

THE SEASON THAT STILL TOUCHES HEARTS

STUDY TWO

The Surprise That Still Brings Relief

Matthew 1:18–25; Luke 1:26–38

The message I have for all of us today is this: God keeps on surprising us when we least expect it. We simply need to stay alert, sensitive, and open to what God wants us to hear.

—Charles R. Swindoll

DURING World War II, a chaplain decided to accompany the crew of an Army Air Force bomber on a raid into Germany. The B-17 encountered heavy resistance when enemy fighter planes swarmed the plane and antiaircraft artillery peppered the sky. To steady the men, the chaplain activated the intercom and said, “It’s all right, men. Have no fear. God is with you.” The tail gunner, who was frantically firing his weapon, shouted back, “God may be with you guys up front, but He’s not back here!” Within a few seconds, an enemy shell passed through the tail of the plane and out the top, leaving gaping holes where it entered and exited but not detonating! After a moment of stunned silence over what appeared to be a miracle, the tail gunner added, “Correction. *God just walked in!*”¹

What a fitting way to describe the first Christmas! When Jesus was born, everything in the world seemed out of control. A power-mad Roman dictator occupied the throne, public executions were commonplace, and death was all around . . . then suddenly, God just walked in and did the impossible!

As Paul put it, “We were slaves to the basic principles of this world. But when the right time came, God sent his Son” (Galatians 4:3–4). To announce the Son’s entrance, a host of angels filled the sky with sound and light and surprised a group of shepherds. Rather than incite more fear, however, God’s surprise brought unspeakable relief—salvation, peace, and joy. God’s surprises *still* bring relief.



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

The Surprise That Still Brings Relief

Matthew 1:18–25; Luke 1:26–38

In this study, we'll examine the angel's surprise visits to Mary first and then Joseph. These sudden appearances must have shocked them both, but along with the surprises came divine reassurances that brought comfort and inspired faith. Will God bring surprises into our lives? Most certainly! But, like Mary and Joseph, we can count on the divine relief that inevitably settles our souls when we rest in His sovereign plan.



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Let's prepare our hearts by reflecting on Isaiah's prophecy of the birth of the Savior who would come from the line of David and rule with peace, fairness, and justice. Read aloud the prophecy in [Isaiah 9:6–7](#), letting each name and description of the Messiah resonate in your spirit.

In what ways recently has your heart longed for the relief only the Prince of Peace can bring? Write a prayer to the Lord expressing your need for His reassuring rule in your world, and ask Him to bring you relief as you draw near to Him through your study.

Now, let's open the Word to Luke's description of the annunciation, the event when Gabriel announced to Mary that God would fulfill Isaiah's ancient prophecy through her.



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TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Read slowly the following verses, imagining the scene unfold.

In the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a village in Galilee, to a virgin named Mary. She was engaged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of King David. Gabriel appeared to her and said, “Greetings, favored woman! The Lord is with you!”

Confused and disturbed, Mary tried to think what the angel could mean. “Don’t be afraid, Mary,” the angel told her, “for you have found favor with God! You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be very great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David. And he will reign over Israel forever; his Kingdom will never end!” (Luke 1:26–33)



Observation: God’s Surprises

Let’s employ the *Searching the Scriptures* process of observation as we look closer at these verses.² To enhance your study, Chuck Swindoll recommends putting yourself in the place of the main character, Mary. What surprises did God have for Mary? And what fears might have been going through her mind?

Mary voiced confusion about the angel’s message: “But how can this be? I am a virgin” (Luke 1:34). She wasn’t resisting God’s plan; she was simply asking a question.



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Do you feel surprised by a circumstance in your life? It's okay to feel confusion, just as Mary did. What would you like to request from the Lord?

Gabriel relieved Mary's confusion by answering her question. But before we read Gabriel's response, let's observe Joseph's surprise in a later scene.

Imagine Joseph's heartache when Mary told him that she was going to have a baby. Naturally, he assumed she was pregnant by another man. Being a gracious and righteous man and loving Mary dearly, Joseph did not wish "to disgrace [Mary] publicly"; rather, "he decided to break the engagement quietly" (Matthew 1:19). But an angel *surprised* Joseph by telling the troubled fiancé in a dream: "Do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife" (1:20).

What confusion might that message have caused Joseph?

Understandably so, both Mary and Joseph experienced distress after God surprised them. When "God just walks in," He usually doesn't forewarn us. It's normal to feel afraid and wonder what God is doing. However, at our lowest, most doubtful point, God relieves our distress with His reassurances. Let's look at how God brought relief to Mary and Joseph.



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Interpretation: God’s Relief

In the interpretation phase of our *Searching the Scriptures* study, we’ll seek to understand the meaning of the similar messages the angel gave Mary and Joseph. In the following chart, compare the verses in the columns, noting the similarities and differences.

