

Use Week of:

Unit 19 • Session 2

John Was Born

BIBLE PASSAGE:

Luke 1

STORY POINT:

John was born to prepare the way for Jesus.

KEY PASSAGE:

John 1:1-2

BIG PICTURE QUESTION:

Is Jesus God or a human? As the Son of God, Jesus is both fully God and fully human.



INTRODUCE THE STORY
(10–15 MINUTES)

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TEACH THE STORY
(25–30 MINUTES)

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APPLY THE STORY
(25–30 MINUTES)

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Additional resources are available at gospelproject.com. For free training and session-by-session help, visit Ministrygrid.com/thegospelproject.

LEADER Bible Study

Some of the last words of the Lord recorded in the Old Testament are found in Malachi 4: “Look, I am going to send you the prophet Elijah ... he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers” (vv. 5-6). The Book of Malachi was written more than 400 years before Jesus was born. For centuries, God’s people did not hear from Him. They were back in their homeland but were subject to other ruling nations. Eventually, the Romans took over.

The Roman emperor installed Herod as a leader over Judea and surrounding regions such as Samaria and Galilee. To gain the people’s favor, King Herod replaced Zerubbabel’s temple in Jerusalem with a beautiful marble temple constructed by 10,000 workers. This was the temple in which Zechariah, a priest from the family of Abijah, served the Lord. This was the temple in which God, through the angel Gabriel, broke His silence after so many years.

Zechariah and his wife, Elizabeth, were both “righteous in God’s sight” (Luke 1:6), living by faith in God’s promise to send a Messiah. Like Abraham and Sarah in Genesis 18, they were getting along in years and did not have any children. Elizabeth’s barrenness was a point of disgrace for her among the community (Luke 1:25) and God graciously answered this couple’s prayers.

An angel appeared to Zechariah in the temple sanctuary and delivered good news: “Your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear a son.” Echoing Malachi’s prophecy, the angel declared this son would “turn the hearts of fathers to their children” (Luke 1:17)

For his doubting, Zechariah was rendered mute until the promise came to pass. When John was born, Zechariah could speak again. He praised God and prophesied. John was born to prepare the way for Jesus. John would point people to Jesus, the Savior God promised.

The BIBLE Story

John Was Born

Luke 1

Zechariah and his wife, Elizabeth, were old and had no children. They lived outside of Jerusalem in the hill country and **did what was right.** Zechariah was a priest and at that time, King Herod ruled over Judea. **Twice a year, Zechariah went to the temple in Jerusalem to carry out his duties as a priest.**

Many priests served in the temple. **One day, Zechariah was chosen to go into the sanctuary of the Lord and burn incense.** People gathered outside to pray, and Zechariah went inside the sanctuary. **Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared.**

Zechariah was terrified!

“Do not be afraid, Zechariah,” the angel said. “God heard your prayer. Your wife will have a son, and you will name him John.

His birth will bring you joy. God will be with Him. The Holy Spirit will fill him even before he is born.”

The angel said that John would help many people turn back to God. John would go ahead of the Lord and get people ready for His coming.

Zechariah asked the angel, “How can I know this will happen? I’m old, and my wife is old.”

The angel said, “God sent me to tell you this good news. Because



you did not believe my words, you won't be able to speak until these things happen."

Zechariah left the temple. The people outside realized he had seen a vision and could not talk. When he was done serving in Jerusalem, **Zechariah went home to Elizabeth. In time, she became pregnant and gave birth to a son.** Her neighbors and relatives rejoiced.

Zechariah and Elizabeth named their son John. Suddenly, Zechariah could speak again. He began praising God. The people who lived nearby could tell that God was with John. **The Holy Spirit filled John. Zechariah praised God and told the people God's words: "God has come to help His people. He will save us through David's family. He will rescue us from our enemies."** Then he spoke to John: "And you will be called a prophet of the Most High. You will go before the Lord to prepare the way for Him."

