

## DISCUSSION GUIDE :: WEEK 1

CHRISTMAS HEROES  
TWO UNSUNG HEROES  
LUKE 1:18-20, 42-45, 57-66  
12/03/2017



### MAIN POINT

Zechariah and Elizabeth are two unsung heroes of Christmas.

### INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

**What's one thing for which you've been willing to wait an extended period of time? Explain.**

**On a scale of 1 to 10 (with 1 being "terrible" and 10 being "all star"), how are you at waiting for something?**

**When have you recently been overwhelmed with gratitude?**

Waiting. Endurance. Forbearance. No matter how we phrase it, no one likes waiting—unless we have determined that the thing we're waiting for is ultimately worth waiting for. In Luke 1, the Christmas story begins with the waiting, patience, and faithfulness of Zechariah and Elizabeth, two unsung heroes of Christmas. As the Christmas story unfolds, we learn that their waiting was worth every minute.

### UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

Luke tells his readers that both Zechariah and Elizabeth were persons of strong faith. They demonstrated trust in God by keeping all the commandments and requirements of the Law. The couple put their hearts into their walk with God and received the godly evaluation as righteous in God's sight and living without blame. The pictures painted are of Old Testament saints—much like Abraham and Sarah—who showed their faith by their works (Jas. 2:26). Zechariah and Elizabeth stayed the biblical course even when life appeared to be unfair.

**ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ LUKE 1:18-25.**

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**Why did Zechariah doubt the angel's word that he would have a son (v. 18)? What difference did he think a sign would make?**

**How can you relate to Zechariah's reaction? During what situations have you asked God for a sign or wished he would send one your way?**

When Zechariah raised a question, the angel rebuked him for lack of faith but then reassured him concerning God's

work. The angel announced he was Gabriel so John might recognize the mighty messenger before him. A faithful ambassador, Gabriel delivered the good news exactly as it had been given to him. The angel assured the priest he could believe the promise. But Zechariah asked for a sign because he did not believe the words of God's messenger. Thus he would be silent and unable to speak until the promise was fulfilled. God's plans would not be performed on Zechariah's timetable but would be fulfilled in their proper time.

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**HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ LUKE 1:39-45.**

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**Describe the setting of Luke 1:39-56 and what you think this experience meant to both women.**

**What makes Elizabeth a hero in this story?**

**What is the significance of each statement in Elizabeth's greeting to Mary (vv. 42-45)? How did Mary respond to her greeting?**

Elizabeth named Mary as the most blessed of women. God chose Mary above any other woman for a high purpose. Additionally, Elizabeth acknowledged the unique nature of the Child that Mary would bear. Elizabeth expressed her sense of unworthiness to receive Mary as a guest. Although God worked in a miraculous way to provide a son for Elizabeth, she proclaimed the superiority of the One Mary was carrying. In response Mary burst out in a song of praise (1:46-55).

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**ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ LUKE 1:57-66.**

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**Which part of Zechariah and Elizabeth's story up to this point would you have found hardest to believe?**

**What is your initial response when you sense God working in your life or someone else's?**

**When you look at the story of Zechariah in Luke 1, what makes him heroic?**

In keeping with the law, Zechariah and Elizabeth presented their son for circumcision on the eighth day of his life (Leviticus 12:3). It was time for them to name their son. Since Zechariah was still unable to speak, Elizabeth spoke up—he was to be named John. Surprised that she would request a name with no family ties, the friends and family turned to Zechariah. With a writing tablet, he produced the same name as Elizabeth. John, the name given to Zechariah by the angel of the Lord, means “the Lord is gracious.”

Immediately, Zechariah regained his speech. His first words? Praise. He praised God for the child he and Elizabeth were given. God fulfilled His promise of a son and soon everyone would hear about it. Verse 65 tells us that this news traveled “all throughout the hill country of Judea.” The story of God's faithfulness to Zechariah and Elizabeth spread far and wide. God was faithful to His word.

**When have you experienced God's faithfulness in a long-awaited situation?**

**What has experience taught you about waiting on God's timing?**

**What evidence found in these verses would have convinced you that God was behind this miraculous birth?**

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**APPLICATION**

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

**What current concern do you need to entrust to God?**

**What is the relationship between waiting and acting? How is waiting not a form of complacency? What step of faith do you need to take today in the midst of your waiting?**

**Which of the traits of these two unsung heroes do you want God to develop in you? Pray actively as a group that He would help you model the faith, love, and commitment we see from Zechariah and Elizabeth.**

## PRAY

As you close your group time with prayer, take a moment and invite group members to share about a time when God provided after a season of petition. Afterwards, offer a prayer of thanksgiving for His continued faithfulness and for the lengths to which He will go for His people. Praise Him for the specific ways He provided for your group members and for allowing them to see His loyalty in a personal way.

