

THE FIRST OASIS

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# *The Savior's Birth*



*So they hurried off and found Mary  
and Joseph, and the baby, who was  
lying in the manger.*

—Luke 2:16



## *The Savior's Birth*

(Luke 1—2)

The church of my childhood was not Bible-centered, though exceptions were made at Christmas and Easter. At Christmas, we always read the second chapter of Luke and sang carols based on this hauntingly beautiful passage. (Luke alone tells the intimate details of Jesus' birth.) Therefore, when I was confronted with the claims of Christ as a young wife and mother, I had to decide whether Jesus was a fairy tale or God incarnate. I prayed and cried out to God to show me the truth. The images which kept flooding my mind and which caused me to pursue the truth were the majestic scenes from the birth: the glory of the Lord shining around the terrified shepherds; the announcement of the sign: a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger; and the angelic message: "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy! . . . Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; He is Christ the Lord."

Since Luke's birth account was pivotal in bringing me to Christ, it is dear to me. But the longer I looked at this tapestry, the more I saw that touched me as a woman. The story begins tenderly with the births of two babies: first, John the Baptist, then, the Christ Child. And woven into this tapestry is also the account of the God-ordained friendship of their two mothers. Come with me to spend a few weeks at the oasis of "The Savior's Birth."

# *First Stop!*

*Elizabeth: Blameless and Barren*

**W**ho of us does not long for special friends to love and to be loved by? God knows our longings as women—for He is the One who created us to be the relational sex! He also brings friends across our path who can particularly minister to our unique needs and to whom we can minister. But we need to be alert, as Elizabeth was to Mary, and as Mary was to Elizabeth.

I would encourage you to be alert to the women in this small group—for God may have placed someone here especially with you in mind. Ask God to give you discernment. Author and speaker Win Couchman says: “Sometimes when I first meet an interesting woman I have a lust to acquire her as a friend—like a possession. But if I pray—God may completely change my attitude, and my motive becomes purer, or, I find myself drawn to a different woman!” So pray. Plead for discernment! God knows your needs better than you do.

In addition, notice that God is more likely to anoint those whose hearts are blameless toward Him and who are stepping out in faith. See how this is true in Elizabeth’s life. God used her mightily as a mentor to Mary.

## *Prepare Your Heart to Hear*

Before each of the following five devotional times, quiet your heart and ask God to speak to you personally from His Word.

## *Memory Work*

In this birth oasis you will memorize Luke 1:46–50. This week begin with verses 46 and 47:

*And Mary said: “My soul praises the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.”*

## **WARMUP**

Share your name and why you came to this group. Was Jesus a part of your childhood Advents or Christmases? If so, what memory stands out?

## **DAY 1**

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### *Overview*

Read Luke 1—2.

1. Read all of the introductory notes. Comment on what stood out to you from:
  - A. The Introduction (p. 7)
  - B. The Special Instructions for Preparation and Discussion (p. 8)
  - C. The introduction for THE FIRST OASIS: The Savior’s Birth (p. 10)
  - D. The introduction for The First Stop! Elizabeth: Blameless and Barren (p. 11)

Spend five minutes on the memory passage.

Often doing a word at a time will help to cement it in your mind:

- Luke
- Luke 1
- Luke 1:46–50
- Luke 1:46–50 “And ...
- Luke 1:46–50 “And Mary ...etc.

## **DAY 2**

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### *Introducing Elizabeth: Barren, yet Blameless*

God’s Word is clear that part of His purpose for us is to mentor the younger women in our lives (Titus 2:3–5). Older women are called, but we are all older than someone. How transformed your life will be if you, like Elizabeth, are open to the younger women who come across your path.

Likewise, we should each be seeking out mentors. How much more fruitful your life will be if you choose your friends wisely. Mary was very wise to make the long journey to Elizabeth’s home. One of the ways you can tell if a woman is truly godly is to see how she has responded to difficulty in her life. Elizabeth, as you will see, was barren, yet

blameless. She trusted God when He didn't make sense, and God called her to mentor a woman for whom there would be many times when He would not make sense.

2. Read Luke 1 again, looking for evidences that implied Elizabeth knew and trusted God. Record the verse and why you believe it shows an intimacy with God.

