

Gospel Doctrine #2 "My Soul Doth Magnify the Lord" (Luke 1; Matthew 1)

Lesson Goal: To help us develop greater faith in Jesus Christ through a study of the lives of Elisabeth, Zacharias, John the Baptist, Mary, and Joseph.

Bruce R. McConkie: "A God was coming to earth and everything connected with his birth and life and ministry and resurrection and ascension to eternal glory – **everything! – must be perfect.** It must conform to what the **prophets have foreseen, foreknown, and foretold.** Truly Omnipotent Wisdom had **left nothing to chance.** A God was coming into the world, and the world must be ready for his Advent" (*The Mortal Messiah*, 1:284-85).

The Mortal Messiah must be identified to his fellow mortals. His servants must prepare the way before him—and above all testify, to the people, of the divinity of the One sent among them by his Father. The Lord did not call for the heavens to rend or the mountains to melt or the earth to shake. His way is to send living witnesses to testify. As we become better acquainted with these people, we also become better acquainted with Jesus Christ.

1. John the Baptist is born to Elisabeth and Zacharias.

Zacharias

Bruce R. McConkie: "Twice each year, in April and October, the priests of the course of Abia, named for Abijah, traveled from their village homes to the House of the Lord in Jerusalem, there to take their week-long turns at performing those sacred rites and ordinances.

"It was October, the autumn of the year, when Zacharias left his beloved Elisabeth—both of them being in the autumn of their lives—to travel the some **twenty lonely miles** to Jerusalem. At least it was the custom to leave family members at home, for the **priests dwelt in the temple** itself during their week-long ministry. . . With his fellow priests, he then drew lots, as was the custom, so that each of the sons of Aaron serving that week might be assigned his duties. The one service, favored above all others, that a priest to whose lot it fell might perform but once in a lifetime was **the burning of incense on the altar** of incense in the Holy Place, near the Holy of Holies where the very presence of Jehovah came on occasion. And, lo, this time **the lot fell to Zacharias**; he was chosen of the Lord to perform the great mediatorial service in which **the smoke of the incense**, ascending to heaven, **would symbolize the prayers of all Israel ascending to the divine throne.** That Zacharias was to be the central figure in the temple, through this service, all the assembled worshippers knew; and that heaven itself was to respond with divine approval shining forth, they would soon learn.

What prayers did Zacharias make on this occasion? Certainly not, as so many have assumed, prayers that Elisabeth should bear a son, though in days past had been the subject of the priest's faith-filled importunings. This was **not the occasion for private, but for public prayers. He was acting on behalf of all Israel**, not for himself and Elisabeth alone. At the right of the altar, near the Holy of Holies, **there stands Gabriel.** Zacharias is troubled, fearful, but such is a normal reaction. . . **To calm his troubled mind, the angel speaks: "Fear not, Zacharias, for thy prayer is heard, and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John"** (Luke 1:11-13) (*The Mortal Messiah*, 1: 308-309).

Bruce R. McConkie: "Why was it so important that **the baby be named John, and not Zacharias?** Couldn't he just as well have been "Zacharias the Baptist?" Well, just as there is a meaning for every number for the Hebrews, **there is also a meaning for every name.** The name **John, Jochanan** in Hebrew, **means "the grace or mercy of Jehovah."** **John was foreordained to be the one who would go forth ahead of Jehovah to proclaim his grace and mercy"** (*The Mortal Messiah*, 1: 335).

Keith H. Meservy: "**All righteous prayers are answered, but in the due time of the Lord.** There may be some delay until his time is due, as a man well-stricken in years learned when Gabriel appeared to him and said: '**Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard.**' (Luke 1:13.) Though the answer was much-delayed, **the prayer was answered in God's time.** This experience says much about God's need and **His timing.**" (*Studies in Scripture, Vol. 5: The Gospels*, ed. Jackson and Millet, 349).

Neal A. Maxwell: "Faith in God includes faith in **His timing.** Frankly, some of us have some difficulty with this significant dimension of faith. **We clearly prefer our own time to His 'own due time.'** "...**Patience stretches our capacity to bide our time while both wondering and sustaining.** This vital elasticity will be especially needed as part of maintaining faith in **God's timing** in the last days, during which 'all things must come to pass in their time' (D&C 64:32)." (*That Ye May Believe* [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1992], 51-53.)

Bruce R. McConkie on the Angel Gabriel: “Why Gabriel? Why not Michael or Raphael or one of the host of unnamed angels who have parted the veil to converse with their fellow servants in mortality? **Clearly there is an angelic hierarchy**—a heavenly hierarchy—as well as an earthly hierarchy. **Some angels take precedence over and give direction to others:** it is no different in the heavenly church than in the earthly.

Michael, the archangel, the greatest of all, the one who stands next to Christ, is the one who led Jehovah’s hosts when there was war in heaven and the devil and his angels were cast out, and he it is who shall again lead the armies of righteousness in the great battles ahead. As commander-in-chief, he will have others, from general to private, serving under him. **He came to earth as Adam**, and “the angels, under the direction of Michael, act under the direction of the Lord. **Noah, who is Gabriel. . . stands next in authority** to Adam in the Priesthood. (TPJS, 157,167-69). It is fitting for Michael, who presides over and directs the angels, **to send Gabriel**, his next in command, to announce to the mortals things they needed to know concerning the Promised Messiah” (*The Mortal Messiah*, 1:311-12).

