul at Troas (Acts 16:10). He was close to Paul near the end of his life (2 Timothy 4:11).

He may have come from Antioch in Syria, or Troas, or Philippi in Macedonia. He was a Gentile (i.e. not a Jew). Indeed he is the only non-Jewish writer in the New Testament.

He had carried out careful research (see Luke 1:3; 2:51). He also wrote the story of the early church in the 5th book of the New Testament, whose full title is: 'The Acts of the Apostles'. It takes us up to Paul's imprisonment in Rome but not his trial, suggesting Luke finished writing it before that event

The Date of writing

Luke wrote his gospel before he wrote Acts (see Acts 1:1), probably before 63AD.

The structure

A	The introduction	(1: 1 - 4)
B	The birth of Jesus	(1:5 - 2:52)
C	The start of Jesus' ministry	(3:1 - 4:13)
D	Jesus in Galilee	(4:14 - 9:50)
E	From Galilee to Jerusalem	(9:51 - 19:44)
F	Jesus in Jerusalem	(19:45 – 21:38)
G	The death of Jesus	(22:1 – 23:56)
H	The resurrection of Jesus	(24:1 - 53)

Its purpose

Matthew and Mark probably wrote their gospels before Luke. Unlike them Luke had not himself witnessed Jesus' birth, life, death and resurrection, but he had personal contact with many eyewitnesses who had. He addresses both his Gospel and Acts to someone called Theophilus. This may have been a real individual: could he have been an official in Roman government?... Someone who wanted details of Christianity before Paul's trial in Rome?... Someone who paid Luke's expenses while writing? Actually, the name means, 'friend of God', so it might refer to anyone, in any time or place, who *wanted to know the Gospel and be a friend of God*.

The Themes

Five themes keep re-occurring in Luke's Gospel:

1 Salvation

- a) a historical event

Jesus Christ's coming to earth as a man is the centre point of history. Luke points out the exact time and situation of Jesus' birth. (Luke 2). Jesus sets his face towards Jerusalem (9:51) where he completes his work, commits his Spirit to the Father, and dies (23:46). On the third day he rises from death. Forty days later, having promised to return, he ascends to heaven (Acts 1:9-11). Meantime, the Good News of this salvation is offered to all by the power of the Spirit (Acts 2:38,39).

- b) for all mankind

From the announcement by the angels of 'good news ... for all people' (2:10) to the genealogy of Jesus stretching back to Adam (3:38), it is clear the non-Jews are included too. This does not deny the importance of Israel. Luke begins and ends his Gospel with people in Jerusalem and shows it to be the ultimate destination of Jesus' earthly ministry (1:8; 2:22,36; 9:51-53; 13:22; 17:11; 18:31; 19:28).

2 The 'outsiders'

Luke shows that people seen as 'weak' are equally welcome in the Kingdom of God, by recording Jesus' interaction with them. This includes:

- a) Women

Women are central to the story. At the beginning, the angelic announcement of His birth was to Mary (1:26-38) and at end, the truth of His resurrection was given first to the women at the tomb (24:1-11). He ministered to women in various settings (7:11, 37; 13:11; 21:1-4) and it was women who helped finance Him and His apostles (8:2-3).

- b) Children

The accounts of Jesus' birth show the importance and value of a child, even from the womb (1:41)! At various times he intervenes to heal the child of a distraught parent (7:12; 8:42; 9:38)

- c) The poor

Jesus himself was from Nazareth (4:16) – a poor, insignificant town (John 1:46). His birth was to an unmarried girl and witnessed by the 'outcasts' of society: the shepherds (2:8-20). The offering at His birth was that of the poor (2:24; Leviticus 12:8) and the message he preached was for the poor (4:18; 7:22). He died with common criminals (23:32,41).

d) Gentiles

Luke, himself a Gentile, is writing to another Gentile, Theophilus (1:3). He records the faith of a Gentile Roman Centurion: Jesus says he had ‘not found such great faith in Israel’ (7:9). Possibly out of deference to his non-Jewish readership, Luke seldom quotes the Old Testament.

3 The Holy Spirit

The ministry of the Holy Spirit is explicit throughout the Gospel, in:

- a)** the birth of John the Baptist (1:15,41,57)
- b)** the conception of Jesus (1:35)
- c)** the prophecy about Jesus by Simeon (2:25-27)
- d)** John’s promise that Jesus would ‘baptise with the Holy Spirit’ (3:16)
- e)** the baptism of Jesus (3:22)
- f)** the temptations of Jesus (4:1)
- g)** the power of Jesus’ ministry (4:18)
- h)** the joy of the Spirit (10:21)
- i)** the promise of the Spirit for His followers (11:13; 12:10-12; 24:49).

This promise was fulfilled at Pentecost, as Luke records in Acts 2.

4 The humanity of Jesus

There is no clearer way of demonstrating Jesus’ humanity than noting his recourse to prayer. Through this he shows:

- a) his own dependence on the Father through prayer (3:21; 5:16; 6:12; 9:18, 28, 29; 10:21; 11:1; 22:39-46; 23:34, 46).
- b) his identification with his disciples, as He similarly instructs them in prayer through
 - i) parables - the friend at midnight (11:5-13) the unjust judge (18:1-8); the Pharisee and the tax collector (18:10-14)
 - ii) teaching on prayer (6:28; 11:2; 22:40, 46)

5 The deity of Jesus

Luke presents Jesus as God in an *oblique* way. This fact was not acknowledged at that time. This is the key theme of the first 5 chapters:

- 1:17 John prepares for the Lord
- 1:32 called Son of the Most High
- 1:43 Mary mother of ‘my Lord’
- 2:11 Saviour who is Christ the Lord
- 2:49 in ‘His Father’s house’
- 3:22 God says ‘you are my Son’;
- 4:34 The Holy one of God

- 4:41 the Son of God
- 5:8 the Holy presence
- 5:13 able to cleanse an individual
- 5:20 a forgiver of sin
- 5:32 (righteous one) calling sinners to repentance
- 5:34 the bridegroom

The purpose of writing

Background and Word list

Luke carefully sets out how, why, and for whom he is writing this account.

3	<i>Theophilus</i>	An individual, or from the Greek ‘a lover of God’ <i>see</i> p3
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Bible connections

2	‘The Word’	A title of Jesus (John 1:1)
3	most excellent	Denotes a person of rank (<i>cf</i> Acts 23:26; 24:3; 26:25)
	Theophilus	The recipient of this Gospel, and the follow up letter – the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 1:1)
4	know	‘Certainty’ of faith (Hebrews 11:6)
	taught	Instructed in the faith (<i>cf</i> Acts 18:25, 1 Corinthians 14:19)

LOOK

1) The Text

What questions does the passage raise?

