

What Is Impossible for Man Is Possible for God

Objective: Students will be able to 1) explain why the Israelites needed God's help to keep them faithful, and 2) identify how Mary's "Yes" to Gabriel allows God to send His Son to fulfill the promise of a New Covenant.

For the Catechist

The emphasis throughout this unit is the covenant of God with His people. We have learned that God had been faithful to the Old Covenant, but the Israelites were not. God knew they could not keep the agreement totally on their own so He promised a New Covenant. God sent Jesus Christ as the New Covenant to teach us and gain for us eternal life. Through Jesus Christ and with the Holy Spirit, we are able to live out the New Covenant—God's agreement to be with us and our agreement to follow God's ways.

End this lesson with the excitement that was felt with the announcement of the birth of Jesus. This is the beginning of the Good News of Jesus Christ. Gabriel came to announce that the completion of the promise is coming closer now that Mary has agreed to be the Mother of God.

The story of Mary's visit to Elizabeth heightens the excitement of the time. "When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the infant leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, cried out in a loud voice and said, 'Most blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And how does this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?'" (Luke 1:41-43).

Before the children complete the activity on the last page of this lesson, have them remain silent for a minute. You may want to pray "Heavenly King" before you read the Scripture. You want the children to be ready to listen and understand that "God is with us" (Mt 2:23).

Lesson Plan Overview

Opening: "Bless The Lord"

Introduction: Discussion of how our best intentions can lead to problems.

Read Text Aloud: Have the students volunteer to read the text aloud or have the students read sections silently.

Activity Tracks:

Choose a basic, group, or craft activity (detailed on the pages that follow) to reinforce the lesson.

- *Basic:* Mary and Joseph
- *Group:* Scripture Word Scramble
- *Craft:* Jesse Tree Project

Closing: Luke 1:46-55

Icon Packets:

Come Bless the Lord:
The Annunciation

Teaching Pics

Background Reading

(Direct quotations from the sources noted)

God Fulfills His Original Purpose

"In all such promises of new and better things, a single power is at work. God has undertaken to give His people what they could not otherwise attain; He has proposed to remove obstacles to a faithful relationship with Himself that the original Creation, Exodus, and the gift of the Law left unremedied. In a sense, the original gifts proved insufficient, ineffective. Likewise were the original beneficiaries of these gifts historically unable to live up to the obligations they imposed (this is especially clear in Isaiah 54:14-19). Therefore, God determined to fulfill His original purpose with something new.

"This post exilic message of renewal shows clearly just how open the Old Testament remained to a fulfillment which lay outside its own field of vision. God's repeated acts of beginning anew (with Noah, with Moses, with the Remnant) lay a clear precedent for seeing in the new little remnant of the Church the final destination of God's plans and promises. Nowhere else does the Old Testament so clearly express its own limitation and nowhere is the Christian so clearly required to seek outside the Old Testament, to look to the New Testament, to find any concrete evidence for the 'new things' promised to Israel" (*OTB* 101-102).

The Nativity of Jesus

"According to St. Gregory, the Nativity of the Lord is the festival of 'recreation.' In the beginning God created the earth, the stars, the trees, the animals and man. Man is the summary of the whole creation. When man fell into sin the whole creation fell in him and with him. Paradise was closed. Through the Incarnation of the Son of God creation was transfigured and paradise acquired a new meaning.

"The manifestation of God in the flesh is not a static reality. It is an act of love, and therefore a dynamic act of imparting life and deification to the world. It is only fitting that, if God was to become man and appear in the flesh, all of His creation should be there to greet him and show its gratitude for His coming.

"Faith is not expressed in a formula. It is, rather, a feast of admiration for the work of God and of joy for His saving love. The icon of the Nativity is just this expression of gratitude and joy. In it Mary appears to be the first and greatest admirer and worshiper. Since she is the 'renewal of all born on earth,' the 'new Eve,' she is also the most exalted thanksgiving to God. She occupies the center of the icon. Her whole being points to God and her eyes are fixed on Joseph. Joseph is usually shown in a far corner, puzzled and bewildered. What is happening is beyond his understanding. Mary looks at him with tenderness. She seems to warn him against that old man behind him who represents the devil of incredulity" (*FG* 69-70).

The Lesson Plan

Opening

Today we will begin with a familiar prayer: "Bless the Lord." [Use the prayer page for your jurisdiction from lesson 10.] Let's pray.

Introduction

Did you ever try to do something right and everything went wrong? Let's try to think of some situations. [I set the table for dinner -I break a glass. I visit my grandparents -I accidentally knock over a lamp. I am an altar server. -I forget to light the candles. I sing at the Divine Liturgy. -I continue singing and everyone stops.]

