

WHEN ANGELS SPOKE STUDY ONE

When an Angel Spoke to Mary

Luke 1:26–38

We sing of them. We write them into our songs. Virtually every carol we sing includes those intriguing creatures we know simply as “angels.” They certainly aren’t chubby little cherubs with pink cheeks and tiny wings and arrows. That’s all fantasy. They are magnificent and sometimes fierce. And, on occasion, because they’re filled with compassion, they rescue us.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

FOR centuries, artists have sought to capture on canvas or other media the wonder of *angels*. The rare mentions of these intriguing beings in Scripture spur our imaginations about their nature.

Some imagine angels as beautiful women arrayed in pristine robes, while others see round babies shrouded in delicate ribbon. Regardless of appearance, most think these celestial figures come equipped with accessories like feathered wings, golden harps, or glowing halos.

These images may sound familiar, but they don’t entirely resonate with how God’s Word depicts angels. This *Searching the Scriptures* study will uncover the truth about angels by focusing on the angel Gabriel’s interaction with Mary to announce one of the most important events in human history: the birth of Jesus Christ.



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

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PREPARE YOUR HEART

Who can resist the joy of Christmas? As the calendar flips from November to December, you can already hear the jingle-bells and taste the peppermint. While this special season may flood your mind and heart with fond childhood memories, use this time you've set aside for God to ask Him to help keep your focus on Him amid the hustle and bustle of the holiday.

Father, thank You for Your Son Jesus—the greatest Christmas gift ever given. Please, help me remember that He is the reason I celebrate this wonderful holiday. Help me keep my eyes on Him. In His gracious name I pray. Amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

These Christmas studies will focus on angels and their God-given role in the story of the birth of King Jesus. Before starting, it's worth clarifying some details about the Bible's depiction of these unique beings.

First, *angels are real*. They don't belong in the catalog with fictional beings like fairies, wood nymphs, and water sprites.

Second, *angels are messengers*. The English word “angel” comes directly from the Greek word *angelos*, which means messenger. Angels depicted in the Bible, however, aren't normal messengers. Instead, angels were sent by God specifically to communicate special messages about His purpose at epochal moments in history.

Angels deliver something far more significant than what is tangible: . . . God's message.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Third, *angels have a distinct nature*. This nature differs from divine nature and human nature. Reading the supernatural descriptions of angels in Scripture, one might think angels deserve worship along with God. But the angels themselves make it clear that the only one worthy of praise is God—and God *alone*.

Luke 1:26–38 tells of the appearance of the angel Gabriel to the Virgin Mary. God sent Gabriel to Mary at the right time with a unique and powerful message of *revelation*—to reveal the miraculous birth of the Son of God.



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Observation: A Special Message for Mary

Pastor Chuck Swindoll's book *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs* lays out the four steps to follow for reading the Bible well. The first step is observation, and when you observe, you read the passage "carefully, with attention to detail."¹

Read [Luke 1:26–38](#), and notice how *little* detail Luke included about Gabriel's appearance. Remember, angels were God's messengers, so what they *said* was always more important than what they *did*. In your own words, summarize Gabriel's message in [1:30–33](#).

What question did Mary raise in [1:34](#)? How did Gabriel respond in [1:35](#)?

What evidence did Gabriel provide in [1:36](#) that God could do the impossible?



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What did Mary say at the end of her conversation with Gabriel? What kind of attitude did she show?



Interpretation: Significant Reasons for the Special Message

The second step of the Bible-study process is to ask questions that dive deeper into the interpretive waters by looking past the surface-level observations and considering what the passage means.

Place yourself in the sandals of Mary. Up to this point in your teenage years, you've led a modest, pious, and unremarkable life. You look forward to marrying Joseph and anticipate living out the rest of your days with him and your future children in humble service to God.

Then one day, a stranger arrives at your home speaking with an authority you've never heard before. This mysterious person doesn't mince words: "You will give birth to the Son of God, and He will deliver God's people. Yes, you may be a virgin, but you will conceive through the power of the Holy Spirit." Mary would be a servant of God unlike anyone before or after her.

How would you have reacted if you had heard these powerful words and experienced this unimaginable encounter?



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The name “Jesus” is the Greek rendering of the Hebrew name *Yeshua*, which is derived from the term meaning “salvation.” Based on the words of the angel, how would Mary’s child ultimately save God’s people? See *Constable’s Notes* on Luke 1:31–33 to guide your answer.

Why was it necessary for Jesus to be conceived by the Holy Spirit, rather than a man? How would Jesus, God-made-flesh, live a life different from any other human ever? See *1:35*.

We’ve become so familiar with this story that it begins to mean little. How else could God have brought someone on this earth without a sin nature if it had not been through the genius of a virgin birth? Never happened before, will never happen again.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: “For Unto Us a Child Is Born”

The message of revelation about the birth of a child who would deliver God’s people did not originate on the lips of Gabriel. Instead, the announcement of hope the angel shared with Mary echoed the words of the prophet Isaiah from hundreds of years earlier.



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In a time when Israel was surrounded by wicked, violent regimes, Isaiah arrived to prophesy how God's light would pierce the darkness. Read *Isaiah 9:1–7*. With what message of hope did Isaiah begin this portion of his prophecy?

According to *9:6–7*, who would provide this hope for Israel? How would he bring this hope? (Hint: Pay special attention to the titles Isaiah uses in *9:6*.)

In the same way that Mary heard hope through Gabriel's message, we, too, can find encouragement through the ancient angel's message—encouragement that will spur us on in our faith in Jesus Christ.

Application: Receiving God's Message Today

Gabriel brought a message of history-altering *revelation* to Mary. Although Mary likely had a hard time receiving the news about giving birth to the Son of God who would become king, she didn't shrug off the words of the angel. Look again at how she responded in *Luke 1:38*:

"I am the Lord's servant. May everything you have said about me come true."

You likely have not had a spectacular encounter with an angel like Mary did 2,000 years ago. Yet, God still speaks to us today *through His Word*.



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In the space below, record a time when you had a powerful encounter with God through Scripture. What verse, passage, or story stood out to you, and how did it reveal God’s message? How did you respond to this revelation?

In what way do you sense God calling you to take the next step in your journey of faith? What would it look like for you to adopt Mary’s disposition and say, “I am the Lord’s servant”?

What a messenger! *What a message!* Little did Mary realize that these words of hope would reverberate for generations to come—that the news of her child would be the beginning of the *good* news that would bring God’s salvation to the entire world. It was with this scene in mind that Mark Lowry and Buddy Greene penned the lyrics of the familiar Christmas carol:

Mary, did you know that your baby boy
Would one day walk on water?
Mary, did you know that your baby boy
Would save our sons and daughters?
Did you know that your baby boy
Has come to make you new?
This child that you delivered
Will soon deliver you.²



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A FINAL PRAYER

Heavenly Father, thank You for the way You work out Your wonderful yet mysterious plan. Thank You for using Your humble servant Mary to play a part in Your bigger plan of bringing Your Son Jesus into the world. I ask that You would give me the strength to follow Mary's example and to say to You in faith, "I am the Lord's servant." In Jesus' precious name, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2016), 80.
2. Mark Lowry and Buddy Greene, "Mary, Did You Know?" Hymnary.org © Copyright 1991 Rufus Music (admin. by Gaither Copyright Management)/Word Music LLC. All rights reserved.

