

Unexpected



by: Steve Ellis
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A few of you may recognize this relief. It is of the scene described in the Gospel of John and the woman caught in adultery ([Jn. 8:2-11](#)). When I was younger, I don't know that I appreciated it as much as I do now. It was the work of a man by the name of Carl. Carl was a church member where Bren and I grew up, and for much of our lives, this relief was displayed so that you walked by it as you entered the church's auditorium. In many ways, it represented the type of congregation Burke sought to be. This would not be a place of judgment but of forgiveness and healing. The relief represented an attitude and prepared you for what you would experience as you entered worship. Today, it is displayed at Parkgate Community Church, just around the corner from us.



The Gospel of Luke begins in much the same way. The Gospel is about Jesus. However, we don't come across his name until ([1:31](#)). Luke begins by telling us about a couple, Zechariah and Elizabeth, and the birth of their son John. Then, we learn of Jesus and his birth announcement to Mary. **Luke is preparing us to enter the story.** It's not a new story but the story of God faithfully fulfilling his promises. In some ways, the story is

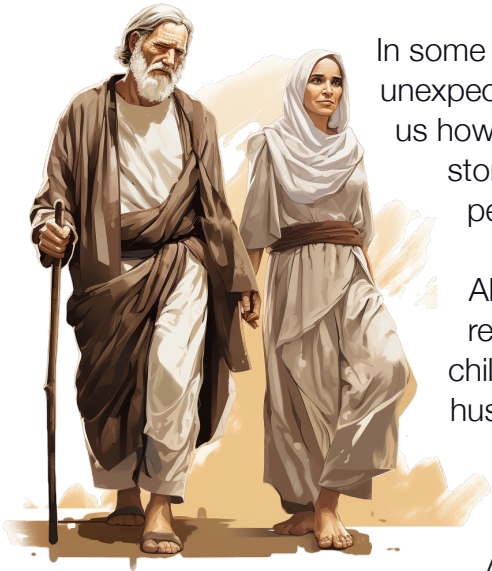
unexpected. At the same time, the story is a continuation of God's faithfulness. Let's dive into the birth narratives found in the Gospel of Luke.

Zechariah and Elizabeth

As Luke begins, we are told Herod is ruling over Judea. A priest named Zechariah and his wife Elizabeth, who were both righteous in the sight of God ([1:6](#)) and very old ([1:7](#)), were childless because Elizabeth was not able to conceive. When Zechariah, who was serving as a priest, went into the temple of the Lord to burn incense, an angel of the Lord appeared to him.

Luke 1:12–17

"When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear. But the angel said to him: 'Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to call him John. He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even before he is born. He will bring back many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the parents to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.'"



In some ways, the announcement was startling and unexpected. In other ways, as we enter the story, Luke shows us how the story is not unexpected or altogether new. The story reminds us of much older stories in the promise and people of God.

Abraham and Sarah, who were childless in old age, received God's favor ([Gen. 21](#)). After years of being childless, Rachel gave birth to two sons through her husband Jacob ([Gen. 30](#); [35](#)). The births of Sampson ([Judges 13](#)) and Samuel ([1 Samuel 1](#)) demonstrate God's faithfulness.

At the announcement of John's birth, the reader is reminded of God's faithfulness as we are connected to much older stories of God's promise. Abraham and Sarah are great ancestors of Israel. Through their son Issac, the story of Israel begins. Sampson is a great deliverer of God's people, and Samuel is dedicated to the Lord from his birth. John, whose name means **"God is gracious,"** has come **"to make ready a people prepared for the Lord"** ([Lk. 1:17](#)). As we enter the gospel of Luke, the story is not unexpected or completely

new. What God is doing is a continuation of his faithfulness and promise. God is about to move in a significant way through his people, Israel, once again. It's not unexpected, but things are changing. **The Lord is coming!**

The Announcement of Jesus' Birth

From John's birth announcement, we are taken north to Nazareth to a town in Galilee. An angel of the Lord appears to a young woman named Mary. She is a virgin who is pledged to be married to Joseph, a descendant of the house of David.

Luke 1:30–33

"But the angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end.'"

The unexpected announcement to Mary is that she has found favor with God, and she will have a Son whose name is to be **"Jesus,"** meaning **"the Lord saves."** He will be a king like David, whose kingdom will **"never end."** He will rule over God's people forever. As you might imagine, Mary is a bit confused.

Luke 1:34–35

"How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?" The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God."

The angel's language reminds us of ([Gen. 1](#)) and the beginning of life. The "Spirit of God was hovering over the waters" ([Gen. 1:1](#)). The Spirit of God brings forth life and abundance. God is uniting Himself to humanity in the birth of Jesus.

Luke 1:36–38

"Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. For no word from God will ever fail." "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled." Then the angel left her."

God's word and God's promise will not fail. Although the announcements of the births of both John the Baptist and Jesus seem unexpected, God is upholding His faithfulness. He will deliver His people and establish His kingdom forever.

Crossing The Context

As we enter the story of Christmas, it's not a new story. It's the story of God's faithfulness through Messiah Jesus moving in unexpected ways. We will see that His kingdom will not be like others, and His reign will not be like others have imagined. **Everything will be turned upside down.**

Entering the story, I would like to invite you back next week as we get a foretaste of His kingdom through Mary's song.

Through Jesus, a way has opened for our deliverance. The sin that holds us has been conquered through His life, death, and resurrection. Today, because of His faithfulness, we can have new life in Him. I pray we don't miss the story of Christmas and its significance to our world.

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