



The Messiah's Messengers

7

Key Theme

- God is faithful to His promises.

Key Passages

- Malachi 3:1, 4:5–6; Isaiah 7:14, 9:6–7, 40:1–5;
Luke 1:5–38; 2 Samuel 7:12–17; Matthew 1:18–25

Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Describe how Zacharias and Mary received the messages of the birth of John the Baptist and Jesus.
- Describe how these births fulfilled prophecy.



Lesson Overview



Come On In

Write on the board, “How does fulfilled prophecy support the Bible’s truthfulness?”

Students will begin memorizing the memory verse with a partner.



Studying God’s Word

God sent the message of the Messiah in a special way. An angel delivered the good news to Zacharias that he and Elizabeth would have a son. This son would prepare the hearts of the people for the Messiah promised by God so long ago. And God sent an angel to tell Mary that she would miraculously conceive a Son who would be Jesus, the Promised One, the Messiah for whom John would be preparing the people.

Study the Prepare to Share section.

Go Before the Throne.



Activity: God’s Messengers

Students will look at the role of angels throughout the Bible, serving God as messengers and performing other tasks.

God’s Messengers worksheet from the Resource
DVD-ROM for each student

Pencils



Prepare to Share

SCRIPTURAL BACKGROUND

Prepare to teach by preparing your heart. Read the key passages listed above along with this background.

As we move ahead in our study of the life of Jesus, we will begin at the beginning—not His birth, but the angelic announcements of His birth. These are significant announcements because of the supernatural way God conveyed them and because they verify Old Testament prophecies made about Jesus and the one who would prepare the way for Jesus. You see, God sent His messengers—angels—with these announcements.

The people of Israel knew of the promised Messiah. They had read of Him in the Scriptures, and some were waiting for this one who would redeem Israel (Isaiah 53:4–6, 61:1–3). The people also knew that before the Messiah appeared, God would send a messenger—one who would come to bear witness to the true Light (John 1:6–8). This messenger would prepare the way for the Messiah. A faithful remnant of the Jewish people waited for “Elijah,” the prophet who would turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and the hearts of the children to their fathers (Malachi 4:5–6) and who would prepare the way for the Lord whom they had waited for (Malachi 3:1).

Little did Zacharias, the aged priest who served in the Temple of the Lord, know that he would have a son in his old age who would be the forerunner for the Messiah, as prophesied by Malachi. Nor could he have imagined how he would learn of this truth. You see, Zacharias was a righteous man. He and his wife, Elizabeth, had never been able to have children (Luke 1:5–7). But that was soon to change in a most amazing way. How? God sent a messenger—the angel Gabriel—to Zacharias while he was ministering in the Temple. The angel told Zacharias not to be afraid. He said Zacharias and his wife would soon have a son, whom they were to name John. John would be great in the sight of the Lord, and many would rejoice at his birth (Luke 1:13–15).

As God’s messenger, the angel testified that the son, John, would come in the power and spirit of Elijah. He would fulfill the prophecy of Malachi 4:5–6. He would make ready a people prepared for the Lord (Luke 1:17). This son, John the Baptist, was not the Christ but came to give witness to the Christ (John 1:20). John the Baptist was the bridge between the Old Testament and the

New Testament, and He would make straight the way of the Lord (John 1:23; Isaiah 40:3).

In another, more spectacular announcement, God again sent His angel Gabriel, this time to the city of Nazareth, to a young woman, a virgin, who was betrothed to be married to Joseph. The angel assured her not to be afraid, for she had found favor with God. She would conceive a child, a Son, who would be called Jesus, for He would save His people from their sins (Matthew 1:21). This child would be great, called the Son of the Highest (Luke 1:26–32). What a mystery! Mary was not yet married to Joseph and had never known a man physically (Luke 1:34). But Mary would conceive in a miraculous way by the power of the Holy Spirit. And thus the prophecy of Isaiah—that a virgin would conceive a Son and name Him Immanuel, which means God with us—was fulfilled (Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:23).

The angel Gabriel also told Mary that her Son would reign over a kingdom that would never end. And He would reign over the house of Jacob forever (Luke 1:32–33). Again we see in Jesus Christ the fulfillment of a promise made long ago through God’s prophet Nathan to King David that a house and kingdom would be established through his descendant forever (2 Samuel 7:16).

These very important messages were sent through supernatural messengers by the will of God to announce the forerunner of the Messiah and the Messiah Himself. Angels are unique creations of God, spiritual beings, who do the will of God. In the accounts mentioned above, Gabriel came to herald God’s news that the Messiah was coming—very soon.

