



# Unable to Speak

Luke 1:5-25; 39-80

## *Birth of Jesus*

The story begins as we are introduced to Zacharias the priest. He and his wife, Elisabeth, both came from a lineage of priests. We are told that they were both righteous before God, they obeyed the commandments and laws.

Zacharias and Elisabeth were older. Elisabeth had not been able to have any children, and now she was too old to have a baby.

Zacharias was in the temple performing his priest duties; he had been chosen by lot to burn incense when it was his turn.

### Discuss:

Do you know what it means to be chosen by lot?

One way of choosing lots is when pieces of paper or small objects are placed into a container. Each person takes one piece of paper or an object. One of the objects or papers is different from the others, and the person who chooses the one that is different is chosen for a specific purpose.

While Zacharias was in the temple, a large number of people were outside of the temple praying.

**Inside the temple, an angel of the Lord appeared to Zacharias; the angel was standing on the right side of the altar of incense.**

Zacharias was in the Holy Place. This was a special place inside the temple, but not the inner part. The most inner part of the temple was called the Holy of Holies, and only the high priest was able to enter once a year. Zacharias was standing in an area that was not very large, so where the angel appeared was very close to Zacharias.

**As soon as Zacharias saw the angel, he was scared and very afraid.**

How would you react if an angel appeared suddenly?

The angel said to Zacharias, "Fear not." All throughout the Bible when angels appear, they almost always said, Fear not, or don't be afraid.

The angel tells Zacharias,

**"Fear not: your prayer is heard, and your wife Elisabeth is going to have a son, and you will name him John."**

The angel continues: He tells Zacharias that he will have joy and gladness, and many people will rejoice when he is born. John will be great in God's sight, and he will not drink wine or strong drink. He will be filled with the Holy Ghost even in his mother's womb. He will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord. He will go before the Lord in the spirit and power of Elijah, and turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to wisdom of the just, and make the people ready for the Lord.



# Unable to Speak

## Discuss:

Wow! This is going to be a really special baby! He is going to grow up to be a great man of God with a special call on his life. He will be joyful, and make others joyful. He will be filled with the Holy Ghost - before he's even born! He will turn people's hearts back to the Lord, and make people ready for the Lord. Discuss this.

What would you think if an angel came and told you this great news? It's very specific. He appeared and told the exact things that John would do.

Zacharias has obviously been praying about this; the angel says,

**"Your prayer has been heard."** But, Elizabeth is an old lady; she is too old to have children. This is probably what Zacharias was thinking about, and he seems to put more value on this than the words of the angel. Not only has his prayer been heard, his child is going to be the man that was prophesied about in Isaiah that will prepare the way for Jesus! This is amazing news.

Zacharias does not readily accept the words of the angel. He is skeptical.

**He asks, "How will I know this?"** I am an old man, and my wife is very old.

This angel is a special messenger sent from God. Zacharias must have known that this was an unusual happening. He knew that this was not a human, and that this whole situation was supernatural. Yet, he still questioned God. Zacharias was a righteous man, but he was looking more at the circumstances than considering the words of the Lord. Even people who are following the Lord do not always have the right priorities, and do not always place value on the things of the Lord above all else.

It does not specifically say, but the reader can almost feel that the angel appears to be somewhat indignant. He answers Zacharias and says,

**"I am Gabriel, that stands in the presence of God; and am sent to speak to you and you these glad tidings" (good news!)**

He's basically saying, I am an angel who stands in God's presence. That means he is an important messenger. He is saying that GOD sent him to speak to Zacharias and give him this exciting news.

And what does Zacharias do? Does he value the words of a messenger who has been in the presence of God? Someone with a special message sent to him from God?

Gabriel continues,

**"You (Zacharias) will be dumb, and not able to speak, until the day that these words are performed, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their season."**

This is quite a statement. Zacharias will not be able to speak until the baby is born, because he doubted and did not believe the words of Gabriel. This makes the offense of unbelief much more serious than we often think it is.



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Why do you think that Gabriel said that Zacharias would not be able to talk? Why would this matter?

**Our words are SO important. We have creative power in our words, and are able to speak death and life with our tongues (Proverbs 18:21).** It is possible that Zacharias could have messed all of this up. If he had spoken his doubt and unbelief, and convinced Elisabeth of the same, this whole situation could have been different. Gabriel was going to ensure that God's promises would be fulfilled. As humans, we actually have the ability to negate the promises and power of God in our lives through our words.

Did Zacharias doubt the fulfillment of his prayers? It seems that he was no longer expecting them to be answered (verse 18).

Meanwhile, there is a large crowd waiting outside for Zacharias. This was a special ritual, and they were wondering why he was taking so long in the temple. When he came outside, he could not speak to them. They all thought he must have seen a vision in the temple because he made signs to them, but couldn't talk.

