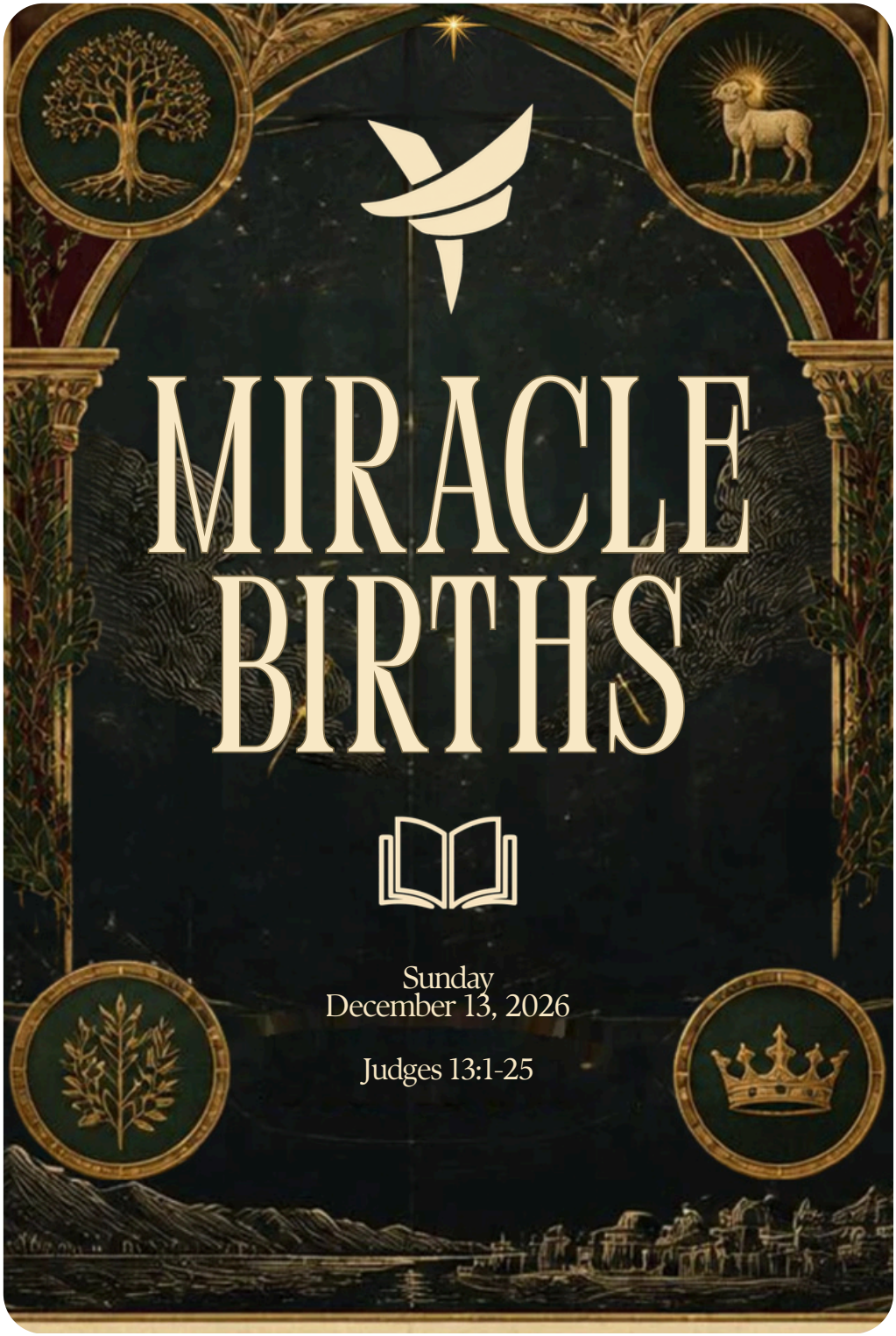

MIRACLE
BIRTHS
Sunday
December 13, 2026
Judges 13:1-25

Example Teaching Rhythm

Welcome and Connect: 10 Minutes
This helps people feel connected and more comfortable participating in the study and discussion.
Look Forward: 5-10 Minutes
Share any important church events, service opportunities, or upcoming group plans. Keep this brief but clear.
Look at Scripture: 25-35 Minutes
This is the main focus of Community Groups. Read the selected scripture together and guide the group through discussion questions and observations.
Prayer: 10 Minutes
Invite members to share prayer requests and praises, then pray together as a group. This is a time to support one another.