Luke 1:34–35	Matthew 1:20–21
<p>Mary asked the angel, “But how can this happen? I am a virgin.” The angel replied, “<u>The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.</u> So the baby to be born will be holy, and he will be called the Son of God. (emphasis added)</p>	<p>As he considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. “Joseph, son of David,” the angel said, “do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. <u>For the child within her was conceived by the Holy Spirit.</u> And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” (emphasis added)</p>

What does it mean that Mary will “became pregnant through the power of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 1:18)? And what does the word *overshadow* imply in the sentence, “the power of the Most High will overshadow you” (Luke 1:35)? These questions need to be researched.

Let’s consult our Bible study tools to clarify meaning. You can look up these verses in your commentaries or check out the explanation of Jesus’ miraculous conception in Constable’s Notes, an online commentary. Go to Luke 1 at netbible.org, click “Constable’s Notes,” and scroll down to the comments on Luke 1:35–37. What do you discover from your reading?



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God surprised Mary and Joseph with the “bombshell” that she would bear the Savior of the world. Along with the surprise, however, came the relief that she would remain a virgin and the conception would result from a miracle. List the specific promises to Mary (*Luke 1:35–37*)? In what ways did God reassure Mary?

God also surprised Joseph when He told him to take Mary as his wife even though she was pregnant. What reassurances encouraged Joseph to go through with the marriage, even though, culturally, the marriage would have been scandalous (*Matthew 1:20–23*)?

We feel the greatest relief when we *know* beyond doubt that God is in control and He is working His plan. Gabriel told Mary, “nothing will be impossible with God” (*Luke 1:37 NASB*). What a hopeful truth to claim during life’s surprises!



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Correlation: The Ultimate Reassurance

What do the following verses affirm about God's power to do the impossible?

Jeremiah 32:17, 27

Mark 10:23–27

Although God's surprises *shook* Mary and Joseph, His reassurances *stabilized* them. How did they respond to God's surprises? In the final section of our study, we'll see Mary and Joseph's humble acceptance of God's plan as we apply the lesson to our lives.

God is not through surprising us. God is not finished with His plan to bring relief to our situation in ways that we would never have guessed. We just must be open. We must be willing to believe Him. And when He directs in a certain area, our response—knowing His direction—must be, “Yes.” —Chuck Swindoll



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Application: Our Response

Read Mary and Joseph's responses to God's surprises.

Mary's response.

Mary responded, "I am the Lord's servant. May everything you have said about me come true." And then the angel left her. (Luke 1:38)

Joseph's response.

All of this occurred to fulfill the Lord's message through his prophet:

"Look! The virgin will conceive a child!

*She will give birth to a son,
and they will call him Immanuel,
which means 'God is with us.'"*

When Joseph woke up, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded and took Mary as his wife. But he did not have sexual relations with her until her son was born. And Joseph named him Jesus. (Matthew 1:22–25)

Write down an application principle—an eternal truth—from this passage that you can put into action.



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Throughout the Christmas story we find the pattern of God's *surprise* followed by *relief* followed by *faith*. Can you perceive God's pattern repeating itself in your life lately? What surprise has He brought you? What might be His reassuring message? And how can you apply the principle of faith today?

The Christmas story is full of surprises. Mary and Joseph, the shepherds, even the Magi experienced unexpected divine encounters. But along with God's surprises came God's miracles followed by trusting obedience from each individual. At this Christmas season, may you discover the joy of faith in a God who can do the impossible!



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, I give You my heart without reservation and without hesitation today. You have first place in my life. I want to adore You above all others this Christmas. Be the Master of my life—my decisions, my actions, and my responses to whatever surprises You bring. I pray in the name of my Savior, Jesus, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. Jane Polley, ed., "God Just Walked In," in *American Folklore and Legend* (Pleasantville, NY: Reader's Digest, 1978), 393.
2. To learn about Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."



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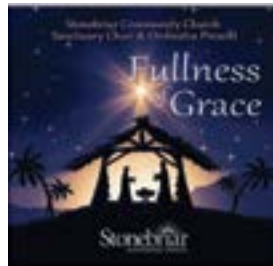
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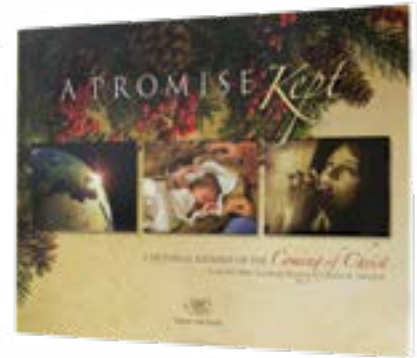
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For the 2019 broadcast, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by Bryce Klabunde, executive vice president of Pastoral Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages.