**Zacharias fulfilled his days at the temple, and then he went back to his house.** As Zacharias could not speak, we are not sure if Elisabeth knew about the visit from the angel or what he said. But after a time, Zacharias and his wife Elisabeth knew that she was going to have a baby. She hid herself for five months, and said that the Lord answered her prayers and took away her disgrace from people.

Six months later, the angel Gabriel visited Mary to tell her that she would have a baby who would be the Son of God, and his name would be Jesus. Her response was different; she was not doubtful. (This lesson will not cover the details of verses 26-38, as those will be covered in a different lesson.)

Gabriel had told Mary that Elisabeth, her cousin, was expecting a baby and that she was already in her sixth month. After Gabriel visited Mary, she quickly went into the city of Judaea to stay with Elisabeth. As soon as Mary came in the door and Elisabeth heard her, the baby inside Elisabeth jumped, and the baby was filled with the Holy Ghost.

Perhaps Elisabeth knew the prophecies about John, and the message from Gabriel. She knew something was happening when Mary came in. Elisabeth said, you are blessed among women, and blessed is the child of your womb. And Elisabeth knew that the mother of her Lord had come to her.

**She told Mary that her baby had leaped for joy in her womb, and that Mary was blessed *because she believed*.** Just as Zacharias had been made dumb because he did not believe, Mary was blessed because she did believe.

Mary spends some time praising God and speaking to Elisabeth about the prophecies. Then she stayed with Elisabeth for three months before going home.



# Unable to Speak

**It came time for Elisabeth's baby to be born, and she had a son.** Her neighbors and cousins heard how the Lord had shown mercy on her, and they rejoiced with her.

At this point, several of the prophecies have already been fulfilled. **Elisabeth conceived a child, he was filled with the Holy Ghost in the womb when Mary visited, and everyone rejoiced when the baby boy was born.**

**On the eighth day, the baby boy was circumcised.** This is the day when a name would be given to a boy. The people called him Zacharias, after his father.

**But Elisabeth said, "No. He will be called John."** All the people were surprised and questioned Elisabeth because she did not have any relatives named John. They then made signs to Zacharias to ask him what to call the baby.

It seems that perhaps Zacharias was not just dumb, but it was very possible that he was also deaf. If he were able to hear, it seems like they would have just spoken to him, and asked him about the baby's name. But they had to use signs to speak to him. Zacharias then asked for something to write on.

**They brought him a tablet and he wrote "His name is John."** All the people were very surprised, and **immediately** Zacharias' tongue loosened and he was able to speak, and he praised God.

This scared and amazed everyone. This news of what had happened spread quickly and everyone in Judaea heard what had happened. They all wondered what kind of man John would grow up to be. They knew something special was happening, and the hand of the Lord was upon John.

Zacharias was filled with the Holy Ghost also. He began to prophesy, and connected the Old Testament prophecies concerning John and Jesus. He referred to the prophecies (Isaiah 9:2; 40:3, 42:16; Malachi 3:1; Matthew 3:3; Mark 1:3; Luke 3:4) that John would be the one to prepare the way of Jesus, and that Jesus would bring light to those who sit in darkness, and guide into the way of peace.

**This John grew up to be John the Baptist.**

He became strong in spirit, and was in the deserts until it came time for him to appear publicly to Israel. He brought the people to repentance and ushered in the ministry of Jesus.

# Jesus in the Story



The Old Testament parallels the New Testament.

**Just as Elijah came before Elisha, John the Baptist came before Jesus.** Elijah is often referred to as the fiery prophet because of the judgment he showed; he represented the Old Testament law. Elisha came afterwards and had a different type of ministry; he was representative of the New Testament - the New Covenant.

**There are many prophecies of John the Baptist in the Old Testament.**

Some of the prophecies include: Isaiah 40:3-5, Malachi 3:1-3, 4:5-6.

Malachi refers to Elijah coming to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and the hearts of the children to the fathers before the coming of the day of the Lord.

**This reference to John the Baptist goes directly with what was spoken to Zacharias by Gabriel.** Zacharias would have known these prophecies but he became distracted when he looked at the circumstances rather than what had been spoken in the Word of God.

In the New Testament, there were also many references made to show that John the Baptist was the fulfillment of those Old Testament prophecies:

