



Equipped By Shari Miller

Leader's Notes

(Leaders and participants are encouraged to look up Bible passages for most effective study. Passages are printed below for ease in presentation.)

Share with a partner or your group: Who is a woman who is (has been) the most influential in your faith life? How has the connection you have (had) with her impacted your life? **Answers will vary. Encourage everyone to share. Make it clear that everything confided within the group stays within the group. The leader should start to begin discussion with an example of her own. Answers might include a mother or friend who is (was) faithful and nurtured and encouraged faith and love by leading her to Baptism, reminding her of her Savior, and encouraging her during difficult times in her life.**

Opening Prayer: Dear gracious Father, forgive us for the times we sin and fall short of Your will. Thank You for giving us Your Son to live a perfect life, suffer, and die for the sins of the whole world. Because He lives, we know we will live with You forever. Thank You for sending us Your Spirit so that we might have faith in You. Equip us through Word and Sacraments to be Your witnesses who tell about the Good News of salvation in Jesus. Bless our study of the Word. In Jesus' powerful name, Amen.

Three women — each of a different generation — were influential in the life of our Savior, especially when He was a baby. Let's explore how God uniquely equipped these women for service.

Elizabeth

Look at the following verses from Luke 1 and glean facts about Elizabeth: Luke 1:5–7, 24–25, 36, 41–45, 57–63.

Luke 1:5-7: ⁵ In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, of the division of Abijah. And he had a wife from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. ⁶ And they were both righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord. ⁷ But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were advanced in years.

Elizabeth was descended from the daughters of Aaron (priestly line); righteous and blameless because of Jesus who forgave her sins; she followed the Lord's commandments; barren for many years; advanced in years (some commentators project that she was over 60 years old, past her child-bearing years).

Luke 1:24-25: ²⁴ After these days his wife Elizabeth conceived, and for five months she kept herself hidden, saying, ²⁵ "Thus the Lord has done for me in the days when he looked on me, to take away my reproach among people."

Elizabeth believed in her faithful God's will for her to conceive. Elizabeth indicates she had been reproached by society because of her barrenness. She waited five months before making her pregnancy known. (Additional question for discussion: Why do you think she did this? Answers may vary.)

Luke 1:36: ³⁶ 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.

The angel Gabriel tells Mary that Elizabeth was pregnant with a baby boy.

Luke 1:41-45: ⁴¹ And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, ⁴² and she exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!" ⁴³ And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? ⁴⁴ For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. ⁴⁵ And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord."

Elizabeth, by the power of the Spirit, declares that the baby Mary carries is her Lord (John 1:14a: *And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us ...*).

Luke 1:57-63: ⁵⁷Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son. ⁵⁸And her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her. ⁵⁹And on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child. And they would have called him Zechariah after his father, ⁶⁰but his mother answered, "No; he shall be called John." ⁶¹And they said to her, "None of your relatives is called by this name." ⁶²And they made signs to his father, inquiring what he wanted him to be called. ⁶³And he asked for a writing tablet and wrote, "His name is John." And they all wondered.

As the angel said, Elizabeth bore a son; she named her son as God had instructed her husband Zechariah (John 1:13: *But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John; note in The Lutheran Study Bible, page 1704: "John" in Hebrew is "yochanan" which means "the Lord has shown favor."*)

See Luke 1:13–16 and 3:1–4. Who was Elizabeth's important child and what was his task on earth? John the Baptist; he proclaimed a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins; he was to "prepare the way of the Lord — the Savior Jesus.

How did God equip Elizabeth (and Zechariah) to raise John?

John was born to godly and righteous parents who followed God's commands, and forgave as the Lord forgave them. They were given knowledge of John's unique vocation as the forerunner of Christ; it is likely they opened the Scriptures to John as he grew up; they supported his Nazarete life as instructed by the angel.

Luke 1:13-16: ¹³But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. ¹⁴And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, ¹⁵for he will be great before the Lord. And he must not drink wine or strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. ¹⁶And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, ¹⁷and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared."

Luke 3:1-4: ¹In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, ²during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness. ³And he went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁴As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.'"

Read Luke 1:39–45. Discuss how Elizabeth was uniquely equipped to be an encourager to her relative Mary.

They were both mothers, but Elizabeth had the maturity of years to help Mary cope with the challenges of motherhood; Elizabeth's pregnancy affirmed for Mary the truth of all the angel had said; she witnessed firsthand the miracle of Elizabeth's conception; by the Spirit's power, she was able to affirm that Mary was carrying the Savior Jesus; she offered her home to Mary as a respite from perhaps the judgments of those in her hometown.

