

ANGEL VISITATIONS PRIOR TO JESUS' BIRTH

BIBLE TEXT_: Luke 1:1-38; Matthew 1:18-25

LESSON 260 **Senior Course**

MEMORY VERSE: "He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David" (Luke 1:32).

BIBLE TEXT in King James Version

Luke 1:1-38

- ¹ Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us,
- ² Even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eyewitnesses, and ministers of the word;
- ³ It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus,
- ⁴ That thou mightest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed.
- ⁵ There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judaea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the course of Abia: and his wife *was* of the daughters of Aaron, and her name *was* Elisabeth.
- ⁶ And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.
- ⁷ And they had no child, because that Elisabeth was barren, and they both were *now* well stricken in years.
- ⁸ And it came to pass, that while he executed the priest's office before God in the order of his course,
- ⁹ According to the custom of the priest's office, his lot was to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord.
- ¹⁰ And the whole multitude of the people were praying without at the time of incense.

BIBLE REFERENCES:

I The Angelic Announcement to Zacharias

- 1 Luke's opening statement sets forth the authenticity of his report, Luke 1:1-4;
 - 2 Timothy 3:16**

¹⁶ All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:
- 2 The righteousness and zeal of Zacharias and Elisabeth made them fully capable of being used by God, Luke 1:5-7;
 - 1 Timothy 6:11-16**

¹¹ But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness.

¹² Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses.

¹³ I give thee charge in the sight of God, who quickeneth all things, and *before* Christ Jesus, who before Pontius Pilate witnessed a good confession;

¹⁴ That thou keep *this* commandment without spot, unrebukeable, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ:

¹⁵ Which in his times he shall shew, *who* is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords;

¹⁶ Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to whom *be* honour and power everlasting. Amen.
 - Titus 1:5-9**

⁵ For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee:

⁶ If any be blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly.

⁷ For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God; not selfwilled, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre;

⁸ But a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate;

⁹ Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers.
- 3 The angel appeared in the Holy Place as Zacharias was burning incense, Luke 1:8-11;
 - Exodus 30:1-9**

¹ And thou shalt make an altar to burn incense upon: of shittim wood shalt thou make it.

² A cubit *shall be* the length thereof, and a cubit the breadth thereof; foursquare shall it be: and two cubits *shall be* the height thereof: the horns thereof *shall be* of the same.

³ And thou shalt overlay it with pure gold, the top thereof, and the sides thereof round about, and the horns thereof; and thou shalt make unto it a crown of gold round about.

⁴ And two golden rings shalt thou make to it under the crown of it, by the two corners thereof, upon the two sides of it shalt thou make *it*; and they shall be for places for the staves to bear it withal.

⁵ And thou shalt make the staves of shittim wood, and

¹¹ And there appeared unto him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense.

¹² And when Zacharias saw *him*, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him.

¹³ But the angel said unto him, Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John.

¹⁴ And thou shalt have joy and gladness; and many shall rejoice at his birth.

¹⁵ For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb.

¹⁶ And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God.

¹⁷ And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.

¹⁸ And Zacharias said unto the angel, Whereby shall I know this? for I am an old man, and my wife well stricken in years.

¹⁹ And the angel answering said unto him, I am Gabriel, that stand in the presence of God; and am sent to speak unto thee, and to shew thee these glad tidings.

²⁰ And, behold, thou shalt be dumb, and not able to speak, until the day that these things shall be performed, because thou believest not my words, which shall be fulfilled in their season.

²¹ And the people waited for Zacharias, and marvelled that he tarried so long in the temple.

²² And when he came out, he could not speak unto them: and they perceived that he had seen a

overlay them with gold.

⁶ And thou shalt put it before the vail that is by the ark of the testimony, before the mercy seat that is over the testimony, where I will meet with thee.

⁷ And Aaron shall burn thereon sweet incense every morning: when he dresseth the lamps, he shall burn incense upon it.

