

# A Different Kind of *Christmas*

## Group Discussion Guide

*Thinking about what Luke tells us*

Every day during the holiday season, different voices are crying out for your attention. Some call you to buy. Some invite you to a show or a display or an event. Some shout messages at you that are intended by the message giver to be heart-warming and encouraging. But listening to the right voices in the midst of the cacophany of sound can be hard. This week we want to tune our ears to listen to one simple voice—the voice of the angel Gabriel. Read Luke 1:5-38.

Who is Zechariah? What does he do?

Who is Mary? What do you know about her?

These are the two people who receive messages through Gabriel. Are there things that are similar about them? Different?

Gabriel's message to each is about a child that will be born—for Zechariah, it is John (who will become John “the Baptist”); and for Mary, it is Jesus. But in speaking of these births, Gabriel also has much to say about what God is doing in the world.

What themes are repeated in Gabriel's messages to these two?

What does that tell you about what God is doing in the “first Christmas story”?

*Thinking about what this means for Christmas*

Put into your own words a summary of Gabriel's two messages. What is the central message that he has been sent to announce?

Clearly Gabriel's message had an immediate impact on those to whom he delivered it. But, there must be some value to us as well. What difference does Gabriel's “take” on Christmas make for the way you understand what Christmas is all about?



December 13, 2009  
Christmas Through Luke's Eyes

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# A Different Kind of Christmas

Leader's Guide for Discussion

*Thinking about what Luke tells us*

We sing songs about the “new-born King,” but we really don’t give much thought to “kings.” We prefer elected officials (who we can later vote out of office) or volunteers (who might be serving at our discretion) or partnerships and teams (where we feel we have a right to have our say). But Gabriel’s announcements to Zechariah and Mary seem to suggest that Christmas really *is* about a king—and it would be of benefit for us to listen to what he has to say.

Although the message to Zechariah has the birth of John (the “Baptist”) in view, Gabriel’s words let us know a good bit more than just some of the details of John’s impending birth. Through this angel’s words to this Jewish dad, we learn that God is doing something in the world that will result in the hearts of people being turned back to God and that God’s people will be, in some sense, brought face to face with Him (1:16-17).

The word the angel brings to Mary clarifies a number of critical ideas about this “child born to us.” Mary’s son must in some sense be both human and divine (1:31-32, 35); even though Gabriel doesn’t clarify what a “God-man” is. Mary’s son will also be a forever-ruling King; quite a calling for a yet-to-be-born child. And all of this is what God is doing; the God who, quite clearly, does that which is considered to be impossible (1:37).

Zechariah is a servant in the Temple in Jerusalem; a man of some prominence and position. Mary is an unknown, yet-to-be-married virgin from a town that was considered the source for nothing good (John 1:46). Although they are both Jews, it would be hard to imagine them much farther apart on the “scale of what matters” when it comes to Jewish life. But both are visited by the same messenger and both get pieces of a world-altering message about the life-altering visitor—Jesus.

*Thinking about what this means for Christmas*

What can we focus on in Luke’s account of what leads up to that first Christmas? A couple of things seem to be underscored by Gabriel’s words. First, whatever else Christmas is about, it is about what God Himself is doing. Although we would readily confess that, such a wonderful truth can get lost in all the voices. Christmas is about God’s activity, not man’s. Secondly, Christmas is about God changing the world by bringing the world her new King. This early in his account, Luke does not tell us of the sacrifice this King will make to draw us into life in His kingdom, but we must not overlook that Christmas is not about a message about a better way of life or making sense of our personal “story”—it is an account of how God invades our world to bring us a King who will rule in holiness and grace.

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