



Weaving God's Promises

LESSON 14

ANGELS COME TO MARY AND JOSEPH

SUMMARY OF TODAY'S STORY

In the Gospel of Luke, the angel Gabriel comes to Mary, who is betrothed but not yet married to Joseph. Gabriel announces to Mary that she will conceive a son by the Holy Spirit and is to call him Jesus. The angel tells Mary of her son's unique role in the salvation history of the people.

Mary then goes to visit her cousin Elizabeth, who is pregnant with a son who will be known to us as John the Baptist. After visiting, Mary returns home singing praise to God in the famous song known as the Magnificat.

In the Gospel of Matthew, Joseph receives a divine revelation from an angel who appears to him in a dream. Joseph is about to divorce Mary because of her pregnancy. In the dream, the angel tells Joseph, as he has already told Mary, that the son that she will bear will be the savior of their people. "You will name him Jesus, for he will save the people from their sins."

KEY CONCEPTS

- Commitment
- Humble submission
- Revelation

WHERE YOU'LL FIND TODAY'S STORY

In the Bible

We recommend the *New Revised Standard Version* Bible.

Luke 1:26-38 (annunciation to Mary)

Luke 1:39-56 (includes Mary visiting Elizabeth, mother-to-be of John the Baptist and the Magnificat)

Luke 1:18-25 (annunciation to Joseph)

In Our Sunday Lectionary

Today's stories are told in church on the following Sundays:

Annunciation to Mary (Luke 1:26-38):

Year B: Fourth Sunday of Advent

Mary with Elizabeth (Luke 1:39-56):

Year C: Fourth Sunday of Advent

Annunciation to Joseph (Matthew 1:18-25)

Year A: Fourth Sunday of Advent



WEAVING OUR STORY WITH THE BIBLICAL STORY

During Advent, we usually recognize Mary, the mother of Jesus. In the Advent wreath, she is often symbolically represented in the third, pink candle.

For this lesson, we will cover two stories, recognizing the role of both Mary and Joseph in the preparation for the coming of our Lord and their son Jesus. The story of how the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary (called The Annunciation) is found in Luke. Joseph's story is found in Matthew.

When Gabriel appears to Mary, her first response is fear. One of the first words that the angel speaks is "Do not be afraid." The raw sense of divine presence can be frightening. At the moment when divine reality with its divine purpose breaks in upon the human consciousness, the effect is overwhelming. We tremble and shrink before the awful magnitude of new possibility and new life to which we are now called.

So Mary receives the call to a new and uncertain future. Gabriel informs Mary that she will bear a son, although she has not yet married and consummated her marriage. Her second response is perplexity to the angel's news. "How can this be?" Indeed, how does God make changes that to us, if in our control, seem inconceivable?

The angel gives Mary the answer that serves as God's answer to our own insufficiency and inabilities: "With God nothing is impossible."

Mary's final response is one of obedience and trust: "Let it be to me according to your word." When God calls us to a new commitment, that is the only sufficient response to God's commission.

And Gabriel says to Mary, "You are favored among women!" What favor is she given? She is given the

favor of bearing a son far from her home, in a stable a son who, though beloved by the humble, is hated by the powerful, often in danger and finally put to death on a cross amidst a jeering crowd. That was the "favor with God," a favor that many would be reluctant to claim. Mary may, even at this point, realize that God promises not unbroken happiness but a deeper truth, not ease and prosperity but reconciliation and union with God, through this child that she will bear.

Joseph discovers that Mary is "with child." Under Jewish law, he has two options: to "divorce her quietly" or bring her to court, which would "put her to shame." The first option is more merciful than the other, and Joseph, being a "just man," favors that option. His sympathy and kindness is apparent here.

But as Joseph is thinking about what to do, an angel comes to him in a dream. Like Mary, he is told that she has conceived a child by the Holy Spirit and that they are to call the child *Jesus*, "for he will save his people from their sins." *Jesus* in Hebrew means *Yahweh is salvation*.

Joseph, like Mary, is quietly obedient to the divine commission. Keeping in mind what the angel told him, he remains betrothed to Mary, then marries her.

Mary and Joseph, in the midst of uncertainty and unexpected happenings, face a difficult choice: submit to the divine will or doubt it and try to control one's own destiny. Both choose to trust in God's word, even though it means leaving the old ways of living (Joseph not heeding the Jewish law), living in difficult circumstances (a stable, then as refugees in Egypt), and living in fear and anxiety for their lives (running from Herod, then following the path of Jesus to his rejection by the people and his death on the cross).

These two stories of Joseph and Mary are perfect examples of the kind of faith and obedience that we

can try to imitate, the humble submission to the will of God when God calls us to mission.

THE EPISCOPAL THREAD



Look at #438 in *The Hymnal 1982* (New York, NY: Church Publishing, 1985) for a beautiful rendition of the Song of Mary (Magnificat).

The Magnificat is also an important part of our Morning and Evening Prayer. It is suggested for use after the Old Testament reading during Evening Prayer on Sundays, at Evening Prayer on all Feasts of our Lord and other Major Feasts, and at any time if only one reading is used.

