Summary of Today’s Story
The angel Gabriel appears to Zechariah to announce the coming birth to him and his wife Elizabeth of a son. This son will be “the Prophet of the Most High” and is to be named John (meaning “God is gracious”). Zechariah expresses doubt, since both he and his wife are old and she has been unable to conceive a child.

The angel strikes Zechariah mute, because of his unbelief.

Elizabeth does conceive. When John is born, Zechariah can now speak and confirms, as the angel had commanded, that the boy’s name is John. He is the one who will prepare the way of the Lord—Jesus.

Where You’ll Find Today’s Story

In the Bible
We recommend the New Revised Standard Version Bible.
Luke 1:5-25, 57-80

In Children’s Bibles
If you plan to use a children’s Bible for storytelling, write the page numbers of today’s story in the space below.

In Our Sunday Lectionary
This story is not part of the Eucharistic Sunday readings or the Sunday readings in the RCL lectionary. However, the story is told on the following occasions:
June 24, the Nativity of St. John the Baptist
Year C: Proper 29 and the Second Sunday in Advent, Canticle 16, the canticle of Zechariah. The canticle is also in the regular cycle of canticles read during Morning Prayer.
In their old age, Zechariah and Elizabeth are told of a great change of which they will be a part. Can they accept that change?

The coming of an angel, the announcement of a pregnancy in one woman who is far past menopause, the hint of earthshaking power working in the son—great changes are coming to a people bound up with tradition.

Even the boy’s name is to be different from what is traditionally given to a child. The relatives say, “But we’ve always named our sons after the father... It’s always been like that.”

But the angel’s announcement—and a command concerning something as “minor” as a name—tells the parents that the new generation will be very different from the former one. The son will follow a different course. And he will lead all Israel, and all the world, there. John will not be like Zechariah. The people in John’s generation will not be like those in Zechariah’s.

It is hard for us to accept a change from “the way we’ve always done it” or “the way it’s always happened.” Zechariah had a hard time accepting even that he and his wife will be instruments of change—as is obvious from the angel’s visit—or that their childless condition will finally end. But look how they obeyed, even after doubt, and look at how Elizabeth so faithfully accepted and embraced her new role that she could sense the wondrous changes even in her unborn child: “For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy” (Luke 1:44).

Our best way of reading this story is to put ourselves in the place of the parents, to feel what they feel—their doubts, fear, joy, trust and probably trembling anticipation.

As leaders, we can read the text slowly to ourselves and imagine Zechariah and Elizabeth’s feelings as they live through these months of waiting for an unexpected birth that is to shake a whole people. Put the child in our womb and anticipate his coming, the Prophet of the Most High. Confront our relatives who cling to traditional ways, and instead side with the angel of the Lord in embracing the new order.

Zechariah’s poetic song of thanksgiving has become a canticle which is sung or said during Morning Prayer and on some Sundays. Known as “The Song of Zechariah,” and found on p. 50 (Canticle 4, Rite I) and 92 (Canticle 16, Rite II) of the Prayer Book, it is recommended for Morning Prayer on Sundays and Wednesdays. (See BCP, p. 144 for all of the suggested canticles at Morning Prayer.)
As the children enter the room, engage them in a simple activity. If you are using this lesson during Advent, your gathering time may be focused on Advent activities for the children. For example, as children enter, have them hang an ornament on a Jesse tree, get ready to light the Advent wreath, or make simple gifts for the homebound in your church. They might prepare for the coming of the Christ child by anticipating the holy time and by doing acts of charity and love.

Here is a simple Advent gift for the homebound that may be done in just a few minutes: On a small piece of paper or 3" x 5" card, write a prayer or grace. Decorate this paper with stickers (for younger children) or drawings. Glue a small piece of candy or other treat to the card. Finish this “greeting card” with a ribbon tied in a bow and glued onto the card.

Another option for older children is Gabriel’s Message on page 8.

After all the children have arrived and had a few minutes of activity or fellowship time, gather them together and say a simple opening prayer.

- Lord, we give you thanks for this day and for this season of Advent, when we await your coming in love and in glory. Send your Holy Spirit to us, we pray, as we listen to your story and get to know you today. We pray this in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Read today’s story aloud from a children’s Bible, showing the pictures, or tell the story in your own words. You might tell the story as Zechariah or as Elizabeth, putting yourself in their places. If there are two leaders for your group, each leader can tell his or her part. Use simple costumes or props to enhance the storytelling. The story can be told as a memory of a momentous time past, or in the present tense as something happening right now.

Bring to life the feelings and thoughts that must have attended this amazing event—the coming birth of a boy to a very elderly childless couple, a boy whose coming was announced by an angel and who himself will announce the coming of the Messiah.