- 1 *Who has undertaken to draw up an account of these things?*
What has been surely fulfilled / surely believed?
- 2 *What does 'handed down to us' imply about Luke.*
Who were 'the first eyewitnesses'?
Who were the 'servants of the word'?
- 3 *What is it the 'beginning' of?*
Why did it seem good to Luke?
What is an 'orderly account'
- 4 *Why does he 'ingratiate' himself with Theophilus*
Why should this 'make him certain'?
What are the things he has been taught?

What surprises or confuses you?

Why, if there are many accounts, does he feel that he should write another one?

2) The Context

What other parts of the Bible - surrounding text, individual book, whole Bible, or Bible story - might help you understand this passage?

- a) The surrounding passages
- b) The book
- c) The whole Bible

- 1 *In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and teach.... (Acts 1:1)*
The reason for writing (John 20:31)
A synopsis of the Gospel (1 Tim 3:16)
- 2 *from the beginning (John 15:27)*
- 3 *those who 'loved him' / received him gave he the right to be children of God (John 1:12)*
- 4 *certainty in faith (Hebrews 11:6)*

d) Bible story

God and humanity have been separated by sin.

God's requirements of the Law have been given but not met.

God's solution is about to happen as He sends His Son, Jesus.

LEARN

1) How do you answer the questions that the passage raises?

I There were many accounts that were not included in the documents that were in circulation at that time.

The prophecies about the Messiah have now been fulfilled (Luke 2:11; 24:46).

2 *Luke himself is a believer but not a witness. The apostles were 'the first eyewitnesses' – those who were with Him (Mark 3:14).*

The 'servants of the word' were the 'sowers' (?) (Luke 8:5,11)

3 *The 'beginning' is the coming of the Christ so he starts with his forerunner, John the Baptist (1:5ff)*

It seemed good to him as he had the ability (doctor) and the apostolic access (as a travelling companion of Paul - Acts 16:10)

An orderly account infers it is clinical and exhaustive.

4 *It is a standard greeting for one in authority (Acts 23:26).*

He is disposed to believe and now he has the evidence.

He has been taught the facts of the good news of Jesus.

2) How do you resolve issues that surprised or confused you?

Luke believes Theophilus will trust his judgment, amidst all the claims, rumours etc.

3) Give an overall 'picture' of the passage in a few sentences.

Many eye witnesses and His servants have written of Jesus' life among us. So I have carefully put them together so that you, Theophilus, might know the truth (1-4).

LISTEN

1) What is the lesson or the main point?

There is a rational, factual basis for those who love God to have faith in Jesus.

2) Which verse best sums up the passage's message? **v 3b,4**

'It seemed good to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught' (3b,4).

LIVE

1) What does the passage say about God (Father, Son, or Holy Spirit)?

a) His nature and character

3 God uses human agencies to reveal Himself.

4 God reveals Himself based on historical truth.

b) His grace

3 God reveals Himself to those who 'love him' (i.e. to Theophilus 'lover of God').

4 God gave us His written Word to enable us to have faith.

c) Jesus and his salvation

2 Jesus' followers are servant of the Word.

Now underline the application of the Main Point.

2) What should I do?

2 Base your faith in Jesus on the testimony of eyewitnesses.

3 Work hard to carefully establish the facts about Jesus.

Share these facts with others.

4 Seek certainty about the Gospel of Jesus.

Now underline the application of the Main Point.

The birth of John the Baptist foretold

Background

Luke begins with the announcement of the birth of the ‘forerunner’, the person foretold by Isaiah (40:3) who would ‘prepare the way for the Lord’.

Word List 5

	<i>Herod</i>	The NT names five people called Herod. This one was ‘Herod the Great’, born c.73 BC. His father, Antipater (appointed procurator of Judea by Julius Caesar in 47 BC) made his son (this Herod) military prefect of Galilee.
5	<i>king of the Jews</i>	Title given to Herod by Roman senate. After three years fighting, he governed Judea for 33 years, 40BC to 4BC. He had killed relatives who might claim his throne.
5	<i>Zechariah</i>	A priest, from the Jewish tribe of Levi, or a ‘Levite’. His name means ‘The Lord has remembered’
5	<i>priestly division of Abijah</i>	priests were divided into 24 divisions; each division served in the Temple in Jerusalem for one week, twice a year. (1 Chronicles 24:1-19)
5	<i>Elizabeth</i>	Means ‘God is my oath’; i.e. God is utterly reliable. Like her husband, she is a Levite.
5	<i>Aaron</i>	He was the first priest appointed after the Exodus from Egypt. He and his brother Moses were Levites.
9	<i>incense</i>	A costly substance, burned by a priest on the Incense Altar in the Temple for its aromatic odour. He could do only once in his lifetime. It was a symbol of prayers offered ‘up’ to God for the salvation and peace of Israel.
	<i>lot</i>	A means used to discern God’s will.
11	<i>angel</i>	Word means ‘messenger’ see also v 19
17	<i>Elijah</i>	An important prophet in the Old Testament
19	<i>Gabriel</i>	The Hebrew means ‘man of God’, ‘strength of God’.
22	<i>not speak</i>	The Greek word ‘ <i>kophos</i> ’ can mean dumb and deaf.

Bible Connections

9	<i>burn incense</i>	<i>see Exodus 30:7-8</i>
15	<i>avoiding wine</i>	<i>see Nazirite vows, Numbers 6:1-4</i>
17	<i>Elijah</i>	<i>(1 Kings 17 to 2 Kings 2) see Malachi 4:5</i>
	<i>make ready...</i>	<i>see Matthew 3:3</i>
	<i>The Lord’s coming</i>	<i>see Isaiah 40:1-5; 64:1-12</i>
19	<i>Gabriel</i>	<i>see Daniel 8:16; 9:21</i>
25	<i>the disgrace / ‘curse’ of infertility</i>	<i>see Deuteronomy 7:14; Psalm 113:9</i>

LOOK

1 The Text

What questions does the passage raise?