Elisabeth

Luke 1:6: And they [Elisabeth and Zacharias] were both **righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.**

Bruce R. McConkie: “Elisabeth—a daughter of Aaron, **highly endowed spiritually, rich in faith—she too was being tested and tried and purified.** With child in her advanced years, facing problems foreign to younger women who bear children, emotionally **troubled, fearing** to face her friends of years, **she “hid herself five months”** (Luke 1:24) to return to normal associations just before Mary’s visit. That **she was overwhelmed at the honor** that was hers to bear the soul of him who would prepare the way for Israel’s King, we can well imagine. That the fruit of her womb was so important in the Lord’s plan and that **Gabriel himself came to announce the conception** was almost beyond human comprehension. **Faithful Elisabeth was being tested and rewarded”** (*The Mortal Messiah*, 1:321).

John

Bruce R. McConkie: “**John was the forerunner in almost every instance.** He was born just before Christ and testified of Him even from the womb, as he leapt in His presence. He started his ministry before Christ started his, declaring that there would be a greater One to come. **He laid down his life for the testimony of Jesus** before Jesus died, and **therefore, he was also the forerunner into paradise to announce that the captive spirits would soon be free.** And in the final dispensation, ours, **he came again to prepare the way for the Second Coming** by restoring the Aaronic Priesthood to the earth so that others could be baptists” (*The Mortal Messiah*, 1:302).

Promises Gabriel made about John:

- Many of the children of Israel shall he **turn to the Lord** – Luke 1:16
- **Turn the hearts of the fathers to the children** – Luke 1:17
- **Turn the disobedient to the wisdom of the just** – Luke 1:17
- Make ready a **people prepared for the Lord** – Luke 1:17

Prophetic words of Zacharias about John:

- To give **knowledge of salvation** unto his people – Luke 1:76-77
- To give **light to them that sit in darkness** – Luke 1:79
- To **guide our feet into the way of peace** – Luke 1:79

2. Mary and Joseph learn that Mary will be the mother of the Son of God.

Mary

Gerald N. Lund: “As we begin reading their story, we learn immediately that Joseph and Mary are ‘espoused’ (Matt. 1:18). Espousal among the Hebrews was significantly more binding than are our engagements today. **The couple entered into it by written agreement and considered it the formal beginning of the marriage itself.** While the couple might not actually live together for as much as a year after the betrothal—a time designed to allow the bride to prepare her dowry—the **espousal was as legally binding as the formal marriage”** (*Selected Writings of Gerald N. Lund: Gospel Scholars Series* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1999], 136).

Elder Bruce R. McConkie: “As there is only one Christ, so **there is only one Mary.** And as the Father chose **the most noble and righteous** of all his spirit sons to come into mortality as his Only Begotten in the flesh, so we may confidently conclude that **he selected the most worthy and spiritually talented of all his spirit daughters to be the mortal mother of his Eternal Son.”** (*Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*. 3 vols. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1965-73, 1:85.)

Elder Russell M. Nelson: “When Mary was notified of her **sacred responsibility**, the announcing angel reassured, **‘For with God nothing shall be impossible’** (Luke 1:37). “...We are children of the noble birthright; **we must carry on in spite of our foredetermined status to be broadly outnumbered and widely opposed.** Challenges lie ahead for the Church and for each member divinely charged toward **self-improvement and service.** **“How is it possible to achieve the ‘impossible’? Learn and obey the teachings of God. From the holy scriptures, heaven-sent lift will**

be found for heaven-sent duties.” (*Perfection Pending, and Other Favorite Discourses* , 105-108.)

Elder Neal A. Maxwell: “The marvelous, **spiritually submissive Mary** likewise expressed it (true submissiveness) in few words. Though filled with wonderment about the miraculous impending birth of Jesus, she said, ‘**Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word**’ (Luke 1:38).

“**Her words can guide us** when we too are puzzled by what is impending or unfolding in our lives. When we cannot explain all that is happening to us or around us, we can adopt Nephi’s position: ‘**I know that [God] loveth his children; nevertheless, I do not know the meaning of all things**’ (1 Nephi 11:17).” (*Sermons Not Spoken* [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1985], 8-9.)

Patricia T. Holland: “I have always been touched that in her moment of **greatest need**, her singular time of **confusion** and **wonder** and **awe**, Mary went to another woman. She knew she could go to Elisabeth. I have also been touched that age was no factor here; **in God’s love there is no generation gap**. Mary was very young—probably in her mid-teens at most—and Elisabeth was well beyond her childbearing years. Yet these two women came together, greeting one another in a bond that only women can know.