GATHERING



Invite group members to sit comfortably, giving them an opportunity to visit with each other, establish friendships and build community. Relationships are an important dimension of Christian formation, so a few minutes of visiting will enrich their spiritual development. This is also the perfect time to “check in” with group members by asking them to share how they are feeling at the time or what kind of a week they had.



PRAYER

Materials:

- small table with cloth to cover it
- advent wreath with Advent candles or one pillar candle
- matches
- cross

After all the group members have a few minutes of fellowship time, gather them together for a simple opening prayer. If you are using an Advent wreath, light the appropriate number of Advent candles.

Ask one of the members to light the candle(s) while saying these words from Psalm 119:115:

- Your word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.

Explain that you are inviting the light of God to be with all of you. (You might consider posting this verse from Psalm 119 in the meeting room).

Invite the member who lit the candle to read this prayer:

- My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my
Savior,
for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of
his servant.
Surely, from now on all generations will call me
blessed;
For the Mighty One has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.
—from The Magnificat (Luke 1:46-49)

Carefully extinguish the candle.



TELLING THE STORY

Before the group enters the room, set up a “mini Advent wreath” and light the appropriate candles. Once the group members have settled in, ask if any of them know what the pink candle represents.

Explain that the pink candle is a symbol of Mary, the mother of Jesus, and that this is the time of year when we focus on and honor Mary.

Read today’s stories from the Bible, or tell the stories in your own words. Begin with Mary’s story; then tell Joseph’s.

At this time you do not need to explain or discuss the story. This is the time for the youth to hear the story. For now, simply let them absorb it in their minds and in their hearts. Later, use the discussion or arts time to help the group members draw appropriate and meaningful connections between the story and their own lives.



ACTIVITIES: ARTS, CRAFTS, GAMES, DRAMA, ETC.

Select one or more activities to supplement and enhance today’s story. For each lesson, there are five suggested activities, one from each of the REACT categories. For a detailed explanation of REACT, see page 10 of the Introduction. All activities are meant to reinforce the concepts that were central to the day’s lesson.

Additional activity ideas can be found on pages 2-6 in the Appendix where we’ve provided suggestions and directions for a variety of general activities that can be adapted to any lesson. Also included are outreach and service projects that can be done at any time.

ACTIVITIES FOR THIS WEEK’S SESSION



WEAVING OUR FAITH

Lesson Box

Materials:

- 1 3" x 5" index card for the day's *scribe*
- pen or pencil
- a file box in which to store the cards

Ask for a volunteer or assign a group member to act as *scribe*. Then, ask the group to articulate the most important lesson gleaned from the day's reading. As prompts, you might ask:

- What is the difference between obedience and "humble submission"?
- What do Mary and Joseph's actions tell us about the kind of people they were?

Once the group has agreed on its wording, ask the *scribe* to write the lesson on the card, date it, and file it in the box. By the end of the year, you will have a wonderful and thorough summation of the lessons covered in the participants' own words.



WEAVING GOD'S BELOVED COMMUNITY

Jesus is born of loving parents Mary and Joseph, who cradle him and do everything they can to protect

him from harm. In the early days of Jesus' infancy, the biggest danger comes from King Herod, who is jealous of the baby he comes to see as a threat to his throne.

In God's Beloved Community, God rules over all, through the teaching of God's fundamental values of love, mercy, and justice. But in any earthly society, there are also earthly rulers. In today's world that is far from that Beloved Community, some leaders are good or do what they believe is best for their society, but some are ineffective or even harmful, when they either do not care for their people or even actively work to oppress their people.

- What makes a good leader?
- How are you a leader in your community (school or church)?
- Does a leader have to be someone in a primary spot of authority?



CLOSING PRAYER

Before the group leaves, say a closing prayer to send them into the church worship service or back to their homes in the knowledge of the love and protection of God. You may say your own prayer or use one from the Prayer Book or say a simple one like the following:

- Thank you, Lord God, for sending your Son Jesus Christ to earth, to be born as a baby as we were, to live as we live. Help us now to prepare the way for the coming of your Son Jesus, so that we can learn from him how we can be close to you and live in your love, forever and ever. *Amen.*

End the lesson with a dismissal that is used in church, such as:

- Go in peace, to love and serve the Lord.

The participants respond:

- Thanks be to God.



Weaving God's Promises

FROM THE MOUTHS OF BABES: HELPING CHILDREN TELL ABOUT JESUS' BIRTH

Group members will act as *scribes* for the congregation's young children as they tell the story of Jesus, Mary, Joseph and the angel Gabriel. They may also help them illustrate their completed stories.

Materials:

pads of writing paper
pens and pencils
art paper
staplers
crayons, washable markers
stickers and other art accessories
video cameras, Flip[®] video camera, or digital cameras with video capabilities

Preparation:

Arrange, ahead of class date, for your group members to pair up with young children in Sunday school. Make sure to have adequate space for them to sit and talk together comfortably.

Plan with the children's teachers to provide snacks and drinks.