- 7 *Why the ‘but’ - (upright but... barren)?*
 Why did God choose a couple who were old and barren?
- 9 *What is the importance of choosing him ‘by lot’?*
- 10 *What were they praying for?*
- 11 *Why did the angel appear at the altar of incense?*
- 12 *Why was he afraid?*
- 13 *What was his prayer?*
 What does ‘John’ mean?
- 15 *What does ‘filled with the Holy Spirit even from birth’ mean?*
- 16 *Where had the people of Israel been?*
- 18 *What would have made him sure?*
- 19 *Who was Gabriel?*
- 20 *Why was Zechariah struck dumb?*
 What part of the angel’s words did he not believe?
- 23 *Why did he wait till his time of service was complete?*
- 25 *What was her disgrace?*
 Why was almost half the story taken up with the preparations?

What surprises or confuses you?

Why so much time and detail over the birth of just the messenger?

2 The Context

What other parts of the Bible might help you understand this passage?

a) Surrounding passage

- 19 *Gabriel spoke to Mary too (1:26).*
- 18 *Mary also questioned the word (1:34).*

b) The book

- 17 *Prepare the way for the Lord (1:76; 3:1-20).*

c) The whole Bible

- 7 *Also barren were Sarah (Genesis 16:1; 18:11), Samson’s mother (Judges 13:3) and Hannah (1 Samuel 1:2).*
- 25 *Removing disgrace (Psalm 3:3).*

d) The Bible story

See study 1

LEARN

1) How do you answer the questions that the passage raises?

7 *They were upright, so people assumed God should have blessed them with children. To have none was regarded not as a medical issue, but a disgrace (v25).*

God chose the situation to mark out John as special.

9 *The lot fell as God determined. Therefore it was his choice.*

10 *They were praying for the Lord / the Messiah to come.*

11 *Incense represented prayers. Angel was an answer to prayer?*

12 *He didn't expect an encounter with God!*

13 *His prayer (either just then, or in the long-forgotten past), was presumably for a child (v13); possibly also for God to make the people ready for the Messiah to come (v17).*

'John' means 'God is gracious'.

15 *God will be empowering and guiding him by His Holy Spirit.*

16 *They were rebellious and so spiritually 'away' from God?*

18 *Nothing, if an angel speaking God's Word didn't make him sure.*

19 *Gabriel was an 'angel of the Lord' (Gen 16:7, 21:17, 22:11, 31:11, 13; Ex 3:2, Judges 6:11). One of only two angels the Bible names. (The other is Michael, see Daniel 8:16, 9:21.) Gabriel's phrase, 'I stand in the presence of God', is used in non-Biblical Jewish writing about 'Archangels'. New Bible Dictionary lists the functions of angels.*

20 *Zechariah was struck dumb because of his lack of faith. He doubted God would give them a son, let alone the 'Elijah' bit too.*

23 *It was his duty / commitment.*

25 *Her disgrace was her childlessness.*

2) How do you resolve issues that surprised or confused you?

Luke wanted to show the context of Jesus' birth, the continuity with the Old Testament. He also wanted to demonstrate the need for faith from the start.

3) Give an overall ‘picture’ of the passage in a few sentences.

Zechariah, upright but childless, was chosen by the Lord to have a son who would prepare the way for His coming. His faithless response to the angel’s announcement rendered him unable to speak. This was in contrast to his wife’s response of believing praise.

LISTEN

What is the main point of the passage?

God expects a faithful response to the news of the coming of Jesus.

Which verse best expresses this? v 20

‘And now you will be silent and not able to speak until the day this happens, because you did not believe my words, which will come true at their proper time.’

LIVE

1) What does the passage say about God (Father, Son, or Holy Spirit)?

a) His nature and character

15 *God may be ‘in’ and ‘upon’ a child from birth.*

16 *God fulfils promises.*

20 *God judges/punishes unbelief.*

God’s Words all come true at his appointed time.

b) His grace

13 *God answers prayer, even old, forgotten ones.*

20 *God didn’t give up on Zechariah despite his initial unbelief.*

25 *God removed Elizabeth’s disgrace.*

c) Jesus and his salvation

17 *God appeared in Jesus to save His people from their sin.*

Now underline the application of the Main Point.

2) What should I do?

- 6 Aim to be 'upright in the Lord's sight'.
- 9 Trust God to order the 'lot'.
- 12 Note – Fear is a sign of lack of faith.
- 18 Listen to God's Word, and do not look at your 'wrinkles'!
- 20 Trust God's promises to be fulfilled in His time.
- 25 Praise God for His favour to you.

Now underline the application of the Main Point.

The Birth of Jesus foretold

Background

In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy Gabriel appears to Mary, who was betrothed to Joseph, and tells her that while she is a virgin, the Holy Spirit will come upon her and she will be with child. This holy child will be called the Son of God.

Word List

26 *Nazareth* An obscure village in Lower Galilee, 25 miles west of south end of Sea of Galilee. It was *small* (about four extended families) and *primitive* (some even lived in caves), in a high valley, 370m above sea-level in a mountainous area.

27 *virgin* A woman who has never had sexual intercourse
pledged to be married = betrothed, engaged. This was almost as binding as marriage itself, and lasted for a year.

28 *David* Second King of Israel

28 *greetings* Greek literally means, 'Rejoice'. A normal way of addressing someone, still used in country areas of Greece, like us saying 'Hello'. i.e. the word itself does not imply reverence.

31 *Jesus* Greek form of Hebrew name *Joshua*, meaning, *the Lord saves*.

35 *son of* At that time, Hebrew understanding was that the foetus was implanted entirely by the male.

38 *servant* Greek *doule*, literally, slave girl; implies full obedience.

Bible Connections

26 *Nazareth. Can anything good come from there?* see John 1:46

28 *Angel speaks to Joseph after he discovered Mary was pregnant.* Matthew 1:18ff

30 *Jesus – because he will save his people from their sins* Matthew 1:2

31 *give birth to a son* see Isaiah 7:14

32,33 *throne of his father David. i.e. Messiah is of David's line.* 2 Sam 7:12ff; Ps 89:29

37 *nothing impossible* see Genesis 8:14; Job 42:2; Jeremiah 32:17

LOOK

1 The Text

What questions does the passage raise?

26 *Why the sixth month?*
Why specify where Nazareth was?

28 *Why did the Angel go to Mary, not Joseph (c.f. Zechariah)?*
What was the purpose of the greeting, i.e. the whole verse?

29 *Why was Mary troubled by his words?*

30 *How had she found favour with God?*

32 *What does 'Son of the Most High' mean?*

34 *What did Mary wish to know?*

35 *What does 'come upon' and 'overshadow' imply?*

36 *Why does he tell her about Elizabeth?*

What surprises or confuses you?