Elizabeth was blameless in God's sight. This does not mean that she was perfect but, as *The Message* paraphrases it, that she "enjoyed a clear conscience before God." This begins by coming to God in salvation, by putting our trust in the payment that God provided through Jesus on the cross. Isaiah 1:18 gives us the following word picture of what happens to a person in God's sight when he puts his trust in Christ:

*Though your sins are like scarlet,  
they shall be as white as snow.*

3. What do you learn about living a holy and blameless life from the following passages?

A. 1 John 1:7-9

B. Philippians 2:14-16

C. 1 Thessalonians 5:23

Our son John and daughter-in-law Julie struggled with bringing a baby to term. I never knew how much barrenness hurt until it happened to our family. One of the things I feared was that John and Julie would stop trusting God. They were trying to live wholeheartedly for Him—so why was this happening?

One day John said to me: "Mom, if God never gives us a baby, we will trust Him."

"Why?"

"Because He died for us."

How we need to remember this truth in dark times. Elizabeth probably came to the point in her life when she assumed she would never be a mother.

Was it because of sin in her life?

Was it because God did not love her?

Was it because God was not able to give her children?

No! No! No! Elizabeth was barren because God had a plan she could not see. He has a purpose for her life far beyond her imaginings.

Like John and Julie, Elizabeth looked at the character of God and chose to trust Him in the dark.

4. In Luke 1, what two words beginning with "b" are used to describe Elizabeth? What does the juxtaposition of these two words teach you?

*A Woman of Purpose*

5. A. Have you ever been or are you being denied a deep desire of your heart? Have you faced times when God did not make sense? What were your feelings?

B. What can you learn from saints of the past, like Job, Elizabeth, and others who trusted God in the dark?

6. What do the following verses tell you about the character of God which could help you when He is not making sense?

A. 1 Peter 5:7

B. Ecclesiastes 3:11

Review your memory passage.

Horatio Spafford wrote the words to “It Is Well with My Soul” after surveying the place in the ocean where his four daughters drowned. Sing this hymn from your hymnal in your private devotional time

## DAY 2

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### *The Greeting Scene*

God often seems to zoom His camera in on greeting scenes and parting scenes—significant moments in relationships. This greeting scene has been painted by artists through the centuries, captured in poetry, and reflected on by believers often, especially, at Christmas.

7. Why might Mary’s appearance have surprised Elizabeth?

8. What two things, according to Luke 1:41, happened to Elizabeth? How might this have made her feel?

9. Describe all the truths that you can find that the Holy Spirit revealed to Elizabeth in verses 42–45.

10. Why did John the Baptist leap in Elizabeth’s womb, according to the prophecy given to Elizabeth? What do you think this means?

We will be studying many narrative passages in Luke, for Gospels are made up, primarily, of narratives. One important principle in interpreting a narrative passage is that our interpretation and application should not contradict a didactic (teaching) passage, for the Bible is its own best interpreter. For example, we could not conclude that when we are filled with the Holy Spirit we will be able to prophesy (as Elizabeth did) or that we will be with child (as Mary was)—for teaching passages do not support this, but rather, teach otherwise. This is how false teaching can occur, by inferring something from a narrative passage that is not supported by teaching passages.

However, sometimes we can infer things, even though it may not be the central point of the passage, as long as those inferences are not contradicted but rather supported by teaching passages. For example, though the central point of the greeting scene between Mary and Elizabeth is to show us how carefully God had planned the Savior’s birth—even preparing His mother through Elizabeth’s prophecy, even preparing John the Baptist—we can also infer, from this greeting scene, some things about blessing others that is indeed, supported by didactic teaching elsewhere in Scripture.

11. How does Elizabeth bless Mary in each of the following verses? What might you learn from Elizabeth about blessing others?
  - A. Luke 1:42
  - B. Luke 1:43
  - C. Luke 1:44
  - D. Luke 1:45
  
12. How might you apply what you’ve seen about blessing others to someone in your life today? Be specific.

## DAY 3

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### *A Godly Wife*

Some couples are in a negative cycle. One criticizes, the other responds in kind, and round it goes! Hearts harden in this kind of marriage. When Zechariah doubted God, we see no evidence of disrespect on Elizabeth’s part. She seems to overlook his weakness in love. She believes in him and supports him.

Read Luke 1:6–25 again.

13. What strengths and weaknesses do you see in Elizabeth’s husband, Zechariah?

*A Woman of Purpose*

14. How did God discipline Zechariah for the doubting words he spoke to Gabriel? What thoughts and feelings do you think Zechariah had as he was deaf and dumb for the following nine months?

Read Luke 1:57–80.