Directions:

1. Once the pairs have situated themselves for talking and writing, explain that today, the youngsters will have the chance to tell the story of Gabriel's visit to Mary and of the birth of Jesus (as they know it).
2. As the youth listen, they will write down (as best they can) what the youngsters are saying.
3. Encourage youth to ask questions of the little ones to spur them on or redirect them.
4. Make sure that the story also includes the angel Gabriel and Joseph.
5. Every few minutes, the *scribes* should stop and review what they've written to make sure it's accurate and acceptable to the storyteller!

6. Once the stories have been told, *scribes* can copy them over neatly while the little ones draw pictures to illustrate their work. Youth and children can work together to turn their stories and illustrations into simple books with the pages stapled together.
7. Give each book a title and include the names of the *author* and *scribe*.

Close:

- The books can be put on display for all to see, read during a service, or taken home by the young children.

This activity is likely to take two sessions.



Weaving God's Promises

WOULD I, COULD I OBEY? Weaving God's Story into Ours

For groups that would rather have discussions than activities, these questions are great for going deeper and helping to weave God's story into their lives, in a way they can see. You can choose to do this out loud or through journals that are kept in the classroom.

Optional Materials:

(If the journals were used before, they should be stored and ready for use.)

journals, 1 per participant (or, if not available, 5" x 8" index cards, 1 per participant)

pens or pencils

white board, poster board or large sheet of paper

Preparation:

In large letters, copy these Ask/Answer Statements to the board or paper:

- Who do you know who has had to make a difficult life decision?
- Did that decision change his/her life? If so, how?
- Have you ever had to make a tough decision, a sacrifice for the good of others?
- If you knew for sure that God was asking you to do something hard, something that would help others, how do you think you would respond?
- Would you, could you obey?

Some other questions to consider:

- What do you think of Mary's courage and her willingness to commit her life to God's will?
- What do you think about Joseph's decision to stay by her side?
- They decided to raise a child who would surely alter the course of their lives. Why did they so readily obey?

Directions:

1. *Optional:* Distribute journals (or cards) and pens or pencils to each member.
2. Direct participants to the questions/statements on the board.
3. Invite participants to consider and respond to the statement. Invite them to share their answers if they are comfortable doing so.

Note: group members might need help locating the day's reading or lesson in their Bibles.



Weaving God's Promises

“FOR UNTO US A CHILD IS BORN” ANGELS AND CRÈCHES

Participants create origami angels and clay crèches for use by the church or for their families.

Materials:

origami paper, at least 10" square, assorted colors
art paper, felt, feathers, etc.
modeling clay (preferable non-drying clay such as Sculpey®), assorted colors
scissors
glue
plastic knives or butter knives
heavy duty toothpicks
cardboard (for sculptures)
wax paper
optional: stream Jane Siberry's "Callin' All Angels"

Preparation:

For easy origami patterns and instructions, go to

— <http://www.origami-fun.com/christmas-origami.html>

or

— http://dev.origami.com/images_pdf/angel_fehl.pdf.

Directions:

1. Group members have a choice to make origami angels or angels of their own design. The angels may be paired with the crèches, hung on the Jesse Trees, or taken home as ornaments for their own trees.
2. Or group members may opt to create individual clay crèches, complete with a full complement of "characters" (*Mary, Joseph, baby Jesus, Wise Men, shepherds, etc.*).
3. Or the group may work together as a unit and create one larger crèche for display in the church. If this is the case, you need to make sure that each person is working on a different element (*people, animals, trees, manger, straw, star, etc.*).

Close:

- Arrange with the rector to display the group's work during the Advent/Christmas season.

Plan on at least two sessions for this activity.



Weaving God's Promises

HELPING THE LITTLEST AMONG US: A CLOTHING AND FOOD DRIVE FOR BABIES

As a reminder of the birth of Jesus and the difficult circumstances Mary and Joseph had to face, group members conduct a church-wide drive to collect food, clothing and other necessary items to help struggling families care for their children.

Preparation:

At least two weeks before this lesson, contact a local hospital, homeless shelter, women's crisis center or social services agency to find out what specific needs they have for infants and young children.

Coordinate with the rector and education resources person to decide how best to announce this initiative and to get out a list of needed items. Suggested items include:

- Announce the project each Sunday during Advent.
- Include an article in the church's newsletter or on its website.
- Make up a flyer (with the group) to distribute during Advent.

Select a date for the congregation to bring in their items.

- Arrange for representatives of the receiving agencies to pick up the items on "delivery day."

Materials for cards:

card stock, assorted colors
markers, fine point pens or markers
scissors
stickers, glitter and other accessories for embellishment
glue

Materials for gifts:

large gift bags
ribbon
baskets
boxes

Directions:

1. Make a list of items that are needed and where they will be going. It is possible that you will be collecting supplies for more than one agency.

2. On the day that the items are brought in, ask the youth to make simple greeting cards with messages of good wishes, hope and love.

Close:

- If possible, make sure the group is present when the gifts are being handed to the community agencies. You may have to deliver them with the help of other church members.