

LUKE—WEEK 2

FAMILY LOVE



F. Michael Slay
A DEEP Study

The Fellowship of Ailbe

*The Cover Picture is The Annunciation by Rogier van der Weyden
(1399–1464) on display at The Louvre, Paris*

Mary isn't the only one to have a child; Elizabeth is already pregnant. Mary races to her side and has a legendary visit.

Two of the greatest songs of all time are in this section: the Magnificat and Zechariah's Song.

We're pleased to provide *the DEEP* studies in PDF format at no charge. We hope you will find them helpful and encouraging as you press on in your journey toward spiritual maturity in the Lord.

The Fellowship of Ailbe offers many opportunities for training, prayer, personal growth, and ministry. To subscribe to the daily DEEP email, visit our website at www.ailbe.org and click the sign-up button at the bottom.

There, you will also discover many other resources, including many email newsletters, such as our worldview study *ReVision*, our devotional newsletters *Crosfigell* and *the DEEP*.

We are a spiritual fellowship patterned after the Celtic Revival. Our goal is to promote revival, renewal, and awakening, following the teaching of Scripture and the example and heritage of our forebears in the faith.

T. M. Moore, Principal
tmmoore@ailbe.org

Thank you.

Luke 1:34–80 — Family Love
Copyright 2025 F. Michael Slay
The Fellowship of Ailbe
www.ailbe.org

Except as indicated, Scripture taken from the New King James Version. © Copyright 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved. ESV stands for the English Standard Version. © Copyright 2001 by Crossway. Used by permission. All rights reserved. NIV stands for The Holy Bible, New International Version®. © Copyright 1973 by International Bible Society. Used by permission. All rights reserved. KJV stands for the King James Version.

1 Luke 1:34–38 (ESV)

And Mary said to the angel, “How will this be, since I am a virgin?”

And the angel answered her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God. And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. For nothing will be impossible with God.” And Mary said, “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.” And the angel departed from her.

Notice that Mary’s question doesn’t upset Gabriel. She asks, “*How will this be?*” not, “*How shall I know this?*” The difference is just a few words, but it’s night-and-day in meaning. She’s asking how, not if. Mary doesn’t doubt Gabriel’s words; she just wants to know how this will happen.

And Gabriel’s answer confirms this interpretation; he tells her how she will get pregnant. He could have prefaced this with, “I’m glad you asked,” since she needs to know this.

We don’t know what it was like for Mary when, “*The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you;*” but without this heads-up, it could have been scary.

Then Gabriel drops the news about Elizabeth, and Mary’s happy-meter hits the pin.

What an incredible moment. Part of God’s blessing on Mary is that He keeps her sane through all this. She has a lot of work to do. Her role is glorious but far from easy.

Time to go see Elizabeth.

God puts many people on roads they did not expect to walk. Mary’s road turned out to be super-painful, but she had the comfort of seeing God’s hand in everything. Our friends could use some of that same encouragement. Ask God to comfort them by revealing Himself.

I often catch myself praying for the wrong thing. When people have been assigned to tough roads, my reflex is to ask God to take them off those roads. But over time my prayers sometimes change focus as I start to understand the road.

Christian fellowship often means coming alongside people and helping them walk their roads. Tough roads can be lonely. Everyone wants to be around good situations. If you can learn to be drawn to tough ones, you can do a lot of good. Encouragement is a holy task.

But don’t stop praying that pain be minimized or for a tough road to be short. Lessons can be brief. God loves to bless His people. Never assume that a trial must be permanent.

You just never know. His ways are higher than our ways.

2 Luke 1:39–45, 56 (ESV)

In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah, and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, and she exclaimed with a loud cry, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.” ... And Mary remained with her about three months and returned to her home.

Mary makes a snap decision to go see Elizabeth and *went with haste* to her. You might guess they are sisters, except that the age difference is much too large for that. Besides, in that case Gabriel would have said “sister” instead of “relative.” It sounds like Elizabeth is a dear aunt.

In any case, Mary feels close to Elizabeth and races to her side. Little did she know how wondrous this trip would be.

In that day, a pregnancy at Elizabeth’s age was very high risk, especially a first pregnancy. Mary was concerned for Elizabeth’s health, but God had a higher purpose for Mary’s visit.

First, Mary gets yet another confirmation that God has great things in store—this time for Elizabeth’s child as well as hers. She can stop stressing over Elizabeth’s pregnancy; God has big plans for this kid.

But Mary stays for three months. This helps answer a key question. How did Mary know that Gabriel wasn’t just telling her (in John 1:31–33) that she would get pregnant on her wedding night? How did she know instantly that he was referring to virgin birth?

Her wedding was a long way off. We don’t know how long, but it must have been more than three months. Otherwise, she couldn’t have just taken off like this.

So the assumption that Gabriel was referring to virgin birth makes perfect sense.

A few years ago, I told my children that if they didn’t go visit their great-uncle soon, they might not get another chance. They collaborated and they went. It was an irreplaceably priceless move; God clearly blessed their visit. The two families were not all that distant before, but they came closer together and the years since have seen some glorious moments. There’s no telling how things might have been different had they not seized that day.

Prayer is no substitute for action. Action bathed in prayer is especially powerful.

We all have loved ones we pray for. Is there someone you need to reach out to? Ask God for direction.

Even a postcard counts. Or maybe you should go.

3 Luke 1:46–55 (ESV)

And Mary said,

“My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name. And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts; he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate; he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever.”

