



# Pleasant Ridge Baptist Church

## Behold the Wondrous Mystery - Christmas 2018

### The Cradle

**Luke 1:28-38; Matthew 1:18-25;**

**12/09/2018**

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## Main Point

A relationship with Christ offers the hope of eternity with God, the peace of His presence, the joy of a life lived for Him, and unconditional love.

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## Introduction

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

**What's your favorite "unexpected" detail in the Christmas story?**

**What's one unexpected way God has worked in your life lately?**

In the Christmas story, one of the common threads we see is God's use of the unexpected. In everything from the young virgin mother, to the birthplace in a stable, to revelations via dreams and angelic choirs, no detail about Jesus' entrance into the world was expected, and

many aspects were downright ironic ways to celebrate the Messiah's birth. All these details build our anticipation of Christmas day, when we celebrate the birth of our Savior.

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## Understanding

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

**HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ MATTHEW 1:18-20 AND LUKE 1:28-33.**

**In addition to being a virgin, what else made Mary an unlikely candidate to carry the Son of God based on the culture of her day?**

**Mary was betrothed to Joseph, which made them legally husband and wife even though the marriage wasn't finalized. What possible legal and social consequences might Mary and Joseph have faced as a result of her being pregnant out of wedlock?**

According to religious law, Joseph had the right to divorce Mary publicly or privately for her apparent adultery. As verse 19 notes, Joseph was a "righteous" man whose conviction and desire to follow God's law, combined with his mercy, led him to choose private divorce. Imagine Joseph's relief when an angel confirmed Mary's story.

**Compare and contrast Mary and Joseph's initial responses to God's "interruption" in their lives. How might you have reacted in their positions?**

Having affirmed Mary and attempted to put her fears at ease, Gabriel then revealed the purpose of his visit. Gabriel delivered a shocking message to the young Mary. She would conceive and give birth to a son. The idea of conception by a woman not yet married made this a hard statement to accept. The angel even provided the name of the child—Jesus. The name Jesus means "Deliverer, Savior."

**What do we learn about the Messiah, the promised child, from the angel's comments to Mary in verses 31-33?**

**Read aloud some of the messianic prophecies from 2 Samuel 7:12-13; Isaiah 9:7; Isaiah 11:1-5; and Psalm 89:3-4. Discuss what these prophecies reveal about the Messiah's identity and function, and discuss the importance of Jesus, the Messiah, fulfilling these prophecies.**

Verses 31-32 tell us much about Jesus: He is the Son of God, and He will reign forever. Jesus is the promised Messiah who would fully and finally redeem the world. In contrast to the previous verse, verse 33 looks beyond life as we know it to the time after Jesus' glorious coming. Both His deity and humanity are in view in the angel's proclamation.

**Using these verses, how would you describe the kingdom of God? What is your purpose as a part of the kingdom?**

**HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ LUKE 1:34-37.**

**What attitudes are revealed by Mary's question (v. 34)?**

**Have someone read Luke 1:11-18. Compare Zechariah's and Mary's reactions to the news the angel brought each of them.**

Zechariah's and Mary's answers to the angel's news reveal two different responses to God. Zechariah didn't believe God's ability to give him and his wife a son, and he asked for a sign to prove God's words were true. Mary voiced confusion over the logistics of how she'd have a child, but she never acknowledged skepticism or doubt. These two responses show us an important distinction between questioning God and asking questions of Him.

**What are a few key differences between questioning God and asking questions of Him?**

## **What connection have you seen in your life between obedience to God and true joy?**

**HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ MATTHEW 1:24-25 AND LUKE 1:38.**

Matthew 1:24-25 emphasize that what Joseph saw while he was sleeping led him to obey God immediately. He resolved to marry his betrothed and believe her story. Not only did he marry her, he also agreed not to consummate the marriage until after Jesus was born. Joseph's understanding of God's love for Him had a direct impact on his love for Mary.

**We have the benefit of knowing the whole story, but Joseph didn't. Do you think choosing to marry Mary was an easy choice for Joseph? Why or why not?**

Joseph also showed submission to God in naming the child Jesus, as the angel had commanded him to do. It was quite common at the time of Jesus' birth for firstborn sons to take a version of the father's name, so it required additional sacrifice on Joseph's part to deviate from the cultural standard.

**Is there a situation in your life that doesn't make sense? How does Mary and Joseph's story encourage you that God knows what He's doing in that situation?**

**What are some practical ways you can remind yourself that God is working His plan in your life?**

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## **Application**

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

**How does your level of trust in God and His goodness compare to the day you became a believer or the oldest memory you have of trusting Him?**

**What about your current circumstances causes you to doubt God's love for you?  
Similarly, what about your current circumstances reminds you of God's love for you?**

**What is one practice that you would like to be a part of this Christmas season for you and/or your family? How can we hold each other accountable to pursuing Christ in that way over the coming weeks?**

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## Pray

Close in prayer, asking God to strengthen our faith and our courage to obey Him this Advent season. Pray that as we study the Christmas story, your hope, peace, joy, and love of Christ will increase.

