

LOVE IS SURPRISING

THE INCARNATION



Bible reading



Luke 1:26-38

<http://bit.ly/3nT2ZiB>

During Elizabeth's sixth month of pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to a virgin who lived in Nazareth, a town in Galilee. She was engaged to marry a man named Joseph from the family of David. Her name was Mary. The angel came to her and said, "Greetings! The Lord has blessed you and is with you."

But Mary was very confused by what the angel said. Mary wondered, "What does this mean?"

The angel said to her, "Don't be afraid, Mary, because God is pleased with you. Listen! You will become pregnant. You will give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and people will call him the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of King David, his ancestor. He will rule over the people of Jacob forever. His kingdom will never end."

Mary said to the angel, "How will this happen? I am a virgin!"

The angel said to Mary, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will cover you. The baby will be holy. He will be called the Son of God. Now listen! Elizabeth, your relative, is very old. But she is also pregnant with a son. Everyone thought she could not have a baby, but she has been pregnant for six months. God can do everything!"

Mary said, "I am the servant girl of the Lord. Let this happen to me as you say!" Then the angel went away.

Bible video

An unexpected Christmas
– St Paul's Auckland

<https://youtu.be/TM1XusYVqNY>

Saddleback Kids

<https://youtu.be/XkEypzmHwCl>

Arrival activity

Big entrance challenge – As children arrive at the front door, surprise them with a huge welcome using party poppers and cheers. Make it as surprising as possible.

Gather as many games that have the element of tension and surprise and encourage the group to simply enjoy playing them together. Good examples would be Buckaroo, Operation, buzzer games, Jenga. Charity shops are usually good for these type of games.

Big question:

♥ What has been the best surprise ever in your life?

Drama

Out of the album (Angel Gabriel)

Don't be afraid, I bring good news. Oops, sorry, got a bit carried away there. You know, I always have to introduce myself by telling people not to be afraid! I think it's probably because nobody ever expects to see an angel appearing all of a sudden. It tends to catch people unawares and make them jump. I've not yet worked out quite how to do it without risking them having a bit of a funny turn when I suddenly pop up with a message from God.

I made Mary jump, despite telling her not to be afraid, and I don't think the message I brought was quite what she was expecting either. She knew there was a wedding to Joseph lined up in the distant future, she'd even dreamed about what it would be like to be a mum one day, but I'll eat my halo if she'd ever thought she might be chosen by God and give birth to God's own son in baby form before she'd even had a chance to get married. All credit to her, though – she didn't hesitate. Even though she was probably in for a pretty rough time, she simply said yes to this surprising news and even sang a song of joy on the spot about how loved she felt by God. I must have prepared her well.

So I always say, "Don't be afraid" when I appear to humans. Not like when I'm greeting another angel – do you know what one angel says to another when they meet? Halo, Halo, Halo !!

Story

Hello everybody. I'm not sure what you're all doing here in our yard, but I'll just introduce myself. I'm Cock-a-doodle-Dougal the rooster. I'm a very important member of the household here, though not everybody notices me. They'd notice if I wasn't around though. I make sure everyone's awake bright and early for the start of the day – I'm kinda like an alarm cluck! I'm sure you'll notice me – whenever I come on the stage, remember to greet me with "Cock-a-doodle-doo, Dougal!" Let's have a practice:

Not bad. A bit wormy though. Let's give it a bit more oomph!

That's better. Hey, do you know which side of a chicken has the most feathers? Ha, the OUTSIDE, of course! But enough of that. I'm here to tell you about a strange thing that happened here, a story of rather surprising love. It was to do with the daughter of the house. Some people call her the Madonna but we....

(Woman in Madonna costume struts or dances across, humming the tune to "Like a Virgin")

No, no, no. I'm not talking about you! Get out of it! Some people call her the Madonna but to us she's just quite simply Mary. Here she is now.

(Mary walks on stage with a basket and pretends to hang the washing on the line)

She's a lovely girl, going to be married to that Joseph fellow, carpenter in the town. Seems a nice enough chap.

(Joseph walks across in the background, carrying a rug under his arm)

No, no, no, not a carpetter, a carpenter. Don't any of you listen?

(Joseph looks puzzled for a moment, drops the carpet and picks up a toolbox. He wanders off, singing, "If I had a hammer")

So Mary was in the garden, minding her own business when all of a sudden, well, would you believe it, she had company. I'll leave you to watch what happens – it's time I was off to band practice. Now, where did I put my drumsticks... (Dougal wanders off stage, walking like a chicken)

(Mary continues hanging out the washing singing, "Mary, Mary quite contrary" and an angel walks in and stands behind her)

Mary: I've got that funny feeling I'm being watched. Is there anybody there?

Everyone: He's behind you!

(Mary turns, keeping her back to the angel)

Mary: Don't go giving me the heeby-jeebies. There's nobody there, is there? It does feel as though I'm being watched, though.

Everyone: He's behind you!

(Mary turns, sees the angel, and jumps!)

