
“Advent Lesson on Elizabeth & the Birth of John the Baptist”

Sunday School Lesson on Elizabeth and the Birth of John the Baptist



In Nativity Noteworthies: Heroes of the Christmas Story (Celebrated and Lesser-Known)

Sunday School Lesson on Elizabeth and John the Baptist

There are a lot of great truths to take from the story of Jesus’ birth. There are also a great many clichés and worn-out elements of the Nativity narrative. In this series, we will encounter several characters and look at the story through the lens of various perspectives. Some of these figures are already well-known, but others will be among the unsung heroes, at least for many people. Lessons will highlight who they are and their significance to the life of Christ and to our lives today.

The first encounter in the series is with Elizabeth, miraculous mother to John the Baptist. This lesson looks at who she was and who her son was. The emphasis here is that both Elizabeth and John celebrated and pointed to the Messiah.

Character focus: Elizabeth, wife to Zechariah, relative to Mary. She was barren until an old age, at which time she miraculously conceived a very special son. She and her husband (rendered speechless until the birth due to skepticism) named the boy John (by God’s command), and he would become a wilderness prophet one day baptizing Jesus.

Passage: [Luke Chapter 1](#), selected passages... this is a lengthy passage, so depending on age range, attention span, and timing of your group, you may opt to paraphrase or read a story version, or you might be able to read the entire chapter bit by bit. Adjust to the needs of your specific audience.



Importance in the Nativity: Mary stayed with Elizabeth for part of her pregnancy (likely to try and avoid the glares of people around town...). The two were relatives of some sort, and both were pregnant by a miracle of God—Elizabeth in her old age and Mary in virginity. Mary was visited by Gabriel six months after Elizabeth conceived. When Mary arrived on Elizabeth’s doorstep, the baby in her womb leapt, recognizing who Mary was carrying. Both Elizabeth and her son knew the importance of Jesus.

Significance to us: Elizabeth celebrated her relative and was thrilled for her to bear the son of God. John was important in his own right, but was always quick to point to Christ as the true person to be followed. Both were obedient and followed God with dedication and trust. So then, we should also point the way to Jesus, and follow God whatever it takes.

Materials Needed for this lesson: Paper, decorative materials, coffee filters, cups, glitter, pipe cleaners

Bonus Ideas:

- Compare several alternative lessons on this Bible passage from our website
 - [The Birth of John the Baptist](#) by Kelly Henderson
 - [Preschool Lesson on the Birth of John the Baptist](#) by Brittany Putman
 - [Advent Teaching Skit: Interview with Elizabeth](#)
- Compare our [Nativity Object Lessons for Advent Children’s Sermons](#)
- Download and print our [Story of Elizabeth for kids](#) min-reader
- Don’t miss our other [Advent](#) and [Christmas coloring pages](#).
- See all our free [Sunday School lesson for Christmas](#)



Sunday School Games, Lesson Introduction

Since this story is about giving and receiving messages, it's a great opportunity to feature some classic communication games! Consider things like...

- (Younger students) Charades, with a word whispered in a child's ear to act out in front of the other kids. This game is great for any age, and can be made more or less difficult depending on the categories and hints used.
- (Any age) Pictionary. Write or whisper a word or phrase, and have students draw it on a paper or white board for others to guess.
- (Any age) Telephone: Always a hit, in this game, one person starts a message by whispering into the ear of the person next to them. This continues around the circle, until the phrase makes it back to the original speaker to see if and how it changed.
- (Older) Picto-phone: this is a hybrid of "telephone" and "Pictionary." Students receive a stack of papers or note cards. They will begin by writing a word or phrase. Every student will then pass the entire stack to the person next to them. That person reads the phrase, moves the card to the back of the pile, and draws a picture representing the phrase. The pile moves again, and the next person looks at the picture, moves the card to the back, and writes what they think the picture represents. This continues, alternating drawing and writing, until the pile makes it back to the first writer, who can watch how the story transformed.
- Sculpt it out: add an extra dimension of difficulty to the charades/Pictionary guessing game by providing a word that students show using or play-doh!
- Explain to kids that today they will be hearing about people in the Bible who received very important messages. We will focus on one in particular, who was related to Mary and who also had a significant son.



Sunday School Lesson: Elizabeth and the Birth of John the Baptist

Introduce the topic by having students brainstorm a list of significant people in the Bible story of Christ's birth. Likely they will name Mary, Joseph, the shepherds, the wise men...have they heard of someone named Elizabeth? Explain that Elizabeth was another hero of the Nativity, in a special way. She was married to a priest named Zechariah, and she was old at the time of the Christmas story, but had never had a baby... For younger students, you may wish to read a story adaptation or paraphrase parts of the text. Older children can take turns reading from the Bible.