HISTORICAL/APOLOGETICS BACKGROUND

We know from Scripture that there is a spiritual realm beyond the physical realm we live in, with both good and evil beings (1 Peter 3:22; Ephesians 6:12). Comprehending the things that are happening in this spiritual realm is hard to grasp since we don’t see or hear what is happening there. On top of that, the Bible does not give us much detail about these spiritual beings and their activities. However, we do know that these beings do God’s will, heed His Word, do His pleasure (Psalm 103:20–21), praise Him (Isaiah 6:3), worship Him (Hebrews 1:6), minister to God’s people

(Hebrews 1:14), and serve God in many other ways. The Bible describes several different spiritual beings who serve God. These are not all necessarily angels, but can be described as “angelic beings” created by God. The Bible gives different names for these created beings that include seraphim (Isaiah 6:2), cherubim (Genesis 3:24), an archangel (Jude 9), and angels (Revelation 5:11). As we continue our discussion here, we will use the term “angel” knowing that there are distinctions among them.

A comprehensive study of angels would go beyond the scope of our lesson. We do know that the basic meaning of the Greek word *angelos* is “messenger.” And in the accounts of our lesson today, we learned God used His angel Gabriel as a messenger to proclaim good news to God’s people—first to Zacharias about John the Baptist the forerunner to the Messiah and then to Mary about the Messiah Himself.

We understand that angels serve God and act as His messengers. But the Bible also tells us there are angels within the spiritual world who do not serve God, but act as His enemies. These are usually referred to as demons, and it is commonly accepted that these demons were once angels created by God who rebelled against God. It is also believed that these angelic demons were led by Lucifer who was cast out of heaven because of his sin of pride and desire to be like God (Genesis 3:5; Isaiah 14:12–15).

These fallen angels led by Lucifer are a very real threat to Christians. That is why Paul warned the Ephesians (and us!) to put on the whole armor of God. These demons appear to be organized and ready to fight. We read that there are principalities, powers, rulers, and spiritual hosts of wickedness vying for our attention and loyalty (Ephesians 6:10–13). These fallen angels serve as messengers, as well. But their messages are filled with deception, death, and destruction. The Bible even warns us that Satan can masquerade as an angel of light, leading people astray (2 Corinthians 11:13–15).

Many ask the question, “When were the angels created?” The Bible doesn’t give us an exact answer in a single verse, but we can take what we know from the whole counsel of Scripture and come up with a reasonable answer. We know that God created everything in the span of six days (Exodus 20:11), and although the creation account in Genesis does not specifically mention angels, they are created beings that had to be created during the Creation Week (Nehemiah 9:6; John

1:1–3; Colossians 1:16). The book of Job speaks of the “morning stars” singing and “sons of God” (also terms for angelic beings) shouting for joy as the foundations of the earth were being created (Job 38:4–7). Consequently, the angels could have been created on Day 1, when God made the light and the darkness, on Day 2 when God separated the waters to make the firmament, or on Day 3 when God made the dry land.

Another question asked is, “When did the angels fall?” Again, we don’t know for certain. Since God proclaimed everything He made to be “very good” at the end of the Creation Week (Genesis 1:31), there could not have been any evil angels present then. And we can safely assume that it was after Day Seven since God set that day apart as holy (Genesis 2:3). God did not choose to reveal to us how long it was before Satan fell into sin and then turned to tempt Eve, but it probably wasn’t too long since there were no children born before Adam and Eve were banished from the Garden.

We do know angels are God’s creation. Some fell into sin, many did not. And after 400 years of silence from God (between the Old Testament and the New Testament), the silence was suddenly broken when God sent His angel/messenger to communicate the hope of the coming Messiah to Zacharias, Mary, and Joseph. The promises given to Malachi, Isaiah, and others hundreds of years before were about to be fulfilled! Our God is faithful to His promises as revealed in His Word. Let us continue to study that Word and share it with others as we rejoice with the angels and praise God for His goodness in sending the Savior.



BEFORE THE THRONE

Promised One, Messiah, I praise your name. How wonderful to read of the announcements God sent before your birth. Lord, you revealed your purpose for Zacharias and Elizabeth and Mary through an angel. And they trusted you and submitted to your will. My prayer is that my students and I will come to realize that you have a purpose for us, too. It’s revealed to us through the pages of Scripture. May it be our greatest joy to trust you and submit to your will for our lives. Use us, Lord, for your glory!

Review

Last week our lesson focused on the reliability of the New Testament text. Pastor Brian Edwards presented much evidence for the integrity of the text, from the fragments that we have today to the role of the Holy Spirit in recording and preserving it.