Why was it all right for Mary to question, but not Zechariah ? (1:18)

Why were all the different names of God used? – God (26); the Lord (28); The Most High (32,35); The Lord God (32)?

2 The Context

What other parts of the Bible might help you understand this passage?

a) The surrounding text

34 *Zechariah was rebuked for a question (1:20).*

36 *Mary visited her relative Elizabeth after she had been told (1:39).*

b) The book

32 *Jesus spoke of God as His Father (2:49).*

c) The whole Bible

28 *The Lord is with you (Judges 6:12).*
Unworthiness in presence of God (Isaiah 6:5; Luke 7:7).

30 *Without faith it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6).*

35 *Overshadow/Cover – Sexual connotations? (Ezekiel 16:8; Ruth 3:9).*

38 *Submission to the will of God, though perplexed (John 6:18-21);*

d) The Bible Story

See study 1.

LEARN

1) How do you answer the questions that the passage raises?

26 *Elizabeth was now out of seclusion so Mary could go and see her.*

It was a little known, very insignificant place.

28 *The Angel went to Mary first because Joseph was not involved in the conception of the child.*

The purpose of v28 was to intimate that God was going to use her to fulfil his purposes.

Mary was troubled by the awareness of her sin / inadequacy.

30 *She could only have found favour with God by faith .*

32 *'Son of the Most High' = Son of God.*

34 *She was asking how God was going to achieve it.*

35 *It implies that God himself will be the Father.*

36 *News of Elizabeth's pregnancy helps to confirm Mary's faith.*

2) How do you resolve issues that surprised or confused you?

Mary's questioning was from within faith – i.e. "I believe. How are you going to achieve it?" Whereas Zechariah's was from outside faith – "I don't believe ... prove it."

All the different names of God were used to emphasise this was the one, all-powerful, all-encompassing, Creator God.

3) Give an overall 'picture' of the passage in a few sentences.

In contrast to Zechariah, Mary is a young girl of humble origins. She faithfully receives the angel's news that God will give her a child though she is a virgin, and that he will be the Son of God, the awaited king. With the reassurance that God's power could cause even Elizabeth to fall pregnant, Mary totally submits to the will of God.

LISTEN

What is the main point of the passage?

God can do anything He wants to do!

Which verse best expresses this? v 37

'For nothing is impossible with God'.

LIVE

1) What does the passage show you about God (Father, Son, or Holy Spirit)?

a) His nature and character

26 *God can and does speak to people.*

28 *God highly favours people with His presence.*

37 *God is all powerful / nothing is impossible for God.*

(26-38 includes all three persons of the Trinity, Father/Son/Holy Spirit).

b) His Grace

28 *God favoured the poor and lowly.*

36 *God gave the sign of Elizabeth to Mary to encourage her faith.*

c) Jesus and His salvation

26 *Jesus is humble and chose Nazareth not Jerusalem.*

35 *Jesus is divine, God's Son, but also human, born of a woman.*

(Nb *The child to be born was Jesus -The Saviour, King, Son of God.*)

Now underline the application of the Main Point.

2) What should I do?

26 *Note - God deploys angels as his messengers.*

28 *Note - God may be 'with' people even if they are unaware of it.*

34 *Note You may question the Lord, so long as you receive His Word.*

32 *Believe that Jesus is God the Son.*

37 *Do not say anything is impossible to God.*

38 *Submit to God's Word, faithfully and humbly.*

Now underline the application of the Main Point.

Mary visits Elizabeth; Mary's song

Background

Mary travels (over 70 miles south) to the 'hill country of Judea' (exact location is uncertain, roughly west of Jerusalem) to visit Elizabeth who has a wonderful recognition of who Mary's baby is. Mary's song is saturated with Old Testament references. It is often referred to as 'The Magnificat' (from the first word in the Latin translation)

The verbs in v51-55 are aorist tenses in the Greek, *i.e.* they refer to specific occasions in the past or, in a spirit of prophecy, looking forward to what God will do as if it has already happened. (The Old Testament prophets often used this style of speaking.)

Word List 42 *blessed* Happy. In the NT, this has a strong spiritual element.

45	<i>that what...</i>	Greek is ambiguous; may be better to translate: <i>Blessed is she who has believed, for what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished.</i> '
49	<i>Mighty One</i>	A name for God
	<i>name</i>	One's name stands for the whole person
54	<i>Israel</i>	The extra name God gave to Jacob, which came to be used for the nation descended from his twelve sons.
55	<i>Abraham</i>	God promised to make him a great nation

Bible Connections

There are *many* references to the Psalms! For example

43	Psalm 110:1
46	Psalm 34:2-3
47	Psalm 18:46; and Isaiah 61:10; Habakkuk 3:18
48	Psalm 137:6 and Luke 11:27-28
49	Psalm 71:19; 111:9
50	Psalm 103:17 and Exodus 20:6
51-52	Psalm 98:1; Psalm 18:27
53	Psalm 107:9
54	Psalm 98:3

LOOK

1 The Text

What questions does the passage raise?

- 39 *What did she need to 'get ready'? Why did she hurry?*
- 40 *What was Mary's greeting?*
- 41 *Why did Elizabeth 'hear' but the baby 'leapt'?
What did 'filled with the Spirit' mean?
Why did she speak 'in a loud voice'?*
- 42 *Why is nothing said about Elizabeth's baby?*
- 43 *Who was Elizabeth speaking of when she said, 'My Lord'?
How did she know who the baby was?*
- 45 *What had the Lord said to Mary?*
- 47 *What had he 'saved' Mary from?*
- 48 *How had God been mindful of her?*
- 49 *What great things?*
- 51 *When did these things happen? What mighty deeds?
How were the proud scattered?*
- 52 *What rulers were brought down?*
- 53 *How were the hungry filled?*
- 54 *How had he been merciful to Abraham and descendants?*
- 56 *Why 'for about three months'?*

What surprises or confuses you?

How did Elizabeth know about Mary?

Did John in the womb recognise Mary's voice?

How did Mary know these Psalms (listed on p15) & why so many of them?

Who heard/recording Mary's Song for Luke?