How do you feel when that happens? How do the people you are helping feel? How would you like the people you are helping to react to the problem? [Let the children share stories.]

That is exactly the way the Israelites felt. They wanted to follow God's Law and keep the covenant, the agreement, they made with God. But some people found it too hard and gave up while others kept trying but still made mistakes. But God had promised to make a New Covenant with His people.

Let's turn to our lesson.

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What Is Impossible for Man Is Possible for God

God wanted the people to know Him and to respond to Him. The Israelites tried to keep their covenant with God for they realized that God's laws were good and protected them from harm. But the people found it hard to love God and to love each other. They failed again and again.

Although the people turned away from God and broke His covenant, God stayed with them and helped them. Even with help, the Israelites still found it difficult to live God's way. They were trying to follow the Law by doing it by themselves. Left on their own, they were not able to keep the Law. Yet, God remained faithful to His people and promised to send them someone who would help them—someone who would save them from their helplessness.



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Reading of Text

As the children read aloud, help them interact with the text using the comments or questions below which are keyed to the text phrases (in bold type).

... someone who would save them from their helplessness.

How were the Israelites trying to keep the Law? (By following the Law by themselves) What did God promise? (He would send someone to save them from their helplessness.) Let's think for a moment about what happens when we try to do something on our own. Did you ever try to learn something totally on your own? What happens? [Use examples such as trying to ride a bike, learning to do a craft, learning to play a sport.] Why is it good to have someone help us? How can we compare this example to everything we have been learning about the Israelites? (They needed God's help many times, and now they needed God's help again to save them from their sins.)

We are like the Israelites in many ways. We try to follow God's way, but we fail. In the Epistle of Saint Paul to the **Romans 7:15-25**, we read the way Saint Paul describes what happens. We know what is right, he says, but we do not do it. We do not do the good things we would like to do. Instead, we do the things we know to be wrong. We know in our minds that God's law is the right way, but we still do not always follow it. We may be so confused that we ask ourselves the same question Saint Paul did. Read **Romans 7:24** to find this question. Then find the answer in **Romans 7:25** and copy it below.

Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord

God has sent His Son Who forgives our sins and helps us to follow Him.

In this icon we see the angel Gabriel announce to Mary that she would bear a son whose name would be Jesus. He would save His people from their sins. She said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word" (Lk 1:38). Mary said "Yes" to God; she would be the mother of His Son Jesus.

Our Church recalls this event on the Feast of the Annunciation celebrated on March 25. Let's read about the Annunciation in the Gospel of **Luke 1:26-38**.



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... she would be the mother of His Son Jesus.

Who appeared to Mary?. (The angel Gabriel) What did the angel say? (Mary would bear a son and His name would be Jesus.)

[The Mother of God accepts the message of the Annunciation and is thus shown with her head inclined in consent. ... the rays of light descending on the Virgin illustrate the message of the Angel, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you' (Lk 1:35)" (CBL 47-48).]

In these pictures we are looking at the places God chose for Jesus' birth and early life.

Who lived in Nazareth? (Mary) After the angel left Mary, she went to visit her cousin Elizabeth who lived in Judah. Find Judah on the map. Does anyone remember whose mother is Elizabeth? (John the Baptist) When Mary arrived, Elizabeth said "Most blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb" (Luke 1:42). The Holy Spirit helped Elizabeth realize Mary would be the mother of Jesus. How would you have felt if Mary came to visit you and you realized she would be Jesus' mother? [Let the children respond.]

Words to Remember: [Read the words together, and use them to introduce, summarize, and/or review the lesson.]

Review: Why do you think the title of this lesson is "What Is Impossible for Man Is Possible for God"? (The Israelites could not follow God's Law on their own. They needed God to be with them to make it possible.) Who does God send to be with them? (Jesus, His Son)



By turning to lesson 5 in this book, we can see a map that shows where the town of Nazareth is. What did we just read that happened in Nazareth? Can you find Bethlehem on this map? What happened in Bethlehem? Let's turn to look at a similar map in your New Testament. The map is after page 12 in the Gospel of Matthew. Find Nazareth and Bethlehem on this map.

Turn the Gospel of Matthew 2:1-4:3 in your New Testament to look at pictures included on those pages. Compare those pictures to the one on this page. In all these pictures we are looking at the places God chose for Jesus' birth and early life.

Words to Remember:

Gabriel: The angel who appeared to Mary and told her she would be the Mother of God.

Fest of the Annunciation: The feast day that recalls the day Gabriel announced to Mary that she would be the Mother of God. We celebrate this feast day on March 25.