Mary’s heart soars and an inspired song, The Magnificat, springs forth. Mary’s attitude is especially glorious. She sees everything in its proper context. Her praise is a treatise on God’s grace, mercy and power.

When we pray for someone who is pregnant, what do we usually pray for? Do we ask for things like an easy pregnancy? How about a safe delivery?

Mary will get none of that; she delivers in a stinking cattle stall and has to lay her child in a manger. What Mary does get is buckets of God’s grace and the thrill of knowing that He has big plans for her (and Elizabeth) and their sons.

Imagine praying at a baby shower and tossing in a request for something big. “May the Lord use this child to do mighty things.” “May the Holy Spirit fill this child with his peace.” “Dear Lord, give these parents the strength to raise up the child in the spirit and power of Elijah.”

Okay, that might not go over so well. I’m not recommending that. Still, it does seem like we’re always asking God to give us a boring life. Mary’s life was anything but.

The Magnificat is Mary embracing her destiny.

Unlike the Lord’s Prayer, the Magnificat doesn’t lend itself to straight recitation (though some folks do recite it) because only Mary can say all these things.

But it is a wonderful model for how to praise God for His glorious works—and embracing His plans for us. Therein lies a challenge. How can we praise God like that?

Some of the Magnificat is suitable for reciting. The beginning is great, especially the King James version—*My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Savior.*

But the rest of the first sentence and all of the second get into specifics about Mary’s life. While we don’t have the kind of vision of the future that Mary had, we’re older than Mary and so have more vision of the past. We know more than enough to agree with Mary’s praises. We just need to find the words.

My soul doth magnify the Lord.

4 Luke 1:58–66 (ESV)

And Mary remained with her about three months and returned to her home.

Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son. And her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her. And on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child. And they would have called him Zechariah after his father, but his mother answered, “No; he shall be called John.” And they said to her, “None of your relatives is called by this name.” And they made signs to his father, inquiring what he wanted him to be called. And he asked for a writing tablet and wrote, “His name is John.” And they all wondered. And immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, blessing God. And fear came on all their neighbors. And all these things were talked about through all the hill country of Judea, and all who heard them laid them up in their hearts, saying, “What then will this child be?” For the hand of the Lord was with him.

It seems odd that *fear came on all their neighbors*. Why would this make them afraid? Excited, sure, or maybe awestruck, but afraid?

Well, the Greek word used here (phobos) can mean fear or reverence or respect. But we need to be careful when reading one of these words with alternate translations. They may not be alternative meanings, but multiple meanings; it may mean all those things at once. For example, consider the word agape, which is translated as charity or love. It really means one thing – charitable love, devotion to someone’s well-being.

There are lots of words in modern languages with nuanced meanings that cannot be translated briefly—Chutzpah, Schadenfreude, Feng Shui. The solution is to not translate them at all, but to adopt the words as English words. English is a cross-breed language anyway, so adding another word is no big deal. Since many Christians use agape in speech, it may get adopted too. Future Bibles may translate agape as agape.

But for many words, translators have a tough job. They can’t translate a single word into a long explanation; they have to keep it short. Sometimes they add a footnote with the alternate translation. That footnote will usually say, “or ...”

But here, it’s not “or.” The footnote could read, “Literally fear/reverence/respect.”

Zechariah’s friends and neighbors are blown away by what has happened. They know something’s up—something big.

They’re in awe.

Something big is still up. God has reconciled mankind with Himself. We can come before His throne like never before. Our prayers and quiet times are not rote ceremony but fellowship.

Quiet time is really worship. Ask the Holy Spirit to sharpen your focus—on His glory, for His glory.

5 Luke 1:67–80 (ESV)

And his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied, saying,

“Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David, as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old, that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us; to show the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant, the oath that he swore to our father Abraham, to grant us that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all our days. And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God, whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.”

And the child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness until the day of his public appearance to Israel.

One of the best devotional guides is *Search the Scriptures* published by IntersVarsity Press. It walks through the Bible in three years—which seems a practical pace. For each day’s reading, they provide a few questions to meditate on. They do not provide the answers. I found their questions for this passage, known as Zechariah’s Song, to be especially insightful.

What, according to this song, is the purpose of salvation? Is this your experience?

Search the Scriptures has been in print since 1949. It’s still widely available.

The genius of *Search the Scriptures* is the way it relies on the Holy Spirit to illuminate the students. By providing questions but leaving out the answers, it stimulates deeper study and meditation.

The genius of how the local church works is similar. It provides resources and leadership, but the Holy Spirit is the real engine. Church leaders don’t control, only shepherd. So, how can we help that?

One of the principal ways that church members can help build their church is through the local fellowship groups. These are key “growth centers” where iron sharpens iron and the Holy Spirit deepens fellowship and discipleship. Pray for the leaders as they prepare lessons—that they will be kept from error. Pray for the members—that they will engage with the lessons and pursue deeper understanding.

Secondly, consider how you can contribute. This is how many people grow in ways they didn’t see coming. If you’ve never led a study, you may get encouraged to lead one. Don’t let fear keep you from growing.

Just because you can’t imagine yourself in a different role, doesn’t mean it can’t happen.

Questions for reflection or discussion

1. How do you help people deal with trials and challenges (and even great successes)?
2. How do prayer and action work together? When is appropriate to just pray? When is it not?
3. Do you pray memorized prayers? Grace? Do you customize them?
4. How can we make our private times with the Lord more worshipful?
5. What's the key to a well-functioning fellowship group?