2 The Context

What other parts of the Bible might help you understand this passage?

a) The surrounding text

39-41 Angel greeting Mary

Luke 1:28, 29

b) The book

41 John filled with the Holy Spirit from birth Luke 1:15

43 *Holy Spirit and speaking truth* *Luke 12:12; John 16:12-15;*
 43 *Elizabeth – Mary's child is 'my Lord'* *Luke 1:46*

c) Whole Bible

41	<i>John's adult recognition of Jesus as Messiah</i>	<i>John 1:32</i>
45	<i>Blessing through faith of Abraham</i>	<i>Gen 12:2,3; Romans 4:16ff</i>
46	<i>Hannah's song</i>	<i>1 Samuel 2:1-10</i>
	<i>Rejoice in the Lord always</i>	<i>Philippians 4:4</i>
	<i>Glorious and inexpressible joy</i>	<i>1 Peter 1:8</i>
	<i>Declaring the wonders of God</i>	<i>Acts 2:4,11</i>
47	<i>God my Saviour</i>	<i>Matthew 1:21</i>
50	<i>God is merciful in Jesus</i>	<i>Romans 12:1; Eph 2:4; 1 Pet 1:3</i>
51	<i>Faith for that not yet seen</i>	<i>Mark 11:24; Hebrews 11:1</i>
	<i>Jesus' mighty deeds</i>	<i>Luke 4:18, 19</i>
52	<i>Jesus disarmed powers and authorities</i>	<i>Colossians 2:15</i>
53	<i>Jesus is the bread of life</i>	<i>John 6:30-35</i>

d) The Bible Story

See study 1.

LEARN

- 1) How do you answer the questions that the passage raises?
- 39 *Packing clothing / food for journey. She wasn't running away; she was excited, eager to see Elizabeth's miracle pregnancy.*
- 40 *We don't know - Luke doesn't tell us.*
- 41 *In the only way an unborn baby could, John ('filled with the Holy Spirit from birth' v15) responded by 'leaping', i.e. a sudden kick.*
God came upon her / took control of her.
She was making a public declaration.
- 42 *He was just the supporting act. Mary's baby was 'the Lord'.*
- 43 *'My Lord' was the Messiah (Ps 110:1) but also God.*
The Holy Spirit revealed him.
- 45 *Her child would be the Messiah, the Son of God.*
- 47 *'Saviour' = quote from Psalms; saved from evil; from sins.*
- 48 *He had chosen her from obscurity.*
- 49 *He had conceived a son in her.*

51 God worked in the past but Mary is by faith also speaking of all that Jesus will yet do in his ministry.

Mighty deeds in the past - e.g. exodus from Egypt.

The enemies of Israel were defeated.

How do you resolve issues that surprised or confused you?

The Spirit of God spoke through Mary enabling her to quote the Psalms and through Elizabeth, telling her things she could not have known.

The Spirit enabled someone to commit it to memory and pass it on – possibly Elizabeth, Zechariah or Mary herself.

Give an overall ‘picture’ of the passage in a few sentences.

Mary’s visit to Elizabeth confirmed her faith in the Word of God.

By the Holy Spirit, Elizabeth and her unborn baby acknowledged the baby conceived in Mary to be ‘The Lord’.

Mary, in response to the blessing received, and in faith, praised God for the privilege of bearing His Son and for the salvation He will bring.

LISTEN

What is the main point of the passage?

The blessing of the Saviour, Jesus, is revealed by the Spirit and received through faith with joy.

Which verse best expresses this? **V 45.**

‘Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished.’

LIVE

1) What does the passage show you about God (Father, Son, or Holy Spirit)?

a) His Nature and Character

41 God fills people with His Spirit

43 The Spirit reveals God’s presence in others.

45 God speaks, faith is engendered and His Will is done.

b) His Grace

41-45 *The testimony of Elizabeth, by Holy Spirit, is given to Mary before Mary has had time to explain or even speak.*

43 *God's 'favour' amazes Elizabeth.*

God gave Mary 'great things' even though she was humble .

c) Jesus and His salvation

47 *'God my Saviour' is Jesus*

Now underline the application of the Main Point

2) What should I do?

41 *Note - At six months a baby can be aware – physically and spiritually.*

42 *Seek the Holy Spirit.*

Speak blessings out publicly.

Acknowledge that Mary is blessed.

43 *Be aware - The Holy Spirit reveals the presence of Jesus even if there is no visible 'sign' of him.*

44 *Note - A baby may respond to the Lord joyfully.*

45 *Receive faith as a blessed gift from the Word of God.*

46 *Let faith, whatever the circumstances, brings joyful praise.*

48 *Note - The most blessed are the most humble and faithful.*

50 *Fear God and receive mercy.*

51 *Note - Faith may speak in the present, of the future as the past!*

52f *Seek God /express your need – he exalts the humble and feeds the hungry.*

56 *Obey God's timing.*

Now underline the application of the Main Point

John's birth; Zechariah's song

Background

Elizabeth's baby is born, and on the eighth day is circumcised (Genesis 17:12; Leviticus 12:3). It was not customary for relatives to name a child, nor inevitable that he should be named after his father. When Zechariah confirms that the name is 'John', his speech is immediately restored, enabling his outburst of praise to God. His song is often known as 'The Benedictus', from its first word in Latin.

Word List

59	<i>circumcise</i>	Remove foreskin from penis surgically
63	<i>writing tablet</i>	A board covered with wax, i.e. re-usable
	<i>John</i>	Means 'Yahweh's gift' or 'God is gracious'
67	<i>prophesied</i>	Spoke God's revelation
68	<i>redeemed</i>	Saved at a cost, rescued at a high price
69	<i>horn</i>	Symbol of strength. translated: 'he has raised up a <i>strong</i> salvation for us'.
	<i>house of his servant David</i>	i.e. speaking of the Messiah
72	<i>covenant</i>	Binding promise between God and his people
73	<i>oath</i>	significant part of any covenant; binding promise.
76	<i>Most High</i>	Name for God
78	<i>mercy</i>	Compassion

Bible Connections

59	<i>circumcision</i>	<i>see Genesis 17:9-14</i>
67	<i>praise be to the Lord</i>	Common way to introduce a thanksgiving <i>see Psalm 41:13; 72:18; 106:48</i>
	<i>Old Testament Covenants: especially with Abraham</i>	<i>see Genesis 12:2; 15:4-6; 17:17-19.</i>

LOOK

1 The Text

What questions does the passage raise?