⁸ And when Aaron lighteth the lamps at even, he shall burn incense upon it, a perpetual incense before the LORD throughout your generations.

⁹ Ye shall offer no strange incense thereon, nor burnt sacrifice, nor meat offering; neither shall ye pour drink offering thereon.

Revelation 8:3

³ And another angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer; and there was given unto him much incense, that he should offer *it* with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne.

Psalms 141:2

² Let my prayer be set forth before thee *as* incense; and the lifting up of my hands *as* the evening sacrifice.

- 4 Zacharias was comforted by the angel and then given the message from God, Luke 1:12-17;

Daniel 8:16

¹⁶ And I heard a man's voice between *the banks of Ulai*, which called, and said, Gabriel, make this *man* to understand the vision.

Daniel 9:21-23

²¹ Yea, whiles I *was* speaking in prayer, even the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning, being caused to fly swiftly, touched me about the time of the evening oblation.

²² And he informed *me*, and talked with me, and said, O Daniel, I am now come forth to give thee skill and understanding.

²³ At the beginning of thy supplications the commandment came forth, and I am come to shew *thee*; for thou *art* greatly beloved: therefore understand the matter, and consider the vision.

Daniel 10:10-12

¹⁰ And, behold, an hand touched me, which set me upon my knees and *upon* the palms of my hands.

¹¹ And he said unto me, O Daniel, a man greatly beloved, understand the words that I speak unto thee, and stand upright: for unto thee am I now sent. And when he had spoken this word unto me, I stood trembling.

¹² Then said he unto me, Fear not, Daniel: for from the first day that thou didst set thine heart to understand, and to chasten thyself before thy God, thy words were heard, and I am come for thy words.

- 5 The doubts of Zacharias were answered by a statement of the angel's identity and a sign to show the authenticity of God's message, Luke 1:18-20
6 The word of God was fulfilled, Luke 1:21-25

I The Angelic Announcement to Mary

- 1 Gabriel was chosen to bring God's message, also to Mary, Luke 1:26, 27
2 The angel saluted Mary and delivered the message, Luke 1:28-33
3 Mary's questions were not of doubt but of inquiry as to her part in the proceedings, Luke 1:34
4 Gabriel explained the Holy Spirit's work, encouraged Mary's faith, and uttered a statement of God's omnipotence, Luke 1:35-37;

Job 42:2

² I know that thou canst do every *thing*, and *that* no

vision in the temple: for he beckoned unto them, and remained speechless.

²³ And it came to pass, that, as soon as the days of his ministration were accomplished, he departed to his own house.

²⁴ And after those days his wife Elisabeth conceived, and hid herself five months, saying,

²⁵ Thus hath the Lord dealt with me in the days wherein he looked on *me*, to take away my reproach among men.

²⁶ And in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth,

²⁷ To a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name *was* Mary.

²⁸ And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail, *thou that art* highly favoured, the Lord *is* with thee: blessed *art* thou among women.

²⁹ And when she saw *him*, she was troubled at his saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be.

³⁰ And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God.

³¹ And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS.

³² He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David:

³³ And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end.

³⁴ Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?

³⁵ And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also

thought can be withholden from thee.

Psalm 115:3

³ But our God *is* in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased.

Matthew 19:26

²⁶ But Jesus beheld *them*, and said unto them, With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible.

5 Mary willingly agreed to be thus used by God, Luke 1:38;

Psalm 110:3

³ Thy people *shall be* willing in the day of thy power, in the beauties of holiness from the womb of the morning: thou hast the dew of thy youth.

Isaiah 1:19

¹⁹ If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land:

2 Corinthians 8:3

³ For to *their* power, I bear record, yea, and beyond *their* power *they were* willing of themselves;

III The Angelic Appearance to Joseph

1 Joseph was perplexed because he thought Mary had been unfaithful, Matthew 1:18, 19;

Deuteronomy 22:22-27

²² If a man be found lying with a woman married to an husband, then they shall both of them die, *both* the man that lay with the woman, and the woman: so shalt thou put away evil from Israel.