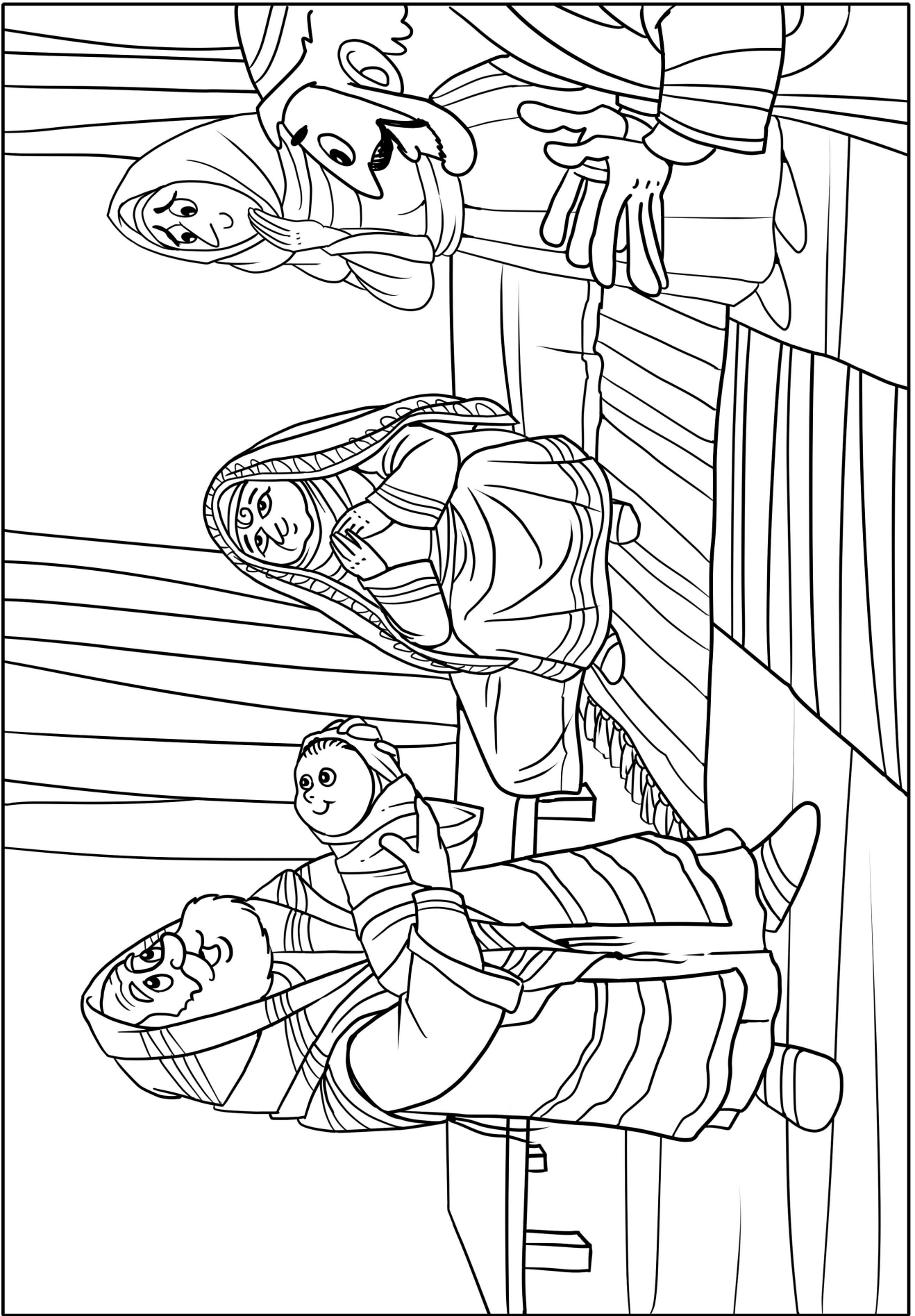
Matthew 3:1-12; 11:7-4

Mark 1:1-8; Mark 9:11-13

Luke 1:8-9, 13-17, 76-79; Luke 3:1-16; Luke 7:24-29

John 1:6, 29-34; John 3:27-36; John 5:31-35

**John the Baptist was a very important fulfillment of prophecy, and had to come first to usher in the ministry of Christ.**



# Lesson Questions & Memory Verses

## 49. An Empty Tomb

Read John 20

1. Who did Mary Magdalene think Jesus was?
2. What did Mary think happened to Jesus?
3. What was in the tomb?
4. Do you think a thief would have left the grave clothes?

**1 Corinthians 15:17-19**

**And if Christ be not raised, your faith is in vain; you are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished. If in this only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.**

## 50. Unable to Speak

Read Luke 1:7, 18, 20, 63-64

1. What do we know about Zacharias and Elizabeth?
2. How did Zacharias respond when Gabriel told him the news?
3. Why did Gabriel say Zacharias would not be able to speak?
4. When was Zacharias able to speak again?

**Psalm 139:4-5**

**For there is not a word on my tongue, but behold, O LORD you know it altogether. You have hedged me behind and before, and laid your hand upon me.**

## 51. A Child Is Born

Read Isaiah 9:7

1. When will the government of Jesus stop increasing?
2. What else is always increasing?
3. Whose throne will Jesus sit on?
4. What is his throne established with?

**Isaiah 9:6**

**For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The Mighty God, The everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.**

## 52. From the East

1. What gifts did the wise men bring?
2. Why did the wise men not go back to talk to Herod after they found Jesus?
3. Where did Joseph and Mary take Jesus?

**Isaiah 60:3, 6**

**The Gentiles shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising. They shall bring gold and incense, and they shall proclaim the praises of the Lord.**