57 *Why was Mary not there?*

58 *What exactly did they hear from whom?*

59 *Who is the ‘they’ who were about to do the naming?*

60 *How did she know his name was John?*

62 *Why signs – was he deaf as well? (c.f. 20)*

63 *Why were they astonished?*

64 *Why was he praising God?*

65-66 *Why the gap – was the song (67-79) not his praise of God?*

65 *Why were they filled with awe?*

66 *How did they know the Lord’s hand was with him?*

67 *Why ‘his father’ –which other Zechariah could it have been?*

68f *Why in the past tense?*

68 – 75 *Why does he not start by talking about his own son?*

80 *What does ‘strong in spirit’ mean? Why desert? From what age?*

What surprises or confuses you?

Why were they so ‘astonished’ – the name or the fact that he spoke?

2 The Context

What other parts of the Bible might help you understand this passage?

a) The surrounding text

57 *There was a ‘proper time’ for the child to be born (1:20).*

At the time of the birth, Mary had returned home (1:24,56).

69,71,77 *Like Mary, Zechariah praised God for the Saviour (1:47).*

80 *John was filled with the spirit from birth (1:15)*

b) The book

77 *John and the forgiveness of sins (3:3)*

80 *Jesus grew in wisdom/stature/in favour with God & men (2:52)*

c) The whole Bible

57 *To everything a time and a season (Ecclesiastes 3:1)*

64/67	Tongues released to praise God	(Acts 2:4,11)
69	Faith is the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen	(Hebrews 11:1; c.f. Mark 11:24)
69	David's house	(2 Samuel 7:16)
71	Our enemies	(Ephesians 6:12)
72	God is merciful	(Deuteronomy 4:31)
74	Serve God whole-heartedly	(Deuteronomy 11:13)
	Without fear	(2 Timothy 1:7; Psalm 23:4)
79	Light and darkness	(Isaiah 9:2; 60:1)
	Peace	(Isaiah 9:6; John 20:21)

d) The Bible Story
See study 1.

LEARN

- 1) How do you answer the questions that the passage raises?

57 *Mary must have deliberately left just before the birth. John and Jesus were to be separate until adulthood (John 1:32f).*

58 *They heard of her pregnancy / ‘the removal of her disgrace’.*

59 *? Relatives, acting in John’s place, as he was still incapacitated?*

60 *Zechariah must have somehow told her all the angel had said.*

62 *Was Zechariah deaf as well as dumb, or were they over-reacting?*

63 *They were astonished at his cure, and at confirming this name.*

64 *Full of the Holy Spirit, he was praising God for what He’d done*

65,66 *The gap here implies that Zechariah’s song was not just for the relatives at the circumcision but for all in the Judean hill-country*

65 *They were filled with awe that this child was to be the prophet who would usher in the Lord’s coming. The Messiah was at hand!*

66 *They knew God’s hand was with him because of his birth and through faith in the prophecy of his father.*

67 *‘his father’ – in contrast with Jesus’ father, namely God.*

68f *Past tense = a statement of faith – by believing, he has received.*

68 – 75 *He talks about the big picture first. The key birth is of Jesus.*

80 *Strong in spirit means full of faith in God,
In the desert as he was to be protected and prepared by God.
We don’t know, perhaps after his bar-mitzvah (coming of age c13).*

How do you resolve issues that surprised or confused you?

They were astonished

- i) *that he spoke after 9 months of silence – deaf and dumb (limited to signs)*
- ii) *at the baby's name – God is gracious / God's gift – not a family name but a sign of a special function?*
- iii) *after 9 months' of God-imposed silence, he praises God.*

Give an overall 'picture' of the passage in a few sentences

During his child's circumcision, Zechariah is given the opportunity to repent of his unbelief (18-20). He expresses his faith by declaring the child's name is John. Those around understood the implication – the angel's message is true, the Messiah is at hand and this boy will be his forerunner. Through faith, Zechariah is filled with the Spirit and prophesies of the coming Saviour, and of his son as the 'forerunner'.

LISTEN

What is the main point of the passage?

When people profess faith in the Word of God and are filled with the Spirit, He inspires them to praise God.

Which verse best expresses this? **v 64**

'Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue was loosed, and he began to speak, praising God.'

LIVE

1) What does the passage show you about God (Father, Son, or Holy Spirit)?

a) His Nature and Character

64 *God keeps His promises (1:20).*

God inspires praise in the faithful.

70 *God speaks through prophets and then fulfils His Word.*

74 *God has promised on oath to rescue us from all our enemies.*

God does not want us to fear while serving him.

b) His Grace

72 *God is merciful.*

c) Jesus and His Salvation

77 *Jesus saves through the forgiveness of sins.*

Now underline the application of the Main Point.

2) What should I do?

57 *Note - There is a proper time.*

58 *Note - God's gracious gift is an act of mercy*

59 *Note - In the absence of any specific instruction from God, it is appropriate to assume precedent will guide action.*

63 *Speak out the word / act in faith.*

64 *Praise God with your loosened tongue!*

65 *Have awe for God - it is the right response to witnessing God's action in an individual's life.*

67 *Note - The first sign of the Spirit's work in an individual's life may be the praise of God.*

68 *Note - Believers may speak in the present, of the future, as if it were the past!*

70 *Listen to His prophets.*

77 *Note - Salvation comes through the forgiveness of sins.*

80 *Note - A child can be strong in the Spirit.*

Now underline the application of the Main Point.

The birth of Jesus

Background

The Roman Empire periodically took a census (in Judea, to assess taxation; elsewhere, also to find those liable for military service). Actual census documents exist for Egypt, AD 20 – 270, held every 14 years.

Bethlehem was Joseph's 'home' town - God had apportioned the promised land by tribe (Joshua 1). Joseph was of the *tribe* of Judah (who lived in Judea) and within that tribe, of the *family* of David, who came from Bethlehem (1 Sam 16:5-13)

Nazareth to Bethlehem was 80 miles, with mountains in the way. Accommodation for travellers was rather primitive: possibly an open courtyard with stalls opening off it, and a central manger for the animals.

Families were poor; houses were a single room, on two levels; if they could afford animals, these stayed on ground level. To be the right height for e.g. a donkey, a box holding hay would sit on the edge of the family's floor (roughly 80cm higher) - thus in easy reach to lay a baby.

Word List

1	<i>Caesar Augustus</i>	Roman emperor, 27BC to 14AD
4	<i>Nazareth</i>	Town in Galilee, about 25 miles west of the Sea of Galilee
	<i>Bethlehem</i>	Small town in Judea, six miles south of Jerusalem, 80 miles south of Nazareth. Birth place of King David.
7	<i>manger</i>	Greek word for manger comes from a verb 'to feed on, eat, taste'. The noun can mean manger <i>or</i> crib, suggesting use as a baby's cot was, or became, common.
	<i>inn</i>	The same word is used in Luke 22:11 for a room in a <i>house</i> ; New International Version there translates it, 'guest room', which in that case was 'a large upper room, furnished' 22:12.