Angel: Don't be afraid, Mary

Mary: Don't be afraid? When the likes of you goes creeping about taking people by surprise with your feathers and your halo and you... you... you... Hold on, you're a blooming angel, aren't you?

Angel: Yes. And I've got some news for you. You're going to have a baby.

Mary: Oh no I'm not.

Angel: Oh yes you are.

Mary: Oh no I'm not.

Angel: Oh yes you are.

Mary: Oh no I'm not. I'm not married, you know. I'm engaged to Joseph but we're not going to have children until we're married and that won't be quite yet. So I'm sorry, but I'm not planning on having a baby.

Angel: *You* may not be planning on it, but God is. Here's the surprise news. It's God's baby. God has chosen you to be the baby's mum but it won't just be any old baby, it'll be God's son. And you're to call him...

Mary: Bertie! Oh, I've always wanted a son called Bertie.

Angel: No. You're to call him Jesus.

Mary: Oh my, *however* am I going to tell my mum!

(Mary and the angel wander off and Dougal reappears on stage)

(Children shout: Cock-a-doodle-doo, Dougal)

Cock-a-doodle-doo, now there's a surprise. God loved the world so much that God's own son was going to be born as a tiny baby, no different to you or me when we were hatched. (aside) *Hey, I'm such a tough old bird, I was hatched from a boiled egg! What, you mean it's different for humans?* Well, back to the story, Mary wasn't the only one in for a surprise.

(Joseph wanders in, hammering here and there, then stretches and lies down for a nap in the sun)

(Angel enters and stands at Joseph's head)

That's one scary angel. I'm chicken (checking) out for a while ! (Dougal wanders off, pecking)

(Joseph turns onto his left side, then onto his right, then onto his left again, then onto his back, opens his eyes and sees the angel, and leaps to his feet)

Joseph: What're you doing? You nearly gave me a heart attack, surprising me like that.

Angel: There's a bigger surprise coming – you'd better sit down. You know Mary?

Joseph: (all dreamy) Oh yes, I know Mary, my beloved, my sweetheart, my coochie-coo, my...

Angel: Well, she's going to have a baby.

Joseph: My valenti... She's what?

Angel: She's going to have a baby.

Joseph: Oh no she isn't.

Angel: Oh yes she is.

Joseph: Oh no she isn't

Angel: Oh yes she... Look, I'm not going through all this again. She's having a baby, but you're not exactly the daddy.

Joseph: Hold on a cotton-pickin' minute. What are you saying?

Angel: I'm saying that it's God's baby. The people find it difficult to get to know God and follow God properly, so it's time for God's son to come and live among them, and Mary's going to be the mum. You'll be like a foster-dad. God's chosen you both. Mary will have a baby and will call him...

Joseph: Joe, we'll call him Joe. Nice solid name for a baby boy. Name him after his dad.

Angel: Sometimes I wonder whether God's picked the right people for the job. No, you will name him after his dad, and that dad will be God. Jesus means God Saves, so you'll call him Jesus, after his dad.

Joseph: Jee... Joe... Jee... (*sighs*) I guess we can do that. Don't you worry, I'll stick by her and be a good dad to little Joe... er... Jesus. That's what you do when you love someone, I guess.

(Angel and Joseph wander off stage and Dougal reappears)

(Children shout: Cock-a-doodle-doo, Dougal)

Cock-a-doodle-do, what a to-do! Surprising news for both those two. I was a surprise to my mother too – I really wasn't all I was cracked up to be! Sorry, just my little yolk! I am a bit of a comedi-hen, you know. Sorry, got a bit carried away there. Was that the end of the story? No, it was only the beginning.

(A very pregnant Mary appears with Joseph, a donkey and a suitcase on wheels)

Mary: When I said I'd like to travel for our honeymoon, I didn't exactly have this in mind, Mr Carpenter.

Joseph: I'm sorry, Mrs Carpenter. I wasn't expecting everyone to get a royal command to go to the place their family originates from to be counted. You'll like Bethlehem, I'm sure. Nice little town.

Mary: So where have you booked? Somewhere nice? I hope it's somewhere palatial with a king-sized bed. We can't have God's baby born just anywhere.

Joseph: Er... booked?

Mary: Don't tell me you didn't book anywhere for us to stay.

Joseph: Oh yes I... er... did? (questioning)

Mary: Oh no, you didn't!

Dougal: I think where they ended up was a bit of a surprise too. But it wasn't a surprise for God, because God had planned it that way. God's son was to be born to ordinary people, in an ordinary place, surrounded by ordinary folk and animals. Because God's love is nothing if not surprising!

Wondering questions

- ♥ I wonder what would have happened if Mary had said no?
- ♥ I wonder if anything else God does surprises you?
- ♥ I wonder if someone you love has ever surprised you?

Small group prayer



Opposites prayers

Not only was Jesus's birth a surprise, but Jesus never did what people were expecting him to do; it was like Jesus turns everything upside down, a big surprise! As we remember God and Jesus doing the opposite of what people expected and surprising people, we're going to say a prayer thinking about some things that are opposites.