The time had come. God was going to bring His light into the darkness of the world. Peace was coming for God's people.

John grew up and lived in the wilderness until God called him to get the people ready for Jesus.

Christ Connection: When Zechariah believed God's word, he praised God. John was born to prepare the way for Jesus. John would point people to Jesus, and they would praise God for keeping His promise to send the Savior.

Bible Storytelling Tips

- **Make eye contact:** As you tell the story, make eye contact with kids to draw them in. Pause at appropriate points to build anticipation when the angel appears to Zechariah.
- **Dress in costume:** Wear Bible times clothes as you tell the story. Act out the role of Zechariah.

INTRODUCE the Story



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KEY PASSAGE: John 1:1-2

BIG PICTURE QUESTION: Is Jesus God or a human? As the Son of God, Jesus is both fully God and fully human.

Welcome time

Greet each kid as he or she arrives. Use this time to collect the offering, fill out attendance sheets, and help new kids connect to your group. Prompt kids to talk about what they want to be when they grow up.

SAY • Believe it or not, many adults end up working very different jobs from what they thought they wanted to do when they were your age. God works through all situations, even when we have jobs we didn't expect. But today we will learn about a baby whose job and purpose was set before he was even born!

Activity page (5 minutes)

Invite kids to complete the "Baby or Maybe" activity page. Kids will circle items they think are necessary to care for a baby, draw boxes around the items that are helpful but not necessary, and cross out items that are unnecessary.

SAY • Nowadays, lots of different inventions can help us care for babies. In our story today, we will learn about a time God sent an angel to tell a man about a baby his wife would have. What might they have done to prepare?

- "Baby or Maybe" activity page.
- 1 per kid
- pencils or markers

Session starter (10 minutes)

OPTION 1: Zipped lips

Task your group with completing a challenge, such as lining up by age, acting out their favorite TV show, or using their bodies to make different shapes on the ground. Inform the kids that they may not speak while completing the challenge.

SAY • Wow, that was difficult! We spend a lot of time speaking to communicate, and it's tough to get our ideas across without talking. Today, we will learn about a man who doubted God and couldn't speak until God kept His promise to send a baby boy. How would you feel if you couldn't speak for nine months?

OPTION 2: A job to do

Gather the kids to sit in a circle. Show the different tools or pictures of tools and ask the kids to raise their hands if they know what the tool is designed to do. Call on a kid and let her describe the tool and what it does. Suggested tools: hammer, soup ladle, padlock, pencil

SAY • Each of those tools was designed with a specific job or purpose in mind. A hammer is great for pounding in nails, but it wouldn't work well for serving soup. Today we will learn about a baby boy whom God had big plans for. When this boy grew up, God used him to prepare the way for the Messiah. How might someone prepare the way for the Messiah?

**LOW
PREP**

• tools or pictures of tools

Tip: For a fun twist, challenge the kids to come up with additional uses for each tool.

Transition to teach the story

TEACH the Story



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Countdown

• countdown video

Show the countdown video as you transition to teach the story. Set it to end as the session begins.

Introduce the session (3 minutes)

• leader attire

• camera on a strap

[Leader enters wearing casual clothing and carrying a camera on a strap.]

LEADER • Hey, everyone! Welcome back to my studio. Can

I tell you a little secret? It's really hard to take baby pictures. I don't mean it's hard to take the pictures; babies don't move all that fast, so it's fairly simple to capture their image on film. But it can be really hard to get good pictures of babies. You know, where the baby is smiling and happy? Some babies just don't want to smile sometimes.

In fact, I just got done with a set of baby pictures for a friend of mine. Their daughter is absolutely precious. She's got the biggest brown eyes and cute chubby cheeks. But today? It didn't matter what I did, she did not want to smile. I spent hours squeezing toys and waving teddy bears and whistling wildly. All I have to show for it are eight dozen

Tip: If you prefer not to use themed content or characters, adapt or omit this introduction.

pictures of the grumpiest baby you've ever seen. Don't get me wrong; they are still adorable pictures, but she isn't smiling in a single one!