Bible Connections

4	<i>Bethlehem</i>	Birthplace of King David Promised Ruler to come from it	1 Samuel 16:1 Micah 5:2; Matt 2:5
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LOOK

1 The Text

What questions does the passage raise?

- 2 *Why the need to identify the date?*
- 4 *Why double mention of 'David'?*
Why did God choose people who lived so far from Bethlehem?
Why was Joseph living in Nazareth if he was 'of David'?
- 5 *Why had Joseph not married Mary?*
Why did Mary accompany him?
- 6 *How long were they in Bethlehem for?*
- 7 *Why does it say firstborn?*
Why was he wrapped in cloths?
Why placed in a manger?
Why was he staying in an inn – no relatives?

What surprises or confuses you?

Why was Mary with Joseph? Was it inappropriate as they were not married; ill-advised as she was bound to have the child when away. (minimum of three weeks – a week each way and a week for rest?);
Attendance not needed as women didn't count? (c.f. Luke 9:14)
Why was there so little fuss – no Elizabeth and Zechariah? Everyone knew John was the forerunner of the Messiah. Had they not told them about Mary's child too?

2 The Context

What other parts of the Bible might help you understand this passage?

- a) The surrounding text
- 4 *Mary had been told he was to be Messiah/son of David (1:32.33)*
- 6 *The time came (1:57)*

- b) The book
- 7 *Mary told no one of identity of Messiah (2:19,51)*

Contrast with John the Baptist:

Parents	<i>John – old, two, respectable, privileged.</i>
	<i>Jesus – young, one, peasant</i>
Birth	<i>John – community rejoicing (58)</i>
	<i>Jesus – alone, away from family. Heaven rejoicing</i>
Upbringing	<i>John – privileged, nr Jerusalem. Public aware (1:66)</i>

Jesus – poor, in country. All unaware (4:22)

7 *Wrapped and laid - in a tomb (Luke 23:53).*

c) The whole Bible

1 *God's control of kings and nations (Dan 4:24-25; Ps 96:10; Is 45:1).*

4 *Bethlehem as the prophets foretold (Micah 5:2).*
God's word is accomplished (Isaiah 55:11).

6 *The right time (Galatians 4:4).*
Born of a woman/fully human (Galatians 4:4; Philippians 2:7; Hebrews 2:17).
Jesus looks for somewhere to stay (Revelation 3:20).

d) The Bible Story

See study 1.

LEARN

1) How do you answer the questions that the passage raises?

2 *The date was given to show that it was a historical event.*

4 *'David' (twice) underlined that he was of the Messiah's line.*
God's prerogative. - perhaps to keep Jesus clear of Jerusalem and John the Baptist till it was time for his ministry?
We do not know. Migration unusual.

5 *He had taken her into his home as his wife, but marriage not consummated (Matthew 1:24).*

6 *He was born and laid in a manger. After the time of purification (22) which was 33 days for a son, he was taken to the temple. The wise men visited thereafter by which time they were staying in a 'house' (Matt 2:11). Herod knew when the star appeared (Matt 2:7) and killed all the boys under 2 (Matt 2:16). If he was allowing for margin of error, Jesus could have been up to 1 year old by then.*

7 *'Firstborn' to emphasise that this was the child spoken of by the angel. She and Joseph had children later (Luke 8:19 etc).*
That was what was available/to be a sign to the shepherds (12).
He was placed in a manger for warmth, shelter, safety.
If it was an inn, it was because relatives' homes were crammed.
Mary accompanied him as she knew the Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem. Luke 1:32; Matthew 1:5,6).
Elizabeth and Mary had not told others of the Messiah's identity.

Give an overall ‘picture’ of the passage in a few sentences.

Historical event. Home of Messiah. Human birth. Humble origin.

LISTEN

What is the main point of the passage?

Jesus, of King David’s line, was born in the humblest of births amongst his own people because they did not recognise him .

Which verse best expresses this? **v 7**

‘She gave birth to her first-born, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.’

LIVE

1) What does the passage show you about God (Father, Son, or Holy Spirit)?

a) His nature and character

- 1 *God is sovereign – He chooses His circumstances and controls events – the census, the timing and place of the birth.*
- 4 *God keeps his Word – the Messiah was born in Bethlehem.*
- 7 *God presents Himself to the world in a very unexpected way.*

b) His grace

- 2 *God provides the means to fulfil his purposes – ‘the census’.*

c) Jesus and His salvation

- 4 *Jesus - Born in Bethlehem, the ‘Son of David’, the Saviour King.*
- 6 *Jesus is human – born of a woman.*

Now underline the application of the Main Point

2) What should I do?

- 1 *Believe – ‘He’s got the whole world in His hands’.*
- 4 *Trust God to guide your path.*
- 5 *Keep believing God, even when circumstance seem to go ‘wrong’.
Bear the ‘disgrace’ of Jesus.*
- 7 *Make room for Jesus.*

Now underline the application of the Main Point

The shepherds and the angels

Background

It is very likely that sheep in the fields near Bethlehem were intended for the Temple sacrifices in Jerusalem, only six miles to the North.

Shepherds were despised by the orthodox ‘good’ people of the day because their duties meant they were unable to keep all the details of the ceremonial law. Yet their work was essential to keep up the supply of lambs, ‘spotless, without blemish’, fit for the Temple.

Word List

9	<i>angel</i>	Greek ‘ <i>angelos</i> ’ means ‘messenger’
	<i>glory of the Lord</i>	Visible sense of the presence of God
11	<i>town of David</i>	Bethlehem
	<i>Saviour</i>	One who will save <i>see</i> John 3:17
	<i>Christ</i>	Greek ‘ <i>Christos</i> ’ means ‘the anointed one’, as does ‘ <i>Messiah</i> ’, from a Hebrew word.
	<i>Lord</i>	God (Greek translation of Yahweh)
13	<i>host</i>	Army
14	<i>peace</i>	Peace between God and mankind
15	<i>let's go to</i>	Greek for this conveys a sense of urgency

Bible Connections

11	<i>Saviour's birthplace</i>	<i>see</i> Micah 5:2
11	<i>Christ</i>	Anointing was used to set apart not only kings, but also prophets and priests. 1 Kings 19:15,16; Leviticus 8:12

LOOK

1 The Text

What questions does the passage raise?