? Did anyone have any opportunities to put that information to use in an evangelistic or discipleship setting? *Discuss various answers.*

As more and more manuscripts are recovered, and we study the connections between all of the copies of the Scriptures

we have, we can be sure that our faith in God's Word is a reasonable faith based in reality and not in fairy tales.

Today we are going to continue looking at the life of Jesus on the earth. Two weeks ago we did a whirlwind tour through the life of Jesus from His birth to His ascension into heaven. Beginning today, we will be continuing that journey, but much more slowly. Over the next 25 weeks, we will be studying significant events in the earthly life of our Savior.



► Write on the board, "How does fulfilled prophecy support the Bible's truthfulness?"

Luke 1:5–25



Studying God's Word

READ THE WORD

We read the opening passage of Luke's Gospel several weeks ago, and today we are going to dive in and study the first account Luke details for us. Let's read Luke 1:5–25 together. *Have someone read the passage aloud.*

EXAMINE THE WORD

Observe the Text

- ? What type of literature are we reading here? *This is a narrative account.*
- ? Who are the main characters in this? *Zacharias and Gabriel are the main characters with Elizabeth and others playing a secondary role in this account.*
- ? What office did Zacharias hold? *He was a priest who served at the Temple on a rotating basis. See 1 Chronicles 24 for an explanation of this service.*
- ? How is Zacharias's character described? *He and Elizabeth were obedient to God's commands and blameless.*
- ? How many children did Zacharias and Elizabeth have? *None, she was barren.*
- ? Who appeared to Zacharias in the Temple? *The angel Gabriel appeared to him.*
- ? Where did this appearance take place? *Next to the altar of incense, which is just outside the veil separating the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies.*
- ? Did anyone else see Gabriel? *No, they were outside praying for him as he ministered inside.*

- ? **How did Zacharias respond to seeing Gabriel?** *He was afraid.*
- ? **How did Gabriel respond to his fearful countenance?** *He tried to comfort him and acknowledged his previous prayers.*
- ? **What message did Gabriel deliver to Zacharias?** *He told him that he would have a child, who was to be named John, and that John would be filled with the Holy Spirit.*
- ? **Where did Gabriel get his message?** *The message was given to him by God to deliver.*
- ? **What dietary restriction did Gabriel place on John?** *He was to avoid wine and strong drink. It is likely that Zacharias would have understood this as a reference to the Nazirite vow described in Numbers 6:1–21.*
- ? **What role would John have?** *He will be a prophet to go before the Lord and turn many in Israel to God.*
- ? **Who was John to be like?** *He was to be like Elijah.*
- ? **Where does the quote in verse 17 come from?** *Malachi 4:5–6 is the source. This will likely be cross-referenced in the margin notes of most Bibles.*
- ? **What sign did Gabriel give Zacharias to confirm the message?** *He made Zacharias mute until John was born. This may be seen as a rebuke for his doubting question in verse 18 as described in verse 20.*

Discover the Truth

John the Baptist is often referred to as the forerunner of Jesus—he came to prepare the people for the arrival of the Messiah by crying out, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matthew 3:2). He delivered the message of the arrival of the Messiah the Jews had been waiting for. All of this was foretold hundreds of years before by the prophets Isaiah and Malachi.

Let’s read Isaiah 40:1–5 and look especially at verse 3 as we read. *Have someone read the passage aloud.*

Isaiah 40:1–5

If you turn to Matthew 3, you will see this passage quoted in verse 3 with respect to John’s ministry.

Now let’s look at the closing verses of the Old Testament, Malachi 3:1 and 4:5–6. *Have someone read the passages aloud. Note that there are two “messengers” referred to in this passage. The first relates to John/Elijah and the second refers to Jesus since He comes to His Temple and is the delight of the people.*

Malachi 3:1, 4:5–6

Later in His ministry, Jesus affirmed this role of John in Matthew 11:13–15: “For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. And if you are willing to receive it, he is Elijah who is to come. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!”

You can see how many different messengers were used by God to communicate how and when Jesus would come into the world to fulfill the promise given 4,000 years before in Genesis 3:15.

? What attribute of God is clearly demonstrated by the fulfillment of these prophecies? *Faithfulness.*

Just as the words of God through Isaiah and Malachi were fulfilled, the words of God through Gabriel were also fulfilled—Zacharias was mute until the birth of John, and John fulfilled his ministry about thirty years later. We serve a faithful God who has kept His promise to provide redemption from our sins through our Savior, Jesus Christ.



Luke 1:26–38

READ THE WORD

Another message was delivered a few months after Zacharias received his. Let's turn to Luke 1:26–38. *Have someone read the passage aloud.*

EXAMINE THE WORD

Observe the Text

► Remember that context is important in interpreting Scripture.