All this talk of babies makes me think of a Bible story. God had big plans for a baby boy and sent an angel to tell about those plans. But the baby's dad didn't believe at first! I'll tell you all about it.

Big picture question (1 minute)

LEADER • To help us think through our story, let's remember the big picture question. ***Is Jesus God or a human? As the Son of God, Jesus is both fully God and fully human.*** It is important to understand this because it helps us see that Jesus alone can unite us to God. Jesus experienced the same kinds of temptations, frustrations, and pains as we do but never sinned. He also has all the power and majesty of God and is worthy of worship. Only Jesus could have died for our sins to make the way for us to live forever with God.

Giant timeline (1 minute)

Show the giant timeline. Point to individual Bible stories as you review.

· Giant Timeline

LEADER • Through the entire Old Testament, the history of God's people pointed forward to the time when God would fulfill His promise to send a Rescuer. We learned last week that **Jesus' family line proved He is the Messiah.** This week, we will learn about a special baby who would come right before Jesus did to prepare the way for Jesus.

- Bibles
- “John Was Born” video
- Big Picture Question Poster
- Bible Story Picture Poster
- Story Point Poster

Tell the Bible story (10 minutes)

Open your Bible to Luke 1. Use the Bible storytelling tips on the Bible story page to help you tell the story, or show the Bible story video “John Was Born.”

LEADER • At the very end of the Old Testament, the last prophet, Malachi, wrote about a messenger who would prepare the way for the Messiah. John was the messenger whom God had promised through Malachi.

Zechariah did not believe the angel Gabriel at first. Zechariah knew that he and his wife were too old to have children. However, one wonderful thing about God is that He has power over all things. Nothing can stop His plans, and He often does things no one else could do to prove His power and love.

Despite their old age, Zechariah and Elizabeth had a baby just as God promised. God is faithful, and all His promises come true. John was filled with the power of the Holy Spirit even as a baby! God had plans for John, and John’s birth was like a small glimpse at the birth of the Messiah still to come.

John was born to prepare the way for Jesus.

Christ connection

LEADER • God used the lives of Zechariah, Elizabeth, and John to bring glory to Himself. Elizabeth should have been too old to have a baby, but God allowed her to have John anyway. When Zechariah believed God’s word, he praised God. **John was born to prepare the way for Jesus.** John would point people to Jesus, and they would praise God for keeping His promise to send the Savior. Ultimately, Jesus died on

Note: You may use this opportunity to use Scripture and the guide provided to explain how to become a Christian. Make sure kids know when and where they can ask questions.

the cross and rose again to glorify God and make the way for us to be saved to glorify God as well.

Questions from kids video (3 minutes)

Show the “Unit 19, Session 2” questions from kids video. Prompt kids to think about who angels are and what they do. Guide them to discuss the special roles God has for people in His kingdom.

· “Unit 19, Session 2”
Questions from Kids
video



Missions moment (3 minutes)

Show the “Relentless Love (Part 1)” missions video.

LEADER • John was born to prepare the way for Jesus.

Did you know that, in a way, you were born to prepare the way for people to know Jesus too? God wants us, no matter our age or where we live, to love Jesus and tell other people about Him. In Brazil, missionaries are preparing the way for people in São Paulo to know about Jesus.

· “Relentless Love
(Part 1)” missions
video

Pray for missionaries in Brazil or for missionaries your church supports.

Key passage (5 minutes)

Show the key passage poster. Lead the boys and girls to read together John 1:1-2. Then sing the key passage song.