## COMMENTARY

### LUKE 1:18-20,42-45,57-66

1:18-20 Zechariah asked for some assurance regarding the truth of the angel's message. He protested that he and his wife were too old to produce a child. This expression of unbelief strongly displeased the heavenly messenger. The angel insisted he, Gabriel, had come to the temple from the presence of God to tell Zechariah "this good news." Gabriel announced that Zechariah would be unable to speak until the day when the imparted prophecy had been fulfilled.

1:42. The expression "in a loud voice" (NIV) is frequently used to describe an inspired utterance (cf. Mark 9:24; John 1:15; 7:28, 37; Rom 8:15; 9:27; Gal 4:6). The first two lines of Elizabeth's blessing found in this verse possess poetic parallelism, but the rest do not. "Blessed are you among women." This is a Semitic way of saying "most blessed." What God had done in Mary outshone even what God had done in Elizabeth. Mary was blessed here not because of her faith, as in Luke 1:45; rather her blessedness depended entirely on her son and his greatness. A similar beatitude is repeated in 11:27. "Blessed is the child you will bear." "The child you will bear" is literally the fruit of your womb (cf. Gen. 30:2; Lam. 2:20; cf. also Deut. 7:13; 28:4). The Lord had already been conceived. Although the two blessings stand essentially parallel, the first stands logically in subordination to the second. Mary's blessedness was based on the blessedness of the child she would bear. This fits an OT pattern in which the second blessing gives the cause of the first (cf. Gen. 14:19-20; Deut. 7:14; Ruth 2:20).

1:43. "My Lord" indicates that the focus in this account is upon Mary's child more than Mary herself. Here "Lord" is clearly a Christological title and refers to Jesus. The title is used in our account (and in Luke 1-2 in general) both for God (1:46) and Jesus (1:43; cf. Acts 2:36), and it reveals the greatness of Mary's child already before His birth. Whereas the title "Lord" is used for Jesus only six times in Mark, it is used more than twenty times in Luke. To these can be added the nineteen times Jesus is addressed in the vocative as Lord. It is above all by the resurrection that Mary's child is recognized as Lord (Acts 2:36), although this verse indicates that from His conception He was already Lord. The use of the title "Lord" indicates that Luke understood Jesus as standing on a different level from others. He, like God, is deserving of the title "Lord."

1:44-45. This is a partial fulfillment of Luke 1:14. For a similar expression of joy on Mary's part, cf. 1:47. Even as Elizabeth rejoiced in her subservient role to Mary, so later John would also rejoice in his subservient role in preparing for Jesus (John 3:29). Elizabeth's praise both begins and now ends with a reference to Mary's blessedness. The blessedness of Mary's faith stands in contrast to Zechariah's lack of faith in 1:20. Her blessedness is a present state (cf. 6:20-22). Again Mary serves as an example for the believer. Indeed Luke sought to maximize Mary's role as a model believer. In Acts 1:14 he mentioned that Mary and her other children were among the inner core of disciples. Mary is "blessed" here for her faith but is "most blessed" in Luke 1:42 for the privilege of being the mother of God's Son.

1:56-57 Mary visited Elizabeth shortly after hearing she was "in the sixth month" of her pregnancy (vv. 36,39-40) and

stayed with her about three months. Mary may have returned to Nazareth either shortly before or after the birth of Elizabeth's son, John. Given their spiritual bond and the great roles their sons would play in God's plan, it seems likely that Mary stayed for John's birth.

1:58 Since Elizabeth remained secluded for the early months of her pregnancy, it is possible that many of her neighbors and relatives first learned of God's great mercy toward her at or near the time of John's birth. The birth of a son was seen as favor from God.

1:59-63 In the OT, a child's name was more often given at birth. Perhaps Zechariah's inability to speak at John's birth caused the delay. Because Luke was writing for a Gentile audience that was unfamiliar with Jewish rites, he explained that Mosaic law (Lv 12:3) required parents to circumcise a male child (i.e., cut off the foreskin of his sex organ) on the eighth day. It was customary to name a boy baby after his father, in this case Zechariah, or his grandfather. Elizabeth had apparently already learned from Zechariah in writing that God wished for them to name the baby John. That neighbors and relatives motioned to Zechariah (rather than spoke) may imply that he was temporarily deaf as well as mute (vv. 20, 22). A writing tablet was a small wooden board covered with wax. A wooden stylus was used to etch words into the wax.

1:64 That Zechariah was again able to speak fulfilled Gabriel's prediction.

1:65-66 The overall outcome of the preceding episode is that it was clear that the Lord's hand was with the newborn John in a remarkable way and that everyone living in the region continued to ponder (took...to heart) the question, What...will this child become?