



Stuff They Didn't Teach Me In Sunday School



Episode 130 - The Christmas Story (Luke 1-2)

Historical Context

Whenever we read the book of Luke we have to remember who he is writing to and why. He is providing an account of Jesus' life that will give Theophilus certainty about the things he has been taught.

- Luke grounds the story of Jesus' life, death and resurrection in real space and time by mentioning the rulers and events current during the days our Savior lived. How does the inclusion of these historical anchors give Theophilus more certainty than if Luke had simply told the story without them?
- Many so-called biblical scholars would have us think the church embellished the bare story of the historical Jesus, adding miracles He supposedly never worked and making Him into the Son of God. How can Luke's inclusion of these historical facts help give us certainty?
- What impact do you think pointing out these historical references can make on educated people, who think the story of Jesus is a mere myth?

John the Baptist's Birth

Luke describes Zechariah and Elizabeth in glowing terms: "and they were both righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord" (Luke 1:6). But then he points out the situation that caused them such grief: "But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were advanced in years" (Luke 1:7).

- Do you know a couple unable to have children, but who desperately wants them? What questions do they struggle with?
- What kinds of questions do you think Zechariah and Elizabeth had for God?

When the angel Gabriel announces that God has heard and will give them a son in answer to their prayers, Zechariah won't let himself believe it.

- Describe a personal dream you once had but have now given up.
- How hard would it be to believe your dream was finally coming true long after you had given up?

Because of his unbelief, Zechariah was unable to speak until after John was born. He silently watched his wife grow larger during her pregnancy. He stood by silently when Mary came to stay for the last three months of Elizabeth's pregnancy, and he knew God's Son was living under their roof, growing in Mary's womb. Imagine not being able to speak for more than nine months, when your life's dream was coming true beyond your wildest expectation.

- What would be the first thing you would want to say when you could speak again?
- How is it fitting that Zechariah's first words were about Jesus, rather than his own son?

Jesus' Birth

Mary was a young virgin betrothed to Joseph, when the angel visited her and announced God's plan to her. After reassuring her that God would work a miracle within her, the angel pointed her to Elizabeth. God worked another miracle when Mary greeted Elizabeth: "In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah, and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, and she exclaimed with a loud cry, 'Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy'" (Luke 1:39-44).

- Why would Elizabeth's words be a great reassurance to Mary?
- Discuss how important that three months with Elizabeth and Zechariah must have been for Mary.

When the time came for Elizabeth to give birth to John, Mary returned to Joseph in Nazareth. He learned from an angel that she was pregnant with God's Son (see Matthew 1:18-25). Then the decree of Caesar Augustus sent them to Bethlehem—the Savior's birthplace—which Micah the prophet had foretold.

- What does it say to you about God that He was not above letting His Son sleep in a feeding trough, instead of a fancy crib?
- What lesson can parents learn who grieve over not having the money to be able to give their children everything they want them to have?
- What might Mary and Joseph have thought when the shepherds came to see the newborn King and shared the angel's message with them?