



THE DIFFICULTIES OF CHRISTMAS

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 3, 2023

KEY SCRIPTURE | Luke 1:26–28

DISCUSSION GUIDE | In our new series, *The Christmas Option*, we'll journey through the entire Christmas story and examine what each of the major characters in the narrative had to deal with and what came out of it. We often do the Christmas story a disservice due to its familiarity. More times than not, we romanticize the events of the Nativity as we put them on postcards, in children's plays, and sing about them in cute Christmas carols. But living through the events of the Christmas story must have felt dreadful at times.

A teenage girl with her future ahead of her was rocked by scandal—but she didn't do anything wrong! A newlywed couple uprooted from their home, their family, and their support system during the most inconvenient time of their lives. A king who was already losing his power to a Roman occupation discovered that a new king had been born and would be an even greater threat to his authority. It seems as though every life that was touched by the events of Christmas experienced inconvenience and hardship. Yet, through those inconveniences, the greatest opportunities presented themselves. Opportunities for peace in the midst of chaos, for powerful influence, and ultimately for the salvation of all humanity. Your difficulty is your opportunity to declare your devotion.

QUESTIONS | Icebreaker: What is your favorite Christmas tradition?

1. Read Luke 1:26–38 together. What were your overall takeaways from this message?
2. How did Mary respond to Gabriel's greeting in v. 28 (1:29)? Why do you think she responded this way?
3. Compare and contrast Zechariah's "how" question in 1:18 to Mary's "how" question in 1:34. How does Gabriel's response reveal the heart behind the question? (See Notes & Digging Deeper sections)
4. How does remembering that God's word never fails to help you with the difficulties you face (1:37)?
5. What do you do when you are disappointed, or are facing difficulty? What did Mary do (1:38)?
6. Read Luke 1:46–55 together. What do you learn about God from Mary's song of praise?
7. How is God calling you to respond to this message? What are you going to do?

NOTES | 1:27 *She was engaged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of King David.*

We know from historians that a Jewish marriage consists of two stages. The first is betrothal (kiddushin). The second is the nuptials (chuppah).

- At this stage, Mary is in the betrothal category which means they have not had the marriage ceremony or consummated the marriage. However, at this point, in order for the two parties to break it off, it would actually require a divorce.
- They are ENGAGED but this is a serious commitment.

Announcement to Zechariah (Luke 1:11-20)	Announcement to Mary (Luke 1:26-38)
The angel Gabriel appears	The angel Gabriel appears
Addresses Zechariah by name	Addresses Mary as "full of grace"
Zechariah is "troubled" when he sees the angel	Mary is "confused and disturbed" at the angels greeting
"Do not be afraid"	"Do not be afraid"
"You shall call his name John"	"You shall call his name Jesus"
"How shall I know this?"	"How will this be since I am a virgin?"
Fails to believe	"Let it be done to me..."
Luke 1:11, 13, 12, 13, 13, 18, 20	Luke:26, 28, 29, 30, 34, 38

DIGGING DEEPER | Joseph's Royal Family

"The Gospel of Matthew begins with Jesus' genealogy (1:1-17). For people today, reading the long list of Jesus' ancestors might seem tedious. For Matthew's Jewish readers, however, the genealogy would have been extremely significant. In it, they would discover that the royal line of King David had been preserved. It was alive and well in Joseph's family.

Matthew begins with Abraham and then lists his descendants. Going on, Matthew lists the kings who came from David, including Solomon, Rehoboam, and Hezekiah. Matthew's genealogy, then, represents not just descendants of David but the royal successors to the throne...according to Matthew, Jesus has a royal genealogy because he is the legal son of Joseph. For Matthew, it is Joseph's line that makes Jesus the "son of David". Of course, Matthew will later make the point that Joseph is not Jesus' biological father. This, however, does not threaten Jesus' royal identity. For ancient peoples, biological descent was not necessary for royal succession. For example, Caesar Augustus, the emperor at the time of Jesus' birth, had become emperor because he had been adopted by Julius Caesar. Subsequent emperors Tiberias, Caligula, and Nero were also all adopted sons of their predecessors...In sum, Jesus was not less of a son to Joseph because he was adopted...

To all appearances, it may have seemed that God had bestowed a gift upon Joseph, royal lineage, that had no purpose. The line of David had been miraculously preserved through the centuries, but for what? Joseph, who came from kings, lives humbly as a carpenter. Joseph later discovers that his wife is mysteriously pregnant. None of the pieces of Joseph's life seem to fit together—until the angel speaks: in Christ, the puzzle of his life is solved. God's plan is that Joseph will be the one to give the Messiah his name, an act performed by a child's father (see Luke 1:62-63). In all of this, we see that Joseph is a model of faithfulness."

Barber, Michael Patrick. *The True Meaning of Christmas: The Birth of Jesus and the Origins of the Season*. Ignatius Press: San Francisco, 2021. Pages 72-78.