Nazareth: The town in which Mary lived.

Galilee: A region in the northern part of the Holy Land. The town of Nazareth is in Galilee.

New Covenant: A covenant is an agreement. Jesus Christ is the sign of the New Covenant that God makes with His people.

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Activity Tracks

Basic: The Annunciation

[This worksheet is in the student text.]

Today we read from our New Testaments the words the angel Gabriel told Mary. Let's complete the sentences on this page and find the hidden sentence that is taken from the Gospel of Matthew. In that Gospel reading we hear what the angel says to Joseph, Mary's husband. [To learn more about the story of Joseph and the angel, read Matthew 1:18-25.]

The Annunciation

Complete the following sentences with the words from the Gospel of Saint Luke 1:26-38. Complete the scriptural notation by writing the verse number at the end of the sentence. Use the letters from the boxes to find the answer to the question at the bottom of the page.

- In the sixth month, the angel **G A B R I E L** was sent from God to a town of Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named **J O S E P H**, of the house of **D A V I D**.
(Luke 1: 26 - 27)
- "Hail, favored one! The Lord **I S** with you."
(Luke 1: 28)
- "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor **W I T H** God."
(Luke 1: 30)
- "He **W I L L** be great and will be called Son of the **M O S T H I G H**.
(Luke 1: 32)
- "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow **Y O U**."
(Luke 1: 35)
- "Therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the **S O N** of God."
(Luke 1: 35)

"Behold, the virgin shall be with child and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel" (Matthew 1:23) What does the name Emmanuel mean?

G O D I S W I T H U S

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Group: Scripture Word Scramble

Materials: Envelopes, "Scripture Word Scramble" worksheet, construction paper, glue, New Testament

*In our lesson we read the Gospel of Saint Luke and heard how Mary said "Yes" to the angel Gabriel. For our activity today, we need our New Testament. Let's read the Gospel of Saint Matthew 1:20-23. Today's activity asks us to figure out something just as we read Joseph was trying to figure out what to do next. In an envelope, I have words taken from one of the verses we just read. [Groups should have two or more students.] Take the words out and work together to put them in order. Glue them in order onto the construction paper. Add the quotation marks, periods, commas and capital letters. [Place the completed verse on the walls if possible.] When everyone is done, each group will read the verse aloud: **"Behold, the virgin shall be with child and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel," which means "God is with us."***



Craft: Jesse Tree Project—Part 2

Materials: Extra worksheets from last week, markers, scissors, envelopes [with students' names], hole punch, thin ribbon

Today we will complete coloring and cutting out the symbols from last week. Try to complete all of them by the end of today's class. Each symbol needs a hole punched at the top. Pull a piece of ribbon (6 inches) through the hole and tie a bow. Now they will be ready for hanging on our tree next week. [Explanation of each symbol is found on p.245] [If each student is doing a tree, ask them to bring in a branch and a pot to secure the branch for next week.]

Closing:

For our closing prayer, let's read the Scripture. Find Luke 1:46-55. These words are called a psalm of praise that Mary says in thanksgiving for the good news that she will be the mother of Jesus. She ends this psalm by reminding us of God's promises in the Old Testament. [Have the students read aloud together from their New Testament or divide the reading by verses.]

Gabriel

*Feast of the
Annunciation*

Nazareth

Galilee

*New
Covenant*

The feast day that recalls the day
Gabriel announced to Mary that she
would be the Mother of God.
We celebrate this feast day on March 25.

The angel who appeared to Mary and
told her she would be the Mother of God.

A region in the northern part of
the Holy Land. The town of
Nazareth is in Galilee.

The town in which Mary lived.

A covenant is an agreement. Jesus Christ
is the sign of the New Covenant that God
makes with His people.

Duplicate this page onto heavier paper, cut out the words, and place them into an envelope. [Another possibility is to have the students cut out the words first since they are scrambled on the page already]

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Matthew 1:23

Unit 3 Review

I. Complete the following:

1. The commandments that tell us how to love God are:

1. I am the Lord your God; you shall not have strange gods before me.

2. You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.

3. Remember to keep holy the Lord's day.

2. The commandments that tell us how to love our neighbor are:

4. Honor your father and your mother.

5. You shall not kill.

6. You shall not commit adultery.

7. You shall not steal.

8. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

9. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife.

10. You shall not covet your neighbor's goods

3. Because God's people were unfaithful in responding to His love, God promises to send a **savior**

4. **Jesus** is the fulfillment of God's promise.

5. Mary is the **mother** of **God (Jesus).**