· Key Passage Poster
· “The Word Was God
(John 1:1-2)” song

LEADER • Our key passage comes from the very start of the Gospel of John. The writer of this book was not the same John from our story today, but one of Jesus’ closest friends and disciples. He explained that Jesus is God and was with God in the beginning. That means that even before Jesus was born as a baby, He already existed eternally with God the Father and God the Spirit. *Is Jesus God or a human? As the Son*

of God, Jesus is both fully God and fully human.

Sing (4 minutes)

• “Jesus Messiah” song

LEADER • Since even before the creation of the world, God had planned to send Jesus to save people from sin. Jesus is the Messiah, and He is worthy of all our praise.

Sing together “Jesus Messiah.”

Pray (2 minutes)

Invite kids to pray before dismissing to apply the story.

LEADER • Father, thank You for Your love. Only You are able to do all things, and only You are worthy of all praise. Help us love and obey You. You sent Your only Son to save us from sin, and we want to glorify You with our lives. Amen.

Dismiss to apply the story

The Gospel: God's Plan for Me

Ask kids if they have ever heard the word *gospel*. Clarify that the word *gospel* means “good news.” It is the message about Christ, the kingdom of God, and salvation. Use the following guide to share the gospel with kids.



God rules. Explain to kids that the Bible tells us God created everything, and He is in charge of everything. Invite a volunteer to read Genesis 1:1 from the Bible. Read Revelation 4:11 or Colossians 1:16-17 aloud and explain what these verses mean.



We sinned. Tell kids that since the time of Adam and Eve, everyone has chosen to disobey God. (Romans 3:23) The Bible calls this sin. Because God is holy, God cannot be around sin. Sin separates us from God and deserves God's punishment of death. (Romans 6:23)



God provided. Choose a child to read John 3:16 aloud. Say that God sent His Son, Jesus, the perfect solution to our sin problem, to rescue us from the punishment we deserve. It's something we, as sinners, could never earn on our own. Jesus alone saves us. Read and explain Ephesians 2:8-9.



Jesus gives. Share with kids that Jesus lived a perfect life, died on the cross for our sins, and rose again. Because Jesus gave up His life for us, we can be welcomed into God's family for eternity. This is the best gift ever! Read Romans 5:8; 2 Corinthians 5:21; or 1 Peter 3:18.



We respond. Tell kids that they can respond to Jesus. Read Romans 10:9-10,13. Review these aspects of our response: Believe in your heart that Jesus alone saves you through what He's already done on the cross. Repent, turning from self and sin to Jesus. Tell God and others that your faith is in Jesus.

Offer to talk with any child who is interested in responding to Jesus. Provide *I'm a Christian Now!* for new Christians to take home and complete with their families.

APPLY the Story



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BIG PICTURE QUESTION: Is Jesus God or a human? As the Son of God, Jesus is both fully God and fully human.

Key passage activity (5 minutes)

- Key Passage Poster
- string or twine
- marker
- clothespins, 15-20
- jar

Hang a length of string or twine across your room where kids can reach it. Write each word or phrase of the key passage on a separate clothespin and put the clothespins in a jar. Invite the kids to take turns drawing a clothespin and placing it on the string in the correct order. When kids finish drawing clothespins and ordering the verses, say them multiple times together.

SAY • John was one of Jesus' closest friends and disciples. He wrote the Book of John and started it all out by explaining who Jesus is. Jesus is God the Son and was with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit even at the very beginning. Though Jesus wasn't born as a human until many years after creation, He has always existed. *Is Jesus God or a human? As the Son of God, Jesus is both fully God and fully human.*

Discussion & Bible skills (10 minutes)

- Bibles, 1 per kid
- Story Point Poster
- Small Group Timeline and Map Set (005802970, optional)

Distribute a Bible to each kid. Help kids find Luke 1. Ask a volunteer to explain which division of the New Testament the Book of Luke can be found in (*the Gospels*) and what that division contains (*the stories of Jesus' life and ministry*).