“**Elisabeth was not petty or fearful or envious**. Her son would not have the fame or role or divinity that had been bestowed on Mary’s child; **but her only feelings were of love and devotion**. To this young, bewildered kinswoman she said only, ‘Blessed art *thou* among women, and blessed is the fruit of *thy* womb. And whence is this to *me*, that the mother of my Lord should come to *me*?’ (Luke 1:42-43. Italics added.)

“... This exchange between these two different yet similar women seems to me **the essence of love and peace and purity**. **Surely the challenge for our day is to be equally pure in our womanhood**. When we pollute the powerful potential for love with our pettiness and our fears, then disease replaces emotional health, and despondency replaces peace.

“As women, **we have the choice and privilege to connect ourselves to God** in a way whereby we draw his nourishing love down to our very roots. **Such peace and power can then be extended to others**.” (Jeffrey R. and Patricia T. Holland, *On Earth As It Is in Heaven* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1989], 33.)

Joseph

Matt 1:19

Bruce R. McConkie: “When Mary told Joseph that she was with child by the power of the Holy Ghost, his reaction was one not only of **shock**, of **sorrow**, and of **dismay**, but also of **disbelief**. His soul had yet to feel the flames of the refiner’s fire before so great a spiritual truth could rest easily in his heart; **as with all men, his faith and his willingness to submit to the divine will in all things must be tested**.

“For Mary it was no easy thing to tell the man she loved that their relationship was different from that of other faithful couples. And yet **Gabriel himself** had brought the word!

“**For Joseph it was the beginning of a period of agony and uncertainty**. That he wanted to believe Mary, but did not, is shown by his determination ‘to put her away privily’ with as little embarrassment as possible.

Joseph pondered and prayed and had to learn by powers beyond those of mortal men that Mary’s child was God’s Son. At this point of hope and faith that Joseph prevailed with the Lord. His prayers were answered for “the **angel of the Lord** appeared unto him in a dream. . . **Joseph now knew!** Doubt fled. He had the same testimony, from the same source, as did Mary and Elisabeth and Zacharias; and according to their law, in the mouths of two or three witnesses shall every word be established. **The Lord was providing his witnesses** and soon the whole nation and the whole world would be bound to believe” (*The Mortal Messiah*, 1:331-2).

Bruce R. McConkie: “We may well suppose that **Mary told Joseph** of her condition; that she then went to Elisabeth; that **Joseph struggled** with his problem for nearly three months, being fully tested; that **Gabriel brought the word**; that Joseph sent word to Mary of **his conversion**; that she returned again in haste and joy; that immediately the second part of the **marriage ceremony** was performed; and that Joseph, to preserve the virginity of the one who bore God’s Child, refrained from marital relations with her until after Jesus came forth as her child” (*The Mortal Messiah*, 1:333).

Genesis 18:14: Is any thing too hard for the Lord?
Luke 1:37: For with God nothing shall be impossible.

These events comprise a great story. Four humble Jews had their lives forever changed by these miraculous happenings. That the greatest event of all time begins with such humble people in a dusty, out of the way country should remind us that no matter what our station in life, we also have been foreordained to a certain mission. If we are righteous and faithful, as were Zacharias, Elisabeth, Mary, and Joseph, we too can fulfill our missions.

**IS IT POSSIBLE THAT WE ARE MISSING OUT ON FOREORDAINED CALLINGS
BECAUSE WE MAY NOT BE LIVING WORTHY LIVES?**

Hymns of Praise to the Lord from Luke 1 That We Could Emulate

Psalm: Any sacred song used to praise Deity

Luke 1:46-55 – Mary’s Psalm or The Magnificat

And Mary said,

My soul doth **magnify [praise] the Lord,**
And my spirit hath **rejoiced in God my Saviour.**
For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden:
for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.

For he that is mighty **hath done to me great things;**
and I will magnify his holy name.
And **his mercy is on them that fear him**
from generation to generation.

He hath shewed **strength with his arm;**
he hath **scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.**
He hath **put down the mighty** from their seats,
and **exalted them of low degree.**

He hath **filled the hungry** with good things;
and the rich he hath sent empty away.
He hath **holpen his servant Israel,**
in remembrance of his mercy;
As he **spake to our fathers,**
to Abraham, and to his seed for ever.

Benedictus: Zacharias’ hymn of praise

Luke 1:67-80 – Zacharias’ Benedictus

And his [John’s] father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Ghost, and prophesied, saying,

Blessed be the Lord God of Israel;
for he hath **visited and redeemed his people,**
And hath **raised up an horn of salvation for us**
in the house of his servant David;
As **he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets,**
which have been since the world began:
That we should be **saved from our enemies,**
and from the hand of all that hate us;
To **perform the mercy promised to our fathers,**
and to **remember his holy covenant;**
The oath which he sware to our father Abraham,
That he would grant unto us,
That we being **delivered out of the hand of our enemies**
might serve him without fear,
In holiness and righteousness before him,
all the days of our lives.
And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest:
for **thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways;**
To **give knowledge of salvation unto his people**
by baptism for the remission of their sins,
Through the tender mercy of our God;
whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us,
To **give a light to them that sit in darkness**
and in the shadow of death,
To **guide our feet into the way of peace.**