Think of what the parents might have felt when they imagine the chain of events that is being put into place by John’s birth. We can be sure that Zechariah and Elizabeth did not take the nine months of pregnancy lightly!

Let the children hear the story without analyzing it for them or discussing it. For now, simply let the story sink into their minds and hearts. Later, while having snacks, you can bring up the story again and invite the children to talk about it and explore its message.
Prayer
Set up a small worship center in your room.

Materials:
- small table with a cloth to cover it
- 2 candles or a single large Christ candle
- matches
- Bible
- cross
- optional: flowers (real, artificial or handmade by the children)

Have the children set up a simple altar with the materials listed above. Invite them to place on the altar any drawings or crafts that they created during Gathering time. Then light the candles.

Read a verse from today’s scripture from a Bible so that the children connect the story they heard with the Bible, which is the word of God. If working mainly with older children, you might expand the reading to several verses.

Suggestions for the readings:
- For younger children: Luke 1:76-77
- For older children: Luke 1:76-79

Help familiarize the children with our liturgy by doing the reading as it is done in church. Read as follows:

Reader: A reading from the book of Luke:
(Read the selected passage.)

Reader: The word of the Lord.

All: Thanks be to God.

Invite the children to sit in a circle and join in prayer. Say a brief prayer yourself, then invite prayers from each child in the circle:

- Invite prayers of thanks for God’s work in our lives during the past week. They may share a time of learning a new sport or skill, a happy time with family, a special trip, or even something as ordinary as a good day at school when there was no teasing and a lot of fun. Encourage them to see God’s presence in all love and good that they see and experience around them.
- Welcome any prayers of concern or petition. Ask if they have any prayers for people in need—for themselves or for others. Pray for children or their family members who are sick. Also pray for the hungry and the homeless and those in any need during this season.
- Recognize birthdays and other special occasions and give thanks to God for giving us these special times to share within our church family.
- End the prayer time by praying together the Lord’s Prayer.

Carefully extinguish the candles.
Sharing
Pass out snacks and say a simple grace, such as this traditional Jewish grace that Zechariah and Elizabeth may have said:

- Blessed are you, Lord our God, King of the universe, who brings forth bread from the earth.
  Amen.

This is an excellent time, while sharing a snack, to begin talking about the story that the children have just heard. Some children may have had experiences in their family of their mother being pregnant with a younger sibling.

- Was everyone excited? nervous? happy? scared?
- Have their parents told them what it was like when they—the children themselves—were still in the womb and the parents were anticipating the birth?
- How might Zechariah and Elizabeth have felt?

For many parents, any birth is miraculous, even if not accompanied by an angel’s “birth announcement.” But a birth that is foretold by an angel of God must have carried a very special responsibility.

Wonder together about the feelings the parents might have when they realize what their yet-unborn son John is going to be, in Israel’s history. He will help God prepare the people for the Messiah’s coming! Ask questions such as:

- Would it be easy or hard for you to respond to God’s call in the faithful way that Zechariah and Elizabeth did?
- Would you give your child the name the angel commanded, even if we had wanted to name him after a special relative?
- When is it difficult to live up to what God asks us to do?
- Have you ever experienced a time when God has asked you to do something different from “the way we’ve always done it”? We may only remember a time when we forgave someone rather than bear a grudge, when our usual response would be to bear a grudge. Or we may remember a time when we spontaneously gave something to someone, even when we wanted it ourselves, just because they wanted it. That is a way that is often different from “the way we’ve always done it.” Small ways to obey God are easier to recall than any momentous or “miraculous” event.

Any way that shows love is a way that obeys God.
Activities: Arts, Crafts, Games, Drama, etc.

After Sharing, begin an activity to supplement and enhance today’s story. While the children are doing an activity, talk about the story so that they make the connection.

Suggested story-related activities are provided at the end of this lesson on pages 8-19.

Additional activity ideas can be found on pages 3-6 in the Appendix (also downloadable) 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
Memorization

If children do not yet know the Lord’s Prayer, begin to teach them this prayer of the Church.

Suggestions for ways to help the children with their memorization can be found on page 15 in the Appendix, also available online.

Weaving the Family of God

As your time together draws to a close, take a few minutes to help the children summarize the story and say what they learned today by asking questions such as:

- Who did we talk about today?
- Who came to see Zechariah, and what did Zechariah hear?
- Who was Zechariah and Elizabeth’s son? What was his name, and what was he going to do?
- What do Zechariah and Elizabeth teach us about being part of the family of God?

Help the children to remember this week’s story by summarizing it in a form that they can easily repeat to themselves or to others. Use the Summary of the Story if you wish, to offer a brief description.