Luke 1:39-45: ³⁹In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah, ⁴⁰and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, ⁴²and she exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! ⁴³And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? ⁴⁴For behold, when the sound

of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. ⁴⁵ And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.”

Faith Talk: How does God equip His people for their unique tasks in life? See John 14:15–17, Romans 1:6, 1 Corinthians 11:23–26, 1 Peter 3:21a, and Galatians 5:22–23.

The Holy Spirit uses the Word of God to teach, train, and guide His people; the Spirit empowers believers to live lives that are pleasing to the Lord; through the Means of Grace (Word and Sacraments), the Spirit gives and sustains faith in Jesus; God gives the fruit of the Spirit, so each believer is equipped to live in step with the Spirit.

John 14:15-17: ¹⁵ “If you love me, you will keep my commandments. ¹⁶ And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, ¹⁷ even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.

Romans 1:16: ¹⁶ For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

1 Corinthians 11:23-26: ²³ For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, ²⁴ and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, “This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” ²⁵ In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” ²⁶ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

1 Peter 3:21a: ²¹ Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you ...

Galatians 5:22-23: ²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

Mary (the mother of Jesus)

Mary, a young woman in her teens and a virgin, was given some life-changing news from God through the angel Gabriel. Read Luke 1:26–38. How does she respond?

She said she was the Lord's servant and that what the angel had said would be true in her life.

What does this possibly indicate about her religious upbringing?

She knew the prophecy of a coming Messiah, so had been raised religiously; she believed in the Lord and His power.

Luke 1:26-38: ²⁶ In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, ²⁷ to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸ And he came to her and said, “Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!” ²⁹ But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰ And the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹ And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. ³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, ³³ and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.” ³⁴ And Mary said to the angel, “How will this be, since I am a virgin?” ³⁵ 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. ³⁶ 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. ³⁷ For nothing will be impossible with God.” ³⁸ 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.

Read the Christmas account found in Luke 2:1–20. What do we learn about Mary?

She traveled for the census as the government demanded; she was faithful to her husband; she gave birth to her son and laid him in a manger (no benefit of hospitals or doctors); she watched the events with the shepherds unfold and kept them in her mind and heart.

Luke 2:1-20 (1-7, 19): In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. ² This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³ And all went to be registered, each to his own town. ⁴ And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, ⁵ to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. ⁶ And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. ⁷ And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. ⁸ And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹ And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. ¹⁰ And the angel said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. ¹¹ For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. ¹² And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.” ¹³ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, ¹⁴ “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!” ¹⁵ When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.” ¹⁶ And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. ¹⁷ And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. ¹⁸ And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. ¹⁹ But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. ²⁰ And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

In Luke 2:33–35, Mary received some sobering news from Simeon in the temple. Compare these words with John 19:25-27.

The events Simeon prophesied happened — some either stood by Jesus or opposed Him; Simeon speaks directly to Mary; she will ultimately witness her Son's opposition, suffering, and death on the cross.

Luke 2:33-35: ³³ And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him. ³⁴ And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, “Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed ³⁵ (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.”

John 19:25-27: ²⁵ but standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. ²⁶ When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, “Woman, behold, your son!” ²⁷ Then he said to the disciple, “Behold, your mother!” And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.

Read Luke 2:39–42. What kind of parents were Mary and Joseph?

They followed the religious practices of the day; they faithfully worshiped God; they nurtured their son.

Luke 2:39-42: ³⁹ And when they had performed everything according to the Law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. ⁴⁰ And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon him. ⁴¹ Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. ⁴² And when he was twelve years old, they went up according to custom.

Faith Talk: How do you think God equipped Mary for her unique role as the mother of the Savior?

Answers will vary, but could include: a knowledge of Scripture and the prophecies about the Messiah; the events she witnessed in the life of her Son including his miraculous conception, the shepherd's visit, the visit from the Magi and the gifts they brought, and the like; the fulfillment of the prophecy from Simeon in Jesus' life and at the foot of the cross; her faithful love for her Son. Encourage everyone to share.

Faith Talk: Acts 1:14 indicates Mary was active in the early church. How was she equipped to bolster and encourage these early believers in Jesus Christ?

Answers will vary, but could include: she could share about her Son's miracle birth; she knew Him throughout His life; she could share all the things that had happened firsthand, including His life, suffering, death, and resurrection; she was a witness to the Good News of salvation in Jesus.

Acts 1:14: ¹⁴ All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.

Anna

Anna, a prophetess who was considerably older than Mary (and also older than Elizabeth), had an encounter with Jesus and his parents in the temple. Read Luke 2:36–38. What is known about Anna (vs. 36–37)?