- 8 *Why at night?*
- 9 *Why did the glory of the Lord shine around an angel?*
What were they terrified of?
- 10f *Why 'you' and 'all the people' not just 'for everyone'?*
- 12 *Why 'you will find'?*
Why are cloths and manger a sign?
- 13 *What was the purpose of the 'company of angels'?*
- 14 *What did their song mean?*
Why did God's favour rest on (some) men?
- 15 *How did they know it had happened?*
Was it not an angel that had told them?
- 16 *How did they find Mary and Joseph?*
Why did they have to go if they believed?
- 17 *Why did they wait till they saw him to spread the word?*
- 18 *What amazed everyone?*
- 19 *Why did Mary 'treasure up' these things?*
- 20 *What did 'glorifying and praising' God involve?*
What had they heard and seen?

What surprises or confuses you?

- Why involve shepherds?*
- Why did the company of angels appear?*

2 The Context

What other parts of the Bible might help you understand this passage?

a) The surrounding text

- 9 *Mary and Zechariah were afraid/troubled (1:12, 29)*
- 14 *Mary was also favoured (1:28)*
- 17 *The Word of God again confirmed to Mary (1:42)*
- 19 *Mary treasured these things in her heart (2:51)*
- 20 *Glorifying and praising God (1:46, 68)*

b) The book

- 8 *Good news to the poor (4:18)*
‘Shepherds’ -the last will be first (Luke 13:30)
- 14 *Rejoicing in heaven (Luke 15:7,10,24)*

The whole Bible

- 9 *God’s glory shone around others too (Ex.34:29; Matt 17:2,5)*
- 10 *Bringing good news, proclaiming salvation (Isaiah 52:7)*
- 11 *Saviour (‘save from sins’ Matthew 1:21; c.f. John 1:29)*
- 14 *God’s favour (Hebrews 11:6)*
- 15 *Faith is the evidence of things unseen (Hebrews 11:1)*

d) The Bible Story

See study 1.

LEARN

- 1) How do you answer the questions that the passage raises?
- 8 ‘At night’ because sheep and shepherds were together.
- 9 God was visibly present with the angel (c.f. 15b).
They were terrified of the Holiness of God and their own sin.
- 10f It was to assure the shepherds (and all like them) that Jesus was for them as well.
- 12 a command is implied to ‘go and see the Saviour’.
Strips of cloth and a manger were a sign, as both were unusual
- 13 The company of angels marked the uniqueness of the occasion (no other corporate assembly of angels recorded in history).
It expressed the joy in Heaven at the salvation of man.
- 14 Their song meant that God is glorified as faithful people believe in him and so are at peace with him.
God’s favour rests on the faithful.
- 15 They knew because they believed the angel’s word – Faith!
The angel was speaking God’s Word with God’s authority.
- 16 By wandering around looking for mangers? By hearing a baby cry?

They went to see the Saviour for themselves (12) and to tell others of the events and as another confirmation for Mary (c.f. 42)

17 They were too busy looking? They were now witnesses!

18 All were amazed at the messengers: shepherds! Their message: the Messiah! The situation: a manger! Their attitude: joy!

19 Mary treasured...pondered in her heart (did not talk about them) as it was not yet time for Jesus to be revealed as the Son of God

20 'glorifying and praising God' involved acknowledging God's gracious act of salvation, showing appreciation and giving thanks.
They heard the testimony of the angels (11,12,14) and had seen the sign.

2) How do you resolve issues that surprised or confused you?

The shepherds were the lowest strata of society, seen then as unreliable witnesses. Jesus was to have an ordinary, private childhood.

It was fitting that shepherds should be first to greet the Saviour – 'the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world' (John 1:29).

The company of angels appeared to show people how important this was – the Christ event is the focus of History

Give an overall 'picture' of the passage in a few sentences.

An Angel tells shepherds the Saviour who is being born in Bethlehem is for them and gives them a sign to recognise Him by. They believe this and go to witness it. They then faithfully proclaim the news of the Saviour born, while Mary is discreet about the bigger picture – He is the Son of the Most High God.

LISTEN

What is the main point of the passage?

Those who believe in God's salvation give Him the glory and praise.

Which verse best expresses this? **v 20**

'The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which had been just as they had been told.'

LIVE

- 1) What does the passage show you about God (Father, Son, or Holy Spirit)?
 - a) His Nature and Character

10, 15 God speaks to people through other agencies -angels/humans.
20 God is glorious and worthy of the praise of heaven and earth.

- b) His Grace

9 God reveals Himself to the humblest of people.

- c) Jesus and His salvation

11 Jesus is the Christ, the Saviour – the Jewish Messiah.

Now underline the application of the Main Point

- 2) What should I do?

8 Expect God any time!

9 Note - God's presence surrounds.

10 Note - The Good News of Jesus brings joy and is for everyone.

12 Note - God gives visible 'signs' to the faithful to confirm his Word.

15 Note - Faith confidently seeks evidence.

17 Note - Proclamation of the Good News is based on facts.

19 Treasure and ponder the good news of Jesus.

20 Note - Believers praise God and Glorify Him continually for the Saviour.

Now underline the application of the Main Point.

Sharing the Word

Use

'Hearing the Word' can be used alone, with another, or in a group.

Preparation

Time put in alone beforehand will greatly benefit time spent together.

Work through the stages - LOOK, LEARN, LISTEN, LIVE. *

Write down your own questions and answers.

(With good preparation and discipline in the time together, the study may be conducted in as little as 45 mins!)

Format

- a. LOOK - Any questions? (If answer is known or not!)
Relevant cross references in rest of the Bible?
- b. LEARN - Answers to questions?
- c. LISTEN - Key verse and Main Point?
- d. LIVE - What does it show about God /His grace/ Jesus?
What should I do

n.b. Leave plenty of time for the LIVE section!

By also eating together and a time of prayer, you will have shared something of the life of the early church! (Acts 2:42-47)

Remember!

As we gather round God's Word -

- a) Listen to the views of others.
- b) Make room for the novice. (They can join in too when you start by listing 'Any questions'.)
- c) Don't let the 'knowledgeable' dominate. Encourage everyone to think for themselves.
- d) Try to include others, especially 'seekers', in your time together.

* The **process** is explained and practiced in a four-hour course, suitable for all, called '**An Introduction to 'Hearing the Word'**

<https://hearingtheword.org.uk>

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so they may follow on for themselves.

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