? **When does this account take place?** *Verse 26 says it is in the sixth month, but this is not the sixth month of the year. Connecting this to verse 36 and the previous account, it is six months after Elizabeth conceived. So this occurred more than six months after the appearance to Zacharias (allowing some time for him to return home and for the child to be conceived).*

? **What was the source of Gabriel's message to Mary?** *God had sent him to deliver the message.*

? **How is Mary described?** *She is a virgin, betrothed to Joseph.*

? **How is Joseph described?** *He is from the house of David.*

? **How did Mary respond to Gabriel's presence?** *She was troubled or afraid.*

? **What words of comfort did Gabriel speak?** *"Do not be afraid."*

? **Where have we heard this before?** *These are the same words he spoke to Zacharias (1:13) when he was afraid.*

? **What was the main idea of Gabriel's message?** *Mary was to bear a Son.*

? **How does Gabriel describe the Son to be born to Mary?** *His name is to be Jesus; He will be great; He will be called the Son of the Highest/Son of God; He will sit on the throne of David; He will reign over Jacob (Israel) forever; His kingdom will never end.*

? **What question did this raise in Mary's mind?** *She wondered how this could happen since she had never known a man, a euphemism for a sexual relationship.*

? **How will Mary conceive?** *She will conceive by the power of the Holy Spirit, a truly supernatural conception, possible only through God's powerful action.*

? **What other conception does Mary learn about from Gabriel?** *Gabriel tells her of Elizabeth's pregnancy.*

? **How does Mary respond to Gabriel's explanation?** *She humbly acknowledges God's will for her. Unlike Zacharias, she does not request a sign, though there is still doubt in understanding exactly how this could be so. Once she hears the explanation, she is satisfied and trusts that it will happen.*

? What connections to earlier topics that we have studied do you see in this passage? *Students may recognize the promise of the throne of David being inhabited forever (2 Samuel 7:12–17), A Savior to save people from their sins (Isaiah 53), and the virgin conception (Isaiah 7:14).*

? What promise is fulfilled in Jesus’s taking the throne of David? *This promise was made by God to David through Nathan in 2 Samuel 7:12–17.*

? What extra information do we learn about the birth of Jesus from Joseph’s message from an angel (likely Gabriel though unnamed in the text) in Matthew 1:18–25? *He was called Jesus because He would save His people from their sins, and this was done to fulfill Isaiah 7:14 (the virgin birth prophecy).*

Isaiah 7:14 is quoted in that passage and gives us another reference to a prophecy that was fulfilled at the birth of Jesus. This prophecy was given 700 years before Christ was born. The promise to David was given 1,000 years before it was fulfilled.

Discover the Truth

Just as God had delivered the message to Zacharias and brought it to pass, so He did with Mary. As we mentioned earlier, God is faithful to the promises He has made and is bringing them to pass in amazing ways that only He could do.

? What attribute of God is displayed in the opening of Elizabeth’s barren womb and providing a virgin conception in Mary’s womb? *Omnipotence: He is all powerful to do whatever He pleases.*

Immanuel means “God with us.” You will hear the *el* sound at the end of that word from the Hebrew word for God. There is no doubt that this child was to be God in the flesh.

This is also confirmed in the prophecy of Isaiah 9:6–7. *Have someone read the passage aloud.*

Here Jesus is described as Mighty God (*El Gibbor*), and He is described as sitting on the throne of David forever. There is no doubt that all of these fulfilled prophecies point clearly to Jesus as our Savior God. The name *Jesus* is derived from the Greek form of Joshua, or Yeshua in the Hebrew. In Hebrew, *Yah* is another name used for God and *Yah-shua* means “God saves.” Jesus came, born of a virgin, to save His people from their sins by dying on the Cross as the God-man and rising from the dead to sit on the throne of David forever.

To accomplish this task of redemption, God involved many of His creatures—angelic and human. We also see all three members of the Trinity involved in the fulfillment of these events. All of these events orchestrated through thousands of years of history is a clear sign of God’s sovereignty over His creation.



2 Samuel 7:12–17

Matthew 1:18–25

➤ If time allows, have someone read about Mary’s visit to Elizabeth and the praise offered by Mary in Luke 1:39–56.

OMNIPOTENT

Isaiah 9:6–7



God's Messengers

MATERIALS

- God's Messengers worksheet for each student
- Pencils

INSTRUCTIONS

The students will be doing a cursory examination of how the Bible speaks about angelic beings.

The Bible tells us quite a bit about angels, but there are still many misconceptions about what an angel is. On this worksheet you will find an activity called God's Messengers. Work together in small groups to look at some of the passages regarding angels and see if you may need a bit of correction in how you think about angels.

