

# Open Bible Stories - The Birth of John

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## Introduction

### Key Idea

The story of the birth of John teaches us how to trust God to fulfill his promises.

### Core Belief Verse

*“I tell you, among those born of women none is greater than John. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.”*

*Luke 7:28*

### God's Big Story

The eternal God created all things in six days.

He made a good and perfect world.

He made humans in his image to fill the earth and rule over creation.

But humans rebelled against God and ruined God's creation.

God set to restore his world through his promise.

God made a covenant with Abraham. He promised to bless all nations through Abraham.

God kept his promises across the generations.

God provided Abraham with a promised child, Isaac.

God gave Isaac a wife and she bore twins, Jacob and Esau.

God blessed Jacob and his sons, and the blessing continued to the next generation.

God rescued Joseph, one of Jacob's sons, and used him to rescue his family.

God caused his people, the Israelites, to multiply in the land of Egypt; eventually, they became slaves.

But, God raised up a deliverer, Moses, to deliver his people from their slavery.

God sent judgment on the Egyptians with harsh plagues; in the final judgment, he passed over his people who covered their doorposts with the blood of a sacrificed lamb.

Then, God delivered the Israelites by bringing them out of Egypt and crossing the Red Sea on dry land.

God made a covenant with the Israelites and made them his people.

God tested Israel in a series of wilderness wanderings and eventually brought his people into the promised land of Canaan.

God raised up deliverers to lead Israel and rescue them from their enemies.

God formed Israel into a kingdom. He made a covenant with King David and promised to send a king that would rule his people forever.

Many of Israel's kings were evil and the kingdom of Israel divided into two kingdoms.

God sent prophets to warn his people of God's judgment and call them to repent.

When Israel did not repent, God sent his people into exile. After many years, he brought them back to the land.

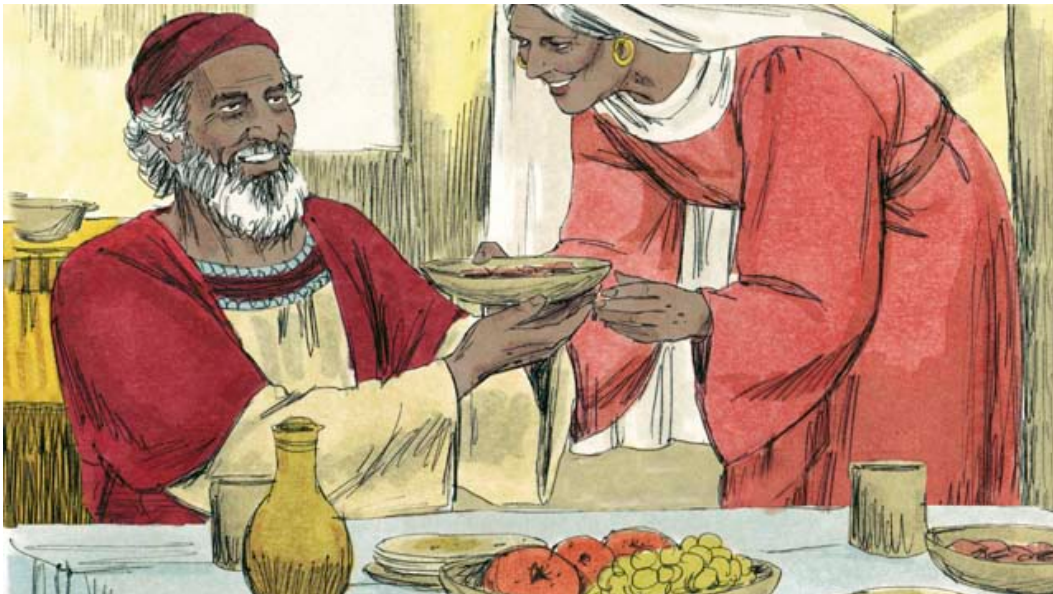
Throughout the Old Testament, God promised to send his Messiah to deliver his people from their sin.

After many years, the prophet John was born. He would prepare people for the coming Messiah.

## **The Story: The Birth of John**

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22-01



In the past, God had spoken to his prophets so they could speak to his people. Then came 400 years of silence in which he did not speak to men. Then God sent an angel to a priest named Zechariah. Zechariah and his wife, Elizabeth, honored God. They were very old, and she had never born any children.

22-02



The angel said to Zechariah, "Your wife will have a son. You will name him John. God will fill him with the Holy Spirit, and John will get the people ready to accept the Messiah!" Zechariah responded, "My wife and I are too old to have children! How can I know you are telling me the truth?"