15. Find clues in Luke 1:57–80 for:

A. Elizabeth and Zechariah’s positive relationship

B. Zechariah’s teachable heart

16. What can a woman do to draw her husband closer to God? What mistakes do wives make that may harden their husbands’ hearts?

17. If you are married, what are some of the strengths you see in your husband? What godly characteristics?

A. List them—and tell him about them today!

B. What are some ways you could help a close married friend to think well of her husband?

Read Matthew 1:18–25.

18. A. How did Joseph react similarly to Zechariah?

B. How did God help Joseph to believe?

19. Imagine that Mary confided in Elizabeth that Joseph was having trouble believing God. What reassuring words, based on her experience and faith, might Elizabeth have given to Mary?

## DAY 4

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### *Elizabeth’s Heart*

How do you feel when someone is greatly blessed by God? Often that is a true test of our character! Elizabeth is pregnant with John the Baptist, but here comes this teenager who is pregnant with the Messiah! Yet there is not an inkling of jealousy, but only pure joy and excitement. Elizabeth seems truly focused on God’s praise, so she can rejoice with Mary. Meditate on Luke 1:39–45 again.



20. A. What qualities do you see in Elizabeth through this greeting scene?

B. Why, in your opinion, wasn't Elizabeth jealous?

21. Elizabeth's humility, her desire to elevate Jesus, can be seen in Elizabeth's son as well.

A. Give evidence for that based on Luke 3:15–17.

B. What evidence can others see in your life for your desire to elevate Jesus?

## *Personal Action Assignment*

Today, follow the example of Elizabeth. Keep a clear conscience by responding quickly to the Holy Spirit. Just as we cannot save ourselves, we cannot live the Christian life in our own strength. When the Spirit calls, respond! Either in the space provided or in your journal, record times you respond or times when you disobeyed. Try to do it right after it occurs. We'll ask for reflections on this exercise next week. For example, this is my journal for yesterday.

6 a.m. Wanted to stay in bed but I did remember to respond to the Spirit. Got up and went right to work-out at the Y—listened to sermon by R. C. Sproul on my iPod.

8:30 a.m. Time in prayer. Asked Him for guidance for the day—sensed I should write and encourage an elderly widowed friend. Did it right away.

2:30 p.m. Worrying about money, tried to turn it over to the Lord. Help me, Lord.

4 p.m. Listened to gossip and was silent. Should have said something positive about that friend—or done something besides be silent. Forgive me, Lord.

7 p.m. Obeyed His prompting to shut off television and read. Am getting into a good Francine Rivers novel. Thank You!

9 p.m. His Spirit told me not to grab that handful of chips before bed but I did anyhow. Forgive me, Lord. Help me not be deceived.

YOUR TURN:

Review your memory verse.

## DAY 5

### *God Cared for Elizabeth*

Jesus promises that if we put Him first, He will meet our needs (Luke 12:31). Every single one of us has the need to be loved, to belong, and to feel that our life has a purpose.

## *A Woman of Purpose*

Review Luke 1:5–8; 1:23–25; and 1:39–58.

22. As you review the above narrative passages, what evidence can you find that Elizabeth put God first, that she sought Him, and that she trusted Him?

Elizabeth's five-month seclusion probably had a spiritual motive, as evidenced by Luke 1:25.

23. As you review the above passages, what evidence do you find for God's love for Elizabeth?

24. What evidence do you find for the love of her family and friends?

25. What evidence can you find that God had a purpose for Elizabeth?

26. One purpose for every older woman (and we are all older than someone) is specified in Titus 2:3–5. List the things we are called to be and to teach.

27. In what ways do you see Elizabeth fulfilling the above?

28. What are some of the greatest needs in your life right now? What could you learn from this lesson that is helpful in regard to your needs?

29. If time permits, share one thing God has impressed on you from this lesson. (Give women the freedom to pass.)

## *Prayer Time*

Many people are intimidated by the idea of praying out loud. This guide will gently lead you into this gradually. And no one will ever be forced to pray out loud.

Elizabeth encouraged Mary by affirming her faith, by blessing her. Today, stand in a circle holding hands. Each woman will bless the woman on her right in prayer. She might say something like: "Thank You for Cindy—for her gentleness." If she doesn't know Cindy, she can say, "Lord, bless Cindy." If she doesn't want to speak out loud, she can bless Cindy silently and squeeze Cindy's hand. Then Cindy will bless the woman on her right.