Ask the following questions. Lead the group to discuss:

1. Where was Zechariah when Gabriel told him about John's birth? (*in the sanctuary of the Lord, Luke 1:8-10*)
2. Why was Zechariah unable to speak until John was born? (*He did not believe God at first, Luke 1:20*)
3. Where did John live when he grew up? (*in the wilderness, Luke 1:80*)
4. Can you think of times we doubt God, or struggle to understand how His plans work? *Guide kids to discuss how they feel about God in hard times. Remind kids that God is always faithful. No matter how we feel or what situations we face, God's promises are sure and will come true in His perfect timing. Help them understand that we can read our Bibles and pray to help us learn to trust God more.*
5. What are some ways God can use you to point people to Jesus? *Encourage kids to think about their friends and family members who may not love Jesus. Discuss ways to show them God's love and share the gospel with them. Remind kids that even people who know and love Jesus need to be pointed to Jesus to help them remember how good He is.*
6. When is it easy to praise God? When is it hard to? *Discuss with the kids how difficult times can make it hard to trust God, but they can also push us toward the Lord as we learn to rely on Him for support. Remind the kids that the Bible teaches we should praise God in good times and difficult times.*

SAY • **John was born to prepare the way for Jesus.** We can help prepare the way for Jesus by loving others.

Option: Retell or review the Bible story using the bolded text of the Bible story script.

LOW PREP

• beanbags, 5

Tip: Use this activity option to reinforce the missions moment found in Teach the Story.

• button or other small object

Activity choice (10 minutes)



OPTION 1: Cinco Marias

Scatter the beanbags on the floor. Invite a kid to select one of the beanbags from the floor and pick it up. Instruct her to toss the beanbag into the air and try to grab one beanbag from the floor before catching the tossed beanbag. She will repeat this process until she has collected all the beanbags from the floor. Then re-scatter the beanbags and play again, allowing another kid to take a turn. After each kid has had a turn, challenge the kids to play a second round in which they must grab two beanbags each time they toss up the selected beanbag.

SAY • That was so fun! That's a game they play in Brazil called *Cinco Marias*, which means "five Marys." It's somewhat similar to a game that children in the United States play, called jacks. When we learn about other cultures, we are better able to make friendships with people from all over the world.

We can use our relationships with other people to glorify God by loving them well and telling them about Jesus. **John was born to prepare the way for Jesus**, and we can help prepare people to hear about Jesus too!

OPTION 2: Point the way

Instruct the kids to sit in a circle. Select a kid to stand outside the circle. He will close his eyes while you give a button or other small object to one of the kids in the circle. She will hide the button in her hand or underneath her. The goal of the kid whose eyes are closed will be to figure out who is hiding the button. Before he opens his eyes to do so, silently select a kid, who will always point to the correct

kid. Inform the others that they may point to whomever they wish. Invite the first kid to open his eyes and look to see who is pointing to whom. Challenge him to guess who is hiding the button. Play additional rounds as time allows. Select new kids to hide and find the button, but ensure that the kid who always points correctly stays the same.

SAY • In that game, a lot of kids were pointing in different directions, but only one kid in each round was definitely pointing the right way.

John was born to prepare the way for Jesus.

Everyone who listened to John was pointed in the right direction—toward Jesus. In our lives, we need to be sure the people we listen to and follow are pointing us in the right direction too—toward loving and obeying Jesus.

Reflection and prayer (5 minutes)

Distribute a sheet of paper to each child. Ask the kids to write about or draw a picture to answer the following questions:

- What does this story teach me about God or about the gospel?
- What does this story teach me about myself?
- Whom can I tell about this story?

Make sure to send the sheets home with kids alongside the activity page so that parents can see what their kids have been learning.

If time remains, take prayer requests or allow kids to complete the Bible story coloring page provided with this session. Pray for your group.

- pencils and crayons
- paper
- Bible Story Coloring Page, 1 per kid

Tip: Give parents this week's *Big Picture Cards for Families* to allow families to interact with the biblical content at home.