22-03



The angel responded to Zechariah, "I was sent by God to bring you this good news. Because you did not believe me, you will not be able to speak until the child is born." Immediately, Zechariah was unable to speak. Then the angel left Zechariah. After this, Zechariah returned home and his wife became pregnant.

22-04



When Elizabeth was six months pregnant, the same angel suddenly appeared to Elizabeth's relative, whose name was Mary. She was a virgin and was engaged to be married to a man named Joseph. The angel said, "You will become pregnant and give birth to a son. You are to name him Jesus. He will be the Son of the Most High God and will rule forever."

22-05



Mary replied, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" The angel explained, "The Holy Spirit will come to you, and the power of God will come to you. So the baby will be holy, and he will be the Son of God." Mary believed what the angel said.

22-06



Soon after this happened, Mary went and visited Elizabeth. As soon as Mary greeted her, Elizabeth's baby jumped inside her. The women rejoiced together about what God had done for them. After Mary visited Elizabeth for three months, Mary returned home.

22-07



After this, Elizabeth gave birth to her baby boy. Zechariah and Elizabeth named the baby John, as the angel had commanded. Then God made Zechariah able to speak again. Zechariah said, "Praise God, because he has remembered to help his people! You, my son, will be the prophet of the Most High God. You will tell the people how they can receive forgiveness for their sins!"

*A Bible story from: Luke 1*

## Community Study: Last of All - Understanding True Greatness

- **Key Idea:** laying the foundation of all ministry
- **Key Passage:** Mark 9:31-35
- **Main Session:** OBS 22 (The Birth of John)

### Sing a Song (3-5 minutes)

Choose a song to sing to praise God and encourage one another.

### Memorize Core Belief Verse (3-5 minutes)

Divide your community into groups of 2-3 people. In your groups, have a different person read the verse out loud while the others listen and try to say it while it is read. Have each person in the group take turns reading out loud. Then, after a few minutes, take turns reciting this passage as a group.

*See, I am about to send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me.  
Malachi 3:1*

OR

*"I say to you, among those born of women none is greater than John. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he is." Luke 7:28*

### Read the Passage (1-2 minutes)

Disciples of Jesus should have different values than those who do not follow Jesus. Many people put themselves first and seek to be great. God wants his people to be servants of others and practice humility. Read the following Bible story together as a community.

*31 [Jesus] was teaching his disciples. He said to them, "The Son of Man will be delivered into the hands of men, and they will put him to death. When he has been put to death, after three days he will rise again." 32 But they did not understand this statement, and they were afraid to ask him. 33 Then they came to Capernaum. After he entered the house he asked them, "What were you discussing on the way?" 34 But they were silent. For they had been arguing with one with another on the way about who was the greatest. 35 Sitting down, he called the twelve together and he said to them, "If anyone wants to be first, he must be last of all and servant of all." Mark 9:31-35*

### Explore the Idea (10-15 minutes)

The above story will help your community have a godly way of being leaders in the church. As a community, use the following questions to discuss the teaching of the biblical story.

1. In this story, what were Jesus' disciples arguing about?
2. What did Jesus tell them about what it means to be really great?
3. How can a personal desire for greatness upset and divide a community/team?
4. What would it look like for you to serve the other members of your team and your church community?

### Prayer of Service (5 minutes)

Have each member of the community get on their knees. Take turns praying for God to help each of you follow Jesus' teaching (i.e., to not have wrong desires for greatness and to become servants to others). Use the short prayers below to help you start your prayers.

*God, forgive us for the wrong desire to...*

*God, help us to serve others by...*

## Movement 1: Understand the Story

*Read each question aloud. Give the group time to answer before sharing the answer.*

### Observation Questions

#### 22-01

How did God speak to his people in the past?

In the past, God had spoken to his prophets so they could speak to his people.

How many years had passed since God had spoken to his people?

400 years had passed.

How did God communicate with Zechariah and Elizabeth?

God sent an angel to Zechariah and Elizabeth.

What were Zechariah and Elizabeth like?

Zechariah and Elizabeth honored God.

What problem did Elizabeth, Zechariah's wife, have?

Elizabeth was very old, and had never born any children.

### **22-02**

What did the angel tell Zechariah?

The angel told Zechariah that his wife would have a son and he was to name him John.

What did the angel say John would do in his life?

The angel said that God would fill John with the Holy Spirit and John would get people ready to accept the Messiah.