She was a prophetess; daughter of Phanuel of the tribe of Asher; she was a widow; she was 84; she was constantly at the temple.

What did she do after she saw the Christ-child in the temple (v. 38)?

She gave thanks to God (possibly in song); she spoke about the coming of the Messiah to those waiting for their Redeemer.

Luke 2:36-38: ³⁶ And there was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years, having lived with her husband seven years from when she was a virgin, ³⁷ and then as a widow until she was eighty-four. She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day. ³⁸ And coming up at that very hour she began to give thanks to God and to speak of him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.

From Page 389 in *Lutheran Study Bible*: Prophetesses in the Bible:

Anna. The first prophetess mentioned in the New Testament was an elderly widow who was constantly at the temple (Lk 2:36-38). It is possible that she had a room at the temple and may have served there in some capacity. Luke does not record her "thanks" spoken over the baby Jesus. Most likely, she spoke or sang poetically, as had Simeon (Lk 2:25-35).

Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 11 show women offering private counsel, settling disputes, and perhaps most important, publicly thanking and praising God. God called women especially to share His Word in song and poetry (Miriam, Deborah, the mother of King Lemuel, and possibly Anna; note also the song of Mary in Lk 1:46-55). Song may have been a key element in what defined a prophetess. Scripture, like much of human culture, consistently distinguishes the roles of men and women. In particular, it describes women speaking God's Word publicly in song and privately through counsel. It describes men speaking God's Word publicly when Christ calls them through His Church.

Faith Talk: How did Anna's 84 years equip her to witness to Mary and all who were at the temple?

Answers will vary, but could include: she believed in her Lord and knew God had fulfilled His promises of salvation when she saw the Baby Jesus; throughout her life, she had witnessed God at work providing

and caring for her and for people who came to the temple; she could speak her generation's language (relate to her peers), and the like. Encourage everyone to share.

Faith Talk: How have the years of your life equipped you to be a witness about the Good News of salvation in Jesus Christ?

Answers will vary, but could include specific events or people who have influenced the faith life of the participants. Encourage everyone to share.

Who does this equipping? See Hebrews 13:20-21.

God, because of the saving work of Jesus, equips us to do His will — He is personally and actively involved in the believer's life.

Hebrews 13:20-21: Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

Faith Walk:

1. Read and meditate on Luke 1:46-56. Find various versions of Mary's "Magnificat" in *Lutheran Service Book* and on the internet.

Luke 1:46-56: ⁴⁶ And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, ⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, ⁴⁸ for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed; ⁴⁹ for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name. ⁵⁰ And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. ⁵¹ He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts; ⁵² he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate; ⁵³ he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty. ⁵⁴ He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, ⁵⁵ as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever."

Lutheran Service Book: "My Soul Magnifies the Lord," Evening Prayer (LSB 248); LSB 933-935.

2. Pray to the Lord, asking Him to equip you for a unique task in His kingdom. Ask for His guidance and encouragement to undertake it.

Closing: Pray and sing "Lord of All Hopefulness" (LSB 738).

Additional Questions if Time Permits:

Faith Talk: In Luke 2:33-35, Simeon spoke directly to Mary with a prophecy. Do you think Simeon's words — and perhaps all the events she had witnessed in Jesus' life — echoed in Mary's mind at the foot of the cross?

Answers will vary, but could include remembering the shepherd's visit, the visit from the Magi and the gifts they brought, the prophecy from Simeon, and the like.

Luke 2:33-35: ³³ And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him. ³⁴ And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed ³⁵ (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed."

Discuss what Mary knew about her Son Jesus in John 2:2–12.

She knew that her Son was able to discern and do what needed to be done in this situation; her belief in Jesus as the Lord and Messiah is evident.

John 2:1-5; 12: On the third day there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. ² Jesus also was invited to the wedding with his disciples. ³ When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." ⁴ And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come." ⁵ His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." ⁶ Now there were six stone water jars there for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. ⁷ Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim. ⁸ And he said to them, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of the feast." So they took it. ⁹ When the master of the feast tasted the water now become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the master of the feast called the bridegroom ¹⁰ and said to him, "Everyone serves the good wine first, and when people have drunk freely, then the poor wine. But you have kept the good wine until now." ¹¹ This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him.

¹² After this he went down to Capernaum, with his mother and his brothers and his disciples, and they stayed there for a few days.

Shari Miller is a baptized child of God. He graciously equips her to be a wife, mother, author, musician, and witness to the Good News of salvation in Jesus.