²³ If a damsel *that is* a virgin be betrothed unto an husband, and a man find her in the city, and lie with her;

²⁴ Then ye shall bring them both out unto the gate of that city, and ye shall stone them with stones that they die; the damsel, because she cried not, *being* in the city; and the man, because he hath humbled his neighbour's wife: so thou shalt put away evil from among you.

²⁵ But if a man find a betrothed damsel in the field, and the man force her, and lie with her: then the man only that lay with her shall die:

²⁶ But unto the damsel thou shalt do nothing; *there is* in the damsel no sin *worthy* of death: for as when a man riseth against his neighbour, and slayeth him, even so *is* this matter:

²⁷ For he found her in the field, *and* the betrothed damsel cried, and *there was* none to save her.

2 Joseph was a just man, and God sent an angel to tell him of the coming of Christ, Matthew 1:20-23

2 Joseph was obedient to the word of God, Matthew 1:24, 25

NOTES:

Angels and Archangels

As we begin the study of this phase of the old yet ever new Christmas story, let us refresh our memories of a few facts that concern it.

It had been about 400 years since the last angelic announcement or prophecy had been given to Israel. A long time had elapsed since God had thus supernaturally manifested Himself in behalf of His chosen nation. The last recorded angelic appearance was that of Gabriel, the archangel, who had appeared to the Prophet Daniel with a message from God concerning the captivity. Gabriel had mentioned the name of another archangel, Michael, at that time. We are not told how many archangels there are, but Gabriel testified that he came from the presence of God; and in the last Book of the Bible it is stated that there are seven angels who stand before God (Revelation 8:2). We do not know that these seven are archangels, or that Gabriel or Michael are among these seven. But we do know that these two heavenly creatures were special

that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.

³⁶ And, behold, thy cousin Elisabeth, she hath also conceived a son in her old age: and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren.

³⁷ For with God nothing shall be impossible.

³⁸ And Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word. And the angel departed from her.

Matthew 1:18-25

¹⁸ Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost.

¹⁹ Then Joseph her husband, being a just *man*, and not willing to make her a publick example, was minded to put her away privily.

²⁰ But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost.

²¹ And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins.

²² Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying,

²³ Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.

²⁴ Then Joseph being raised from sleep did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife:

messengers from God who served God in extraordinary ways and in the carrying out of extremely important events.

Michael was termed one of the chief princes (**Daniel 10:13** ¹³ But the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me one and twenty days: but, lo, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me; and I remained there with the kings of Persia.), and it is stated that he stands for the children of Daniel's people, who we know are the Jews (**Daniel 10:21** ²¹ But I will shew thee that which is noted in the scripture of truth: and *there is none that holdeth with me in these things, but Michael your prince.* **Daniel 12:1** ¹ And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people: and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation *even* to that same time: and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book.). Michael, then, is a special angel who has a mission concerning God's chosen people. He is mentioned in Scripture as carrying out very hazardous assignments, even to engaging in conflict with Satan himself (**Jude 1:9** ⁹ Yet Michael the archangel, when contending with the devil he disputed about the body of Moses, durst not bring against him a railing accusation, but said, The Lord rebuke thee. **Revelation 12:7** ⁷ And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels,).

But Gabriel was given the greatest privilege that any heavenly messenger could have. We are studying about these special appearances in this lesson. The only other time, recorded in the Bible, that Gabriel appears is during the period of the captivity when he came to Daniel and brought the messages from God concerning the latter days and the things that should take place prior to, and at the time of, Christ's Revelation. We can see, then, that Gabriel's missions have always concerned Jesus Christ, the Lord of Glory, as the Savior of mankind.