It may surprise you how many you can find to pray for.

For example, we pray for people who are feeling happy and for those who are feeling sad.

- Big and small
- Light and dark
- Happy and sad
- Loud and quiet
- High and low

After each prayer share the phrase "Love is surprising: God is always with us"

Activity/craft

Nativity in a matchbox

You will need:

- Match boxes
- A peg doll or some brown card
- White tissue
- A star

What you need:

1. Open the box and colour the back of it dark blue.
2. Glue or stick a star in the corner.
3. If using a peg doll, wrap it in the strip of white tissue and draw in a face.
4. If using brown card, cut a strip of card to fit the box. Roll this up into a cylinder shape and then secure.
5. Wrap it up in the tissue.
6. Place it in the box and close it.

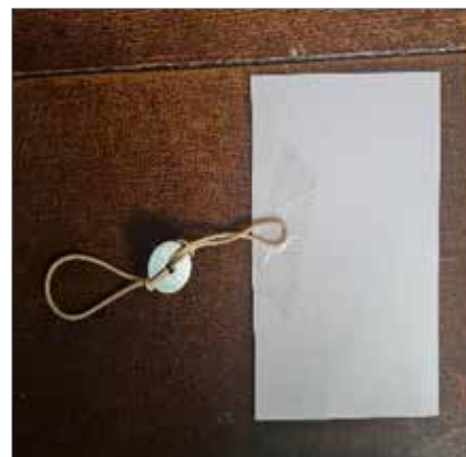


STEM activity

Surprising card

What you need:

- Piece of card
- Felt tips
- Envelopes
- Elastic bands
- Metal washers
- Masking tape/ Sellotape
- Sharpies (optional)



What you do:

1. Decorate the card using the felt tips, including the words... "Surprise... God loves you"
2. (If you have time, you could decorate the washer with small hearts using the sharpie)
3. Tie an elastic band to either side of the washer, through the hole in the middle.
4. Tape the ends of the elastic band down onto the card.
5. Twist the washer round and round until the tension is really tight; the card might start to bend slightly but that's OK.
6. Now, while holding the washer to stop it unwinding, put the card in the envelope.
7. When someone opens the envelope and takes out the card, the washer should quickly unwind, surprising the recipient.



Recipe

Surprise cake

God's rescue plan came in the form of a tiny baby; this was a surprise to many. Once created, these cakes will have a surprise hidden within them.

What you need:

- Fairy cakes (Free from)
- Teaspoon or cake corer
- Surprise ingredient – jam / cream / sweets / sprinkles / jelly bear – (it helps to have a couple of options on offer)
- Butter icing (Free from)
- (Optional) sprinkles

What to do:

1. Decide what surprise ingredient is going to be placed inside the cake.
2. Use the spoon or a cake corer to remove a small section of the middle of the cake. Ensure you do not make a hole all the way to the bottom of the cake.
3. Spoon/pour the hidden ingredient into the hole.
4. Put back the piece of cake you removed (if possible).
5. Cover the top of the cake with butter icing.
6. Scatter sprinkles on the icing (optional).



Games

Board games

There are a lot of 'element of surprise' games on the market so you might choose to play one of these either as a whole group or in smaller groups – games such as Kerplunk, Buckaroo, Jenga etc.

Mary and the Angel

This is an adapted version of Duck, Duck Goose. It plays with the idea of Mary waiting for the visit and then being surprised by the angel into action.

All children sit or stand in a circle facing inwards. Someone is chosen to be the angel, who walks around the outside of the circle. The angel touches everyone on the head as they walk, saying "No" until they get to the one they have chosen. They tap this person on the head, say "Mary" and run off round the circle.

Mary then gets up and chases the angel round the circle. Either Mary will catch the angel and become the next angel or Mary doesn't catch the angel and the angel gets another go.

If you have some boys who don't like the idea of being called Mary, they could use the name Joseph, who was also visited in a dream by an angel.

Large group prayer



Mary's song of praise

A simple version of Mary's song with actions. When the angel Gabriel told Mary she would give birth to Jesus, he also told her that her relative, Elizabeth, was going to have a baby, too. Mary went to see Elizabeth and Mary was so filled with joy that she sang a song of praise about what God had promised.

Stand in a circle together and encourage everyone to join in with the actions.

I am singing, that the Lord is great, *(thumbs up)*
I am full of joy: God is best! *(clap hands together and then punch the air)*

God has done great things for me, *(stretch arms out wide)*

God knows me. *(thumb to side of forehead)*
Like all who know God, I can feel his kindness to me. *(cross hands on your chest)*

God has shown his strength and majesty. *(Bend arms and clench hands)*

He sends away people who are boastful, who only think about themselves and how important they are. *(Sweep arm across in front of you as if clearing something out of the way)*

The poor and hungry are welcomed and fed. *(Wave arm as if to welcome people)*

God remembers the promises made to God's people. *(With palm up, circle arm in front of you)*

Amen