Encourage the children to remember key words from the story, such as: angel, prophet, John.

Closing Prayer

Before the children leave, say a closing prayer to send them into the church worship service or back to their homes with God’s love and blessing. The prayer can be very simple, such as this one:

- God our Father, we thank you for being here with us today, and for sending John to prepare your people for the coming of your Son Jesus Christ. Send us now back to our families with your love in our hearts, to follow you and to love others as you love us. We pray this in the name of your Son. Amen.

End with a dismissal from the Prayer Book:
- Let us go out into the world, rejoicing in the power of the Spirit.

The children respond:
- Thanks be to God!
GATHERING ACTIVITY:
GABRIEL’S MESSAGE

Unscramble the letters in this message to find out what the angel Gabriel told Zechariah.

“Do not be ____, Zechariah, for your _____ has been heard.

irafda erryap

Your ____ Elizabeth will ____ you a ____, and you will ____

feiw reba nos eman

him John. You will have ___ and ____________, and many will rejoice

oyj neslagds

at his _______, for he will be ______ in the sight of the ______.

tirhb retag rodL

He will turn ______ of the people of Israel to the _____ their God.

amyn drol

He will go ______ them, to make ready a ______ prepared for

febeor pleepo

the Lord.”

See Luke 1:13-14, 16-17, NRSV
MUTE ZECHARIAH: CHARADES
for Intermediate

Children guess everyday messages as a mute Zechariah acts them out.

Materials:
- copy of messages (p. 10)
- bag or hat

Preparation:
Make a copy of the messages. Cut them apart and put them in a bag or hat. You may want to create your own messages.

Directions:
1. Choose one child to be Zechariah.
2. Have Zechariah act out a simple everyday message. The other learners try to guess what he is trying to say.
3. When the message is guessed, choose another child to be Zechariah and act out a message. Continue until everyone has had at least one turn.
CHARADES MESSAGES

I’M HUNGRY.

WHEN IS DINNER?

WE ARE EATING PANCAKES AND EGGS.

TIME FOR BED.

I’M LATE FOR SCHOOL.

CAN I BORROW YOUR PENCIL?

THE DOG IS BARKING OUTSIDE.

I’M PLAYING AT THE COMPUTER.

THE COMPUTER IS BROKEN.

CAN YOU WATCH TV WITH ME?

I’M GOING TO RIDE ON MY BIKE.

I’M GOING TO THE STORE.
GAME: “WRITE IT DOWN”
for Elementary, Intermediate

Children put together a Bible passage in the right order, but each word is stuck on a different child’s back!

Materials:
- small pieces of paper or blank adhesive name tags
- paper
- pens or pencils
- tape
- Bible sentences (p. 12)

Preparation:
Wait until after the story time, when you know how many children are attending this session. Then count the children. The message that you will write will have the same number of words as the number of children in the group.

You should have the sentences handy, but don’t let the children see them.

Directions:
1. Based on the number of children, secretly pick the Bible passage that you will use (see the Bible sentences on the p. 12).

2. Write one word on each name tag or small slip of paper.

3. Give each child a piece of paper and a pencil or pen. Tell them that they will all have a word stuck on their back. Together, the words will form a sentence from the Bible story that was told. Each learner needs to write down on their paper the words on each others’ backs while trying to keep others from seeing the word on their back.

   NO WORDS SPOKEN! Everyone is mute!

4. Stick one printed name tag or slip of paper on each child’s back. Don’t let them begin until all have tags on their backs.

5. When a learner has collected all the words, he or she can try to guess the sentence by putting the words in the correct order. Or have the learner call “Stop!” and all can work together to figure out the sentence.
### “Write It Down” Sentences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th># of Children</th>
<th>Bible Passage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>I am Gabriel.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>His name is John.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Do not be afraid, Zechariah.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 6             | You will have joy and gladness.  
  Or  
  Mary will rejoice at his birth. |
| 7             | I stand in the presence of God.  
  Or  
  Blessed be the Lord God of Israel. |
| 8             | I have been sent to speak to you.  
  Or  
  He will be filled with the Holy Spirit. |
| 9             | The dawn from on high will break upon us. |
| 10            | You will go before the Lord to prepare his ways. |
| 11            | Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard. |
| 12            | And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High. |
| 13            | You will have joy and gladness, and Mary will rejoice at his birth. |
| 14            | Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will name him John. |
Children make cards to announce the birth of John the Baptist.

Materials:
- white or pastel paper for drawing
- crayons or markers
- transparent shelf paper
- glitter
  
  *optional: samples of birth announcements*

Directions:
Invite each child to make a birth announcement as follows:

1. On the drawing paper, create a birth announcement for John. Remember that John’s is a special birth, so you may want to add to your “Announcing the birth of . . .” the note: “A Prophet of the Most High” or “The Prophet Who Will Prepare the Way of the Lord” or other note to proclaim his special calling.