Gabriel's Visit to Zacharias

It is interesting to see how perfectly every detail concerning the angelic appearances fits into the Divine Plan. Gabriel first appeared to one of the priests — Zacharias — who was ministering in the House of God at Jerusalem, the city of God. A priest stands between God and the people; and, according to God's plan, the revelations should be through a member of that office. Notice also that Gabriel did not appear to Zacharias in his home city but he came to the place where it was proper that he should come when bringing such a message. He came to the House of God and met the representative of the people there. It is in the House of God that we hear best the Word of God. It is from His holy precincts, dedicated to the worship of God, that God makes known His will most consistently to His people. God doeth all things, well. He sent this most important message by the proper messenger, at the proper time, to the proper place, to be received by the proper person.

Notice also that it was at the time of prayer that the message of God was received. Here, also, is a great lesson for us all. We do not hear the Voice when our minds and hearts are encumbered with the cares of this life, unless that Voice is speaking to warn us of the folly of our deeds. We find, through experience as well as by the stated fact in the Bible, that God draws near to us when we draw near to Him. When the incense of our communion with God ascends to the heavenly throne, then, and then only, can we expect to receive from Heaven a message of God's will for us.

Zacharias and his wife Elisabeth were people of whom the

²⁵ And knew her not till she had brought forth her firstborn son: and he called his name JESUS.

Holy Spirit could speak with remarkable commendation. "They were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless." What a statement concerning two members of the human race!

Righteous before God! Many have been considered righteous before man, according to man's standards. But these two were righteous before God, "walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless." Many have followed the ritual and the form of the worship of God, conforming to the letter of the ceremonial law, and still have had sins hidden away in their heart and mind which were not outwardly apparent. But these two chosen ones were blameless in their walk. They were blameless not only before man but were blameless before God!

Let those who say that earnest seekers of the Old Testament dispensation received a lesser degree of godliness, try to equal, in their own strength, what these two servants of God did in attainments of righteousness and godliness! Zacharias and Elisabeth were saved from their sin; and they were sanctified!

It is to godly people that God sends His message. There may have been many other godly people at this time who also were waiting for the coming of the Messiah. But these two were the ones chosen by God to fulfill His plan. Zacharias was an earnest listener, even though the stupendousness of the announcement raised some doubt in his mind. The doubts that were in Zacharias' mind were not of that quality or extent that stops the hand of God from carrying out His purpose. There was present in the hearts of these two saints of God, in addition to the righteousness and godliness we have already discussed, a sufficient measure of faith in God and in His Word that made that Word effective and operative in them.

By custom, every king has a forerunner, to prepare the way before him. God chose to prepare the way before His Son by sending a holy man to preach the Gospel of the Kingdom of God to His chosen people. We have seen that about 400 years had passed since the last prophet had lifted his voice to proclaim the message of God; and, significantly, that prophet was the one who gave us the clearest picture of the coming of the next prophet — the forerunner of Jesus Christ. (**Malachi 4:4-6** ⁴ Remember ye the law of Moses my servant, which I commanded unto him in Horeb for all Israel, *with* the statutes and judgments. ⁵ Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD: ⁶ And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse. **Luke 1:16-17** ¹⁶ And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God. ¹⁷ And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord. **Matthew 11:7-15** ⁷ And as they departed, Jesus began to say unto the multitudes concerning John, What went ye out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind? ⁸ But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? behold, they that wear soft *clothing* are in kings' houses. ⁹ But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet. ¹⁰ For this is *he*, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. ¹¹ Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. ¹² And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force. ¹³ For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. ¹⁴ And if ye will receive *it*, this is Elias, which was for

to come. ¹⁵ He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.)

How could the coming of this forerunner be properly introduced? By angelic announcement. Who could be trusted with this vital message from the Throne of God? The archangel Gabriel who stood in the presence of God. He was commissioned with the duty and responsibility of bearing this and other messages concerning the Christ of Glory. We have seen the qualification of those to whom he came — trusted ones who were chosen to receive and fulfill this phase of God's will for fallen mankind. And we have also seen from Scripture how wonderfully that will was carried out, to the very letter, through the days of the forerunner's life.