Why did Zechariah not believe Elizabeth would have a son?

They were too old to have children.

### **22-03**

How did the angel punish Zechariah because he did not believe?

Zechariah was not able to speak until John was born.

What happened after Zechariah was unable to speak?

Zechariah returned home and his wife became pregnant.

### **22-04**

How long had Elizabeth been pregnant when the angel appeared to Mary?

She was six months pregnant.

What do we know about Mary?

Mary was a virgin and was engaged to a man named Joseph.

What did the angel say was going to happen to Mary?

She would become pregnant and give birth to a son and was to name him Jesus.

Who did the angel say Jesus was going to be?

Jesus would be the Son of the Most High God.

### **22-05**

How did Mary respond to this news?

Mary asked how this could be possible since she was a virgin.

What did the angel tell Mary?

The angel explained to Mary that the Holy Spirit and God's power would come to her.

Who would this baby be?

This baby would be God's holy Son, Jesus.

## 22-06

Who did Mary go to visit after the angel left her?

She went to visit Elizabeth.

What happened when Mary greeted Elizabeth?

As soon as Mary greeted her, Elizabeth's baby jumped inside her.

How did the women respond?

The women rejoiced together about what God had done for them.

How long did Mary visit Elizabeth?

Mary visited Elizabeth for three months and then returned home.

## 22-07

What did Zechariah and Elizabeth name their baby?

Elizabeth gave birth to her baby and Zechariah and Elizabeth named him John as God had commanded.

When was Zechariah able to speak again?

After Zechariah and Elizabeth named the baby John, Zechariah was able to speak again.

What did Zechariah say about John?

Zechariah praised God for remembering his people. He said John would be a prophet of the Most High God and would tell the people how they could receive forgiveness for their sins.

## Movement 2: Theological Questions

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### What Does This Story Teach Us?

1. Who is John and what role did he have in God's plan? What does this story teach us about the role John had in God's plan?
2. Who is Jesus and what did he come to earth to do? What is a faithful response to God's plan to send his Son? What does this story teach us about who Jesus is and what he came to do?
3. What is real and genuine faith in God? How do the responses of the characters in this story teach us about genuine faith?

## Movement 3: Live It Out

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### Personal Implications & Applications From The Story

*Guide the group to discuss practical obedience from this story and name concrete next steps.*

1. Which of the characters can you most identify with in this story? Why do you most identify with this character?
2. How is God preparing your heart to accept/trust/receive Jesus as God's Messiah?
3. How have you expressed genuine faith in God? What would it look like to express genuine faith in God?
4. Think about this week. Where does "The Birth of John" challenge you to obey God in a practical way?
5. How does this key idea shape one decision you need to make right now: The story of the birth of John teaches us how to trust God to fulfill his promises.

## Movement 4: Retell the Story

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*Invite the group to retell the story several times until they can tell it clearly and faithfully.*

1. Can someone retell "The Birth of John" from beginning to end in their own words?
2. Retell this story again, but focus on what God did at each key moment.
3. Retell the story in three parts: beginning, middle, and ending. What changed in each part?
4. If you were teaching this story to your family tonight, how would you tell it simply and clearly?

### Church Ministry

Reflect on how this story can edify and mature the Christian community. Design a way to minister this story to your church community.

**Ministry Preparation:** Take time to consider how you could minister this story to others. What setting, audience, or approach would you use? Record your ideas below.

**Ministry Implementation:** Minister this story to a group of believers as you had planned. Use the information in this study to help develop a teaching or lead a discussion. Record your ministry plan below.

**Ministry Reflection:** Think about what you learned from ministering this story to other believers. What went well? What would you do differently? Reflect on your experience below.

## Movement 5: Share It

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*Help each person plan how they will share this story with others before the next gathering.*

1. Who is one specific person you will share "The Birth of John" with this week?
2. When and where will you share this story with them?
3. What is the one main truth from this story you want them to remember?

Report-back next meeting: Who did you share with, and what happened?

### **Mission Engagement**

Consider how you will witness this story to unbelievers. Design a way to share this story and engage them in what it teaches about Christianity and the gospel.

**Witness Preparation:** Take time to consider how you will witness this narrative to unbelievers. What context, relationship, or opportunity will you use? Record your ideas below.

**Witness Implementation:** Share this story with an unbeliever. Use the information in this study to help develop a natural conversation or teaching. Record your plan below.

**Witness Reflection:** Think about what you learned from sharing this story with unbelievers. What did they respond to? What questions did they ask? Reflect on your experience below.