CONNECT TO THE TRUTH

Let's talk about what you found out about angels from the Bible.

1. When were angelic beings created?

(Exodus 20:11; Nehemiah 9:6) *Based on what we can determine from Scripture, all of the angelic beings would have been created during the Creation Week when everything else was created. Some have suggested Day One, but there is no clear answer from the Bible.*

2. What names are given to these creatures in the following passages:

- a. Isaiah 6:2 *Seraphim.*
- b. Genesis 3:24 *Cherubim.*
- c. Jude 9 *Michael the archangel, indicating a hierarchy within the angelic beings.*
- d. Hebrews 1:14 *Ministering spirits.*

- e. Colossians 1:16 *Thrones, dominions, principalities, powers.*

3. What do these passages tell us about the nature of angels:

- a. Psalm 103:20 *The angels described here are those who do God's will and obey Him.*
- b. 2 Peter 2:4; Ephesians 6:10–12 *The angels here are those who rebelled and were cast out, the demonic angels.*

4. What roles are described in these passages:

- a. Isaiah 6:3 *Proclaiming God's holiness before the throne.*
- b. Hebrews 1:14 *Ministering to the saints.*
- c. Revelation 5:11–12 *Praising Jesus before the throne.*
- d. Acts 8:26 *Directing an apostle with a message.*
- e. Acts 12:23 *Carrying out God's judgment.*

Based on all of this information, which is just a short summary of the Bible's teaching on angelic beings, how could we describe angels? *Angels are created beings who perform different roles in God's creation. Some of the angels work against God under the direction of Satan while others serve God faithfully.*

It is important for us to have a proper understanding of angelic beings, both those who serve God, and those who fight against Him. Angels are much more than messengers, but we should be grateful to God for sending His message to us through these servants.





Applying God's Word

WHAT YOU HEARD IN THE WORD

As we think about the lesson today, we can certainly acknowledge God's faithfulness to us as well His power to orchestrate all of these events throughout history. Using both men and angelic beings over thousands of years, the message of the Messiah was made known to mankind. Through prophets, priests, maidens, and angelic messengers, God was preparing the way for the Messiah to come and fulfill His ministry on the earth. That ministry is where we find our hope. So all of the messages are messages of the hope we have in the life, death, and Resurrection of Jesus, our Messiah.

GOD'S WORD IN THE REAL WORLD

- ? What did you find most interesting about our study of the two messages delivered by Gabriel to Zacharias and Mary? *Discuss various answers.*
- ? In what areas do you find yourself struggling to understand some of the ideas we have discussed today? *Discuss various answers and remind students that this is a safe environment to ask honest questions and receive honest answers from Scripture.*
- ? Both Mary and Zacharias had doubts about the message they received. How can we look at their examples as we deal with our own personal doubts about what we read in God's Word? *The two examples show us that devout people have doubts, and we can be honest about those things. However, our doubts should drive us to hear more from God, and we do that by reading His Word. That may sound like a circle, but it is getting God's Word into our hearts so we are understanding more and more of what it teaches. And as we read it in the power of the Holy Spirit, our understanding grows and our doubts fade. Also, when we do this in the community of the Body of Christ, we have others to guide and encourage us.*
- ? We have talked about fulfilled prophecy today, from the Virgin Birth to the arrival of John the Baptist. How can these prophecies be used as tools for evangelism? *Opening the Bible and showing someone how these prophecies were spoken hundreds of years prior to their very exacting fulfillment can be a very eye-opening experience. Of course, acknowledging fulfilled prophecies is different from acknowledging personal sinfulness and turning to Christ, but it can be a powerful explanation of who Jesus is and what He came to do in obedience to the Father.*
- ? As you think about how God uses people to accomplish His plans, how are you falling short of the type of submission to God's will that Mary exhibited in the passage we studied? *Discuss various answers reminding the students that even if they have had sinful attitudes, those sins can be forgiven in Christ, and His*

grace can move them forward as they seek to be obedient. Further, when we consider that Mary was likely a teenager who was to become pregnant before she was married to Joseph, she faced a significant social stigma. She was willing to trust and obey God even in the face of this challenge. We can look to her as a model of obedience in the face of social pressure.

? Having talked a bit about angels in our lesson, what change will you carry forward in thinking and talking about them? *Discuss various answers.*



MEMORY VERSE

Philippians 2:8 And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.



GROUP PRAYER TIME

Be sure to pray with your class before you dismiss them.

- Thank God for His faithfulness.
- Praise God for fulfilling the prophecies from so long ago.
- Ask God to help each person submit to God and honor and obey His Word.