2. Cut the transparent shelf paper the same size as the drawing paper.

3. Remove the protective backing from the shelf paper. Lightly sprinkle the adhesive side with glitter.

4. Carefully place the transparent paper onto the drawing, adhesive side sticking to the drawing.
Hearing God
for Elementary

Children listen for subtle differences in sounds.

**Materials:**
- metal spoons
- 3' length of string
- pencils, toilet paper tube and other miscellaneous objects

**Directions:**
1. Tie a spoon to the center of the length of string.
2. One child puts the ends of the string into his or her ears. Someone taps the spoon with a variety of objects. See what sound these objects make.

**What is the point?**
How do we hear God? What do we hear? Just as the spoon makes a different sound in our ears depending on the object it hits, so we hear God differently depending on what we are attuned to listening. That is why we need to learn to listen for God and to recognize God’s voice calling us to God’s service.
Children make a delicious Advent or pre-Christmas treat with a heart in the center.

**Materials:**
- cake mix
- flat-bottomed ice cream cones, 1 per child
- small candy hearts (not chocolate)
- cookie sheet
- access to an oven

**Preparation:**
1. Mix the cake batter in advance.
2. Preheat the oven to 325 degrees.

**Directions:**
1. Scoop the cake mix batter into the ice cream cone.
2. Insert a candy heart into the middle of each cone.
3. Place cones on a cookie sheet and bake for 15 minutes at 325 degrees. Let cool, then enjoy!
Children make a message holder with an inspirational message.

**Materials:**
- clothespins
- clear adhesive shelf paper
- colored cellophane paper or tissue paper
- scissors
- glue
- strip magnet
- heart pattern (p. 17)

**Preparation:**
Make a copy of the heart pattern and the words by Zechariah for each child.

**Directions:**
Invite each child to make a note holder as follows:

1. Cut out a piece of shelf paper that is twice the size of the heart shape.
2. Draw two identical heart shapes on the shelf paper.
3. Pull off the protective backing from one piece of shelf paper and cover the heart shape with the colored cellophane or tissue paper. Take the backing off the other shelf paper and apply to the cellophane/tissue side.
4. Cut out the heart shape.
5. Glue the clothespin on top of the heart.
6. Cut a piece of strip magnet, take off the adhesive backing, and stick it to the back of the heart.
7. Cut out the words by Zechariah and glue them to the top of the clothespin.
By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us.
Children make a message board they can use at home.

**Materials:**
- white poster board
- black or dark colored poster board
- transparency sheets
- transparency pens, 1 per child
- thin ribbon or string
- markers
- milk pens
- stickers (for younger children)
- glue
- toothpicks or craft sticks
- tape
- stapler
- scissors

**Directions:**
Invite each child to make a note board as follows:

1. Cut out a square of white poster board 9” square.

2. Cut the black or dark poster board 9” square. Make a frame by measuring a square 2” smaller on all sides, thus having a square of 5” on the inside. Cut out the inner square.

3. Cut the 11” transparency length to 8”, leaving the width at 8½”.

4. Carefully apply glue on the edges of the back of the dark poster board and place the transparency on it. Try not to get glue on the transparency. (Use toothpicks or craft sticks to spread the glue.) You may use tape to make sure that the transparency sticks onto the poster board.

5. Put glue on the edges of the white poster board and place the dark poster board on it, with the transparency in between.

6. Cut a 12” length of ribbon and tie the transparency pen to one end. Staple or tape the other end to the note board.

7. Decorate the dark frame of your note board with stickers or milk pens.
Children create a holder for delivering messages.

**Materials:**
- paper towel tubes, 1 per child
- fringe, or colorful construction paper
- acrylic “jewels”, sequins or other decorative elements
- ribbon
- gold foil or other nice solid-color paper
- glue
- scissors
- stapler
- hole punch

**Directions:**

Invite each child to make the message holder as follows:

1. Cut a piece of gold foil or paper a little longer than the tube. Wrap the tube in the paper, using glue to secure the ends.
2. Cut a circle of the foil or paper a few inches larger than the hole of the tube. Wrap one end of the tube in the foil to close the end hole, using a stapler to attach it to the sides.
3. Add fringe to the closed end of the tube.
4. Punch two holes at the opposite end of the tube.
5. Cut a length of ribbon around 12”-16”. Tie the ends to the holes.
6. Decorate the tube with jewels or other fancy items.
7. Put a note into your new “message holder” and slip the ribbon loop over your shoulder.