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## Commentary

### LUKE 1:28-38

1:28. The angel greeted Mary with the words, "Rejoice, favored woman! The Lord is with you." The word for rejoice here was a common greeting, somewhat akin to our greeting "Hello, how are you?" Mary, a normal Galilean girl, received favored status not because she was in some way unique or sinless but because God selected her for a high honor. Because of her favored status, Mary received full assurance of God's support and help. The words underscore God's gracious action in choosing Mary for such a high honor and responsibility.

1:29-31. At first the angel's greeting "deeply troubled Mary." Confrontation by an angel might disturb anyone. No sense of panic overcame Mary. However, she did wonder about the circumstances. Verse 30 expands on verse 28. The angel instructed Mary, "Do not be afraid." He then told her the reason that she need not fear. She had found favor with God. Again, God

based His favor not on Mary's status or any special abilities she possessed. It rested completely on God's choice. Gabriel delivered a shocking message to the young Mary. She would conceive and give birth to a son. The idea of conception by a woman not yet married made this a hard statement to accept. The angel even provided the name of the Child—Jesus. Take note that God chose the name. Traditionally, a father named his child. In this case, God as the Heavenly Father claimed that right over Joseph to name the Child Mary would give birth to. The name Jesus means "Deliverer, Savior." In the Old Testament, the equivalent Hebrew name is Joshua. Moses' successor, Joshua, served God as a deliverer of the people out of the wilderness into the land of promise (see Josh. 1:1-5).

1:32. With this verse Luke began a description of who Jesus is. His greatness indicated that He would be more than human. Normally the term great referred to God. The exalted title "Son of the Most High" also connected Jesus with God. As Most High, God reigns over all creation. As a descendant of King David, Jesus would occupy the great king's throne to carry on the just and righteous reign of God on earth (see Isa. 9:7; Dan. 7:14). These titles look to Jesus as the Messiah and emphasize His divine nature.

1:33. Jesus' reign as Messiah-King will last forever. It will be a "kingdom with no end." The eternal reign coincided with the Old Testament view of the Messiah. The phrase house of Jacob stood for Israel as a nation. Luke, however, understood God's people to be all who by faith gave God authority over their lives. Thus Jesus came to establish Himself as King over a kingdom not limited by earthly boundaries.

1:34-35. Mary took in the angel's comments about the Child to come. Her question about it, however, set up the further explanation offered in verse 35. She questioned how a virgin could conceive and give birth. The Holy Spirit, the third Person of the Godhead, is God present in His power. He acted to make the conception happen apart from the normal biological process. Mary's human abilities played no part in this process. She simply made herself available to God. Luke identified the Child as the "holy One." Only God makes things holy. Holiness indicates something or someone set aside by God to be used to accomplish His purpose.

1:36-38. The angel urged Mary to consider the case of her "relative Elizabeth." He offered further evidence of God's power to assure Mary. God enabled a childless woman to give birth and a virgin to be pregnant. Mary made herself available for God to work through her. She accepted slave status, which meant total submission and obedience. Nothing else needed to be said after Mary's affirmation of faith. So the angel left her. This departure indicated the settlement of the matter in Mary's heart. Things could move forward.

1:18. A Jewish girl might be quite young, perhaps in her early teens, when betrothed. At this point the couple was recognized as legally married, though they were not permitted either to live together or to have sexual relations. Pregnancy automatically would have cast suspicion on Joseph, but in that society Mary would bear the brunt of the shame. The miraculous nature of her pregnancy is underscored in the text, but people would not know about that.

1:19. Joseph's honor is confirmed in his conduct after the painful revelation of Mary's pregnancy. Notice he already was considered her husband, even though the actual marriage had not yet occurred. At this moment he still had no idea about God's intervention. Mary would have been considered an adulteress, and public censure could have resulted in her death by stoning (see Lev. 20:10; Deut. 22:23).

1:20. The angel's addressing him as "Joseph, son of David," underscores the messianic lineage of Joseph. It also prepared him for the information that the conception was miraculous and thus the child would be the Messiah. In the eyes of the law the child would be Joseph's son and thus of the lineage of David, which fulfilled the prophecy.

1:21-22. Jesus means "Yahweh saves" or "Yahweh is salvation." Jesus' fundamental purpose in coming was to "save His people from their sins." The beauty and wonder of Christmas must always have the shadow of the cross. Fulfillment of prophecy was an important theme for Matthew.

1:23-25. Matthew quoted Isaiah 7:14 as the relevant prophecy. The name would be "Immanuel" which Matthew helpfully translated for any in his audience who spoke Greek as God is with us. The Messiah indeed would be God among His people. Joseph's character again came through clearly. Instead of doubting and questioning, he simply did as the Lord's angel had commanded him. Obedience is a cardinal quality of a righteous man.