In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah¹ of the division of Abijah. And he had a wife from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. ⁶ And they were both righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord. ⁷ But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were advanced in years. - Luke 1:5-7

Explain that in Bible times, it was very important to people to have children. Not being able to have kids was seen as almost a curse or sign of God's disapproval. Elizabeth thought she would never give birth because she was old and had never been able to have a child. One day, while her husband Zechariah was in the temple, an angel came to him with a special message:

And there appeared to him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. ¹² And Zechariah was troubled when he saw him, and fear fell upon him. ¹³ But the angel said to him, "Do not



be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. ¹⁴ And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, ¹⁵ for he will be great before the Lord. And he must not drink wine or strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. ¹⁶ And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, ¹⁷ and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared.” -Luke 1:11-17

What an amazing promise! Zechariah was told that not only would he be able to have a child, but it would be a significant and wonderful child who would turn people toward God! That must have been an exciting message to hear, but Zechariah questioned the possibility of it, since he and Elizabeth were old. In response, the angel told Zechariah that he would not be able to speak until the child was born! Shows what happens when you doubt God... so Zechariah left the temple, unable to talk. But sure enough, Elizabeth became pregnant. When she was six months along, the same angel who had talked to Zechariah appeared to a young woman named Mary...do we know who Mary is?

After Gabriel the angel told Mary she would be giving birth to baby Jesus, he also let her know that her older relative Elizabeth was pregnant. Mary was so excited she went to visit Elizabeth, and something remarkable occurred upon her arrival...

In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah, ⁴⁰ and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹ And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, ⁴² and she exclaimed with a loud cry, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! ⁴³ And why is this



granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? ⁴⁴ For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. ⁴⁵ And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.” -

Luke 1:39-45

Elizabeth was still pregnant when Mary came to her, but the baby inside her jumped for joy when she arrived! Just as the angel promised, he “was filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother’s womb.” He knew that Mary was carrying someone greater than anyone: the Messiah, the son of God. Elizabeth could tell what happened, and knew Mary had been given a special purpose.

Elizabeth took care of Mary for a little while, and then the time came for her baby to be born:

Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son. ⁵⁸ And her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her. ⁵⁹ And on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child. And they would have called him Zechariah after his father, ⁶⁰ but his mother answered, “No; he shall be called John.” ⁶¹ And they said to her, “None of your relatives is called by this name.” ⁶² And they made signs to his father, inquiring what he wanted him to be called. ⁶³ And he asked for a writing tablet and wrote, “His name is John.” And they all wondered. ⁶⁴ And immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, blessing God. ⁶⁵ And fear came on all their neighbors. And all these things were talked about through all the hill country of Judea, ⁶⁶ and all who heard them laid them up in their hearts, saying, “What then will this child be?” For the hand of the Lord was with him.

-Luke 1:57-66



Zechariah regained his ability to speak when he demonstrated trust in God by giving his son the name the angel had prescribed. The people around him knew that the child would be something quite special, and Zechariah knew it as well. He sang with gladness to his son, understanding God had an important plan for him...

*And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High;
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,
⁷⁷ to give knowledge of salvation to his people
in the forgiveness of their sins,
⁷⁸ because of the tender mercy of our God,
whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high
⁷⁹ to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of
death,
to guide our feet into the way of peace.” ⁸⁰ And the child grew and
became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness until the day of
his public appearance to Israel. -Luke 1:76-80*

Ask if students know who this John was. He grew up to be a prophet, wearing strange clothing and living in the wilderness. He gave people messages and told them how to live for God. When Jesus was preparing to enter His earthly ministry, He came to John to be baptized in the Jordan River. The whole time John was living, though, he emphasized that he was not the one people should be looking to for answers. His job was to prepare the way for Jesus. He pointed to Christ, not to himself, assuring others that he wasn't even worthy to tie the shoes of Jesus (well, sandals. They didn't have shoelaces then...).

So what do we learn from this? It's not about us! Our job is not to do things that will bring attention to our own strength, but to point the way to Jesus. We want to glorify God with all we do and say. We want to live in a way that seems different and special, but that recognizes the Lord's supremacy in all things. When others look at us, we want to point to Christ. How can we do that every day??



So in the season of wanting to do more, get more, anticipate Christmas...let's remember that trusting in God can sometimes mean waiting, or not being certain of what's coming. But we want to live for Him and for others, serving in every way possible.

Close the lesson with prayer and thank God for loving us and coming to die for us. Thank Him for Biblical examples that paved the way for us, and ask for guidance in pointing the way to Christ. Pray for hearts open to His word and service throughout the season.

Craft: Angel or Name Celebration

Since Gabriel appears to both Mary and Elizabeth in this story, it could be a great opportunity to feature an angel craft, such as:

- Paper plate angel: Decorate one paper plate with “eyes” and glitter. Cut another plate in half and staple behind the first plate for “wings.” Add a halo or hanger, if desired.
- Cup ornament: turn a Styrofoam cup into an angel by adding coffee filter wings and a pipe cleaner halo. Add extra string if you'd like to hang from a wall or a tree.
- OR, since the story has to do with naming someone (John, Jesus), celebrate names. Students can use their own name or pick someone to give a special note to, and make a decorative name plate using markers to make the name colorful and artistic. For extra meaning, create an acrostic poem using the letters of the name.
- See additional [Advent craft ideas](#)



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