Gabriel's Visit to Mary

The same archangel appeared again to bring the most important message of all to a holy, consecrated, and humble woman of Galilee. She was a chaste virgin and was espoused to a man named Joseph. The message from God told her that she was highly favored and that the Lord was with her. She inquired how the things she was told were to come to pass — not with doubt, but only that she might know God's will for her and what she was expected to do to carry out that will. She was told that the Holy Spirit would make possible that which is impossible and would bring to pass God's will.

Here, too, is a lesson for us. We know that God's commands are always His enablings. When God directs, He makes a way. It is not our place to question His will nor doubt His provision for us as we obey His will for us. We can ask, as Mary did, the methods, or the time, or the place that God is choosing. But we can neither doubt nor quibble. If we obey, there is blessing for us. If we disobey, there is trouble.

The Angel's Visit to Joseph

Joseph, too, needed reassuring. God never leaves one of His people without the comfort or reassurance he needs. He is always present to help, to encourage, and to point the way when we cannot tell which direction we should go.

We do not know the name of the angel who appeared to Joseph. It is not important that we know it, or the Holy Spirit would have told us. The important thing for us to know is that God sent the message Joseph needed, and that He will do the same for us when difficulties come to us and we need help and instruction. God can do this in any way He chooses, but in this Gospel Dispensation He has made His Word the principal medium of bringing His will and commands to us. In that Holy Bible we find also the encouragement and inspiration we need for the carrying out of those commands. How gracious and merciful is our God!

The angel pointed the just man, Joseph, to the Word of God for a confirmation of the message that he brought from God. In the words of the prophets concerning Jesus was found the clarification of the facts that were troubling Joseph. Here, too, is a lesson for us. "To the law and to the testimony," should be our motto at all times. If we receive what we feel is a message or command from the Lord, we should go to the Word of God and see if that message or command is absolutely in accord with the Word of God. Only in this way can we be sure that we are hearing the voice of God, for God will not contradict His Word.

The Coming of the Son of God

Thus we have a summary of the appearances of the angels prior to the birth of Christ, and some practical applications may be garnered from them. This was an important time in the history of Israel. It was an important time in the history of the entire world. The Son of God was to become also the Son of David. He was to be born so that He could suffer and die for us, to redeem us from our sins. His coming was no casual, everyday event in this world's history. It was the most important event that has ever taken place, for without His birth there could have been no sacrificial death. Without His death there would be no resurrection. Without His resurrection our faith would be vain and we would yet be in our sins.

But thanks be to God for Christ's birth, that made possible His death and resurrection for our justification! And thanks be to God that He has given us sufficient evidence of the truth of all these events, having spoken of them by the prophets through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and having made them possible through the willing service of sanctified men and women such as Zacharias, Elisabeth, and Mary. Thanks be to God that He announced and certified these important events by miraculous appearances of the highest archangels in Heaven, which appearances are now established historical facts. Thanks be to God that He carried out these predictions — the angelic and the prophetic — to the fullest perfection of detail, thereby attesting to the truthfulness and completeness of His plan for us.

QUESTIONS

1. What is the purpose of the Gospel of St. Luke, as announced by the writer in its opening verses?
2. What can you remember that the Scriptures say concerning the spiritual qualifications of Zacharias and Elisabeth?
3. Where was Zacharias when the angel appeared to him?
4. Recount the occasions when we are told that Gabriel appeared to men or women.
5. What was the message that the angel gave Zacharias? and how was it received?
6. What message did Gabriel give to Mary?
7. What was the message that Joseph received?
8. Relate some of the practical applications you have received from this lesson.
9. Did Mary doubt the word of the angel?
10. Quote Luke 1:37 and Other similar statements to be found in Scripture.