Explaining the H.E.A.R Method

The acronym **HEAR** stands for **Highlight, Explain, Apply, and Respond.** Each of these four steps aims to cultivate an atmosphere to hear God speak.

Highlight - After praying for the Holy Spirit's guidance, read the passage of scripture, and highlight each verse that speaks to you.
Explain - Explain what the text means. Ask questions like:

- Who wrote this, to whom, and why? What does this reveal about God? What do the key words actually mean? What did this call the original audience to, and what does that reveal for me?

By asking questions, with the help of God's Spirit, and by using helpful study resources, you can understand the meaning of a passage or verse.
Apply - Application is the heart of the process. Everything you have done so far culminates under this heading. As you have done before, work to uncover the significance of these verses and the implications they have. Ask questions like:

- What does this passage reveal about God, yourself, or the world that you need to embrace or sit with? Does this passage challenge an attitude, assumption, or habit that needs to change? Is there something to do? Is there someone to love?

Respond - Your response to the passage may take on many forms. Ask: Is there something to pray? – Let the passage shape your prayer, not just inform it. Use the "Five Daily Prayer Prompts" to guide you in your response.

Protector

God intercedes for us, sets apart a child for His people's good, and sends the greater Protector at Christmas.

Introduction

Most rescue stories in the book of Judges run on the same four beats. Israel does evil. God hands them over to an enemy. Israel cries out. God raises up a rescuer. The third beat is easy to find (3:9; 4:3; 6:6; 10:10).

Judges 13 leaves it out. Israel does evil, and the LORD gives them into the hand of the Philistines for forty years, the longest stretch of oppression in the book. Then the text reaches the place where a cry should go, and nothing is there. Nobody prays. Nobody petitions. Forty years is long enough for captivity to feel like the weather. By chapter 15, three thousand men of Judah will go out, tie up their own champion, and hand him to the Philistines, because they would rather appease their rulers than provoke them (15:11-13).

So whatever rescue arrives in this chapter, nobody ordered it. An angel finds a woman in a field. She has no children, and the text never says she was praying for one. God opens the conversation Himself, and everything after it rests on that.

The LORD who handed them over is the same LORD who sends the rescue. Judgment and mercy come from one hand, and here mercy arrives with no repentance on record and no request. It lands on a childless household in a tribe that was already losing its land.

Advent works the same way. Israel had waited for centuries, but no one in Israel could have drawn up this plan: a Savior born to a virgin in Bethlehem and laid in a feeding trough. God sent forth His Son (Galatians 4:4) because He chose to. That is what it means to intercede: to go between, on behalf of someone else. Our word this week is Protector.

Take this question into the text: what has God already stepped in front of for you that you have never thanked Him for?

Discussion Questions + Illustration

Select a question or two below to open up discussion.

- When has someone stepped in for you before you even knew there was a problem? How did you find out?
- What have you lived with so long that you stopped asking anyone to change it?
- Is it easier for you to ask for help or to accept it when it shows up unasked? Why?
- When a situation turns frightening, who do you want in the room with you, and what is it about them?
- What is the difference between being protected and being comfortable?

October 27, 1962. The Soviet submarine B-59 is trapped near Cuba, out of contact with Moscow, its air foul and its batteries running down, while American destroyers circle overhead dropping practice depth charges to force it up. The captain and the political officer decide war may have started and want to fire the nuclear torpedo on board. A launch required all three senior officers to agree. The third, Vasili Arkhipov, said no. The submarine surfaced, and nothing was fired. The world did not learn a nuclear weapon had been aboard until 2002. Arkhipov died in 1998, and historians still argue over how close that launch came.

- Most people alive that day went about their Saturday without knowing any of it. Who might have stood between you and something you never saw coming?

Highlight | Judges 13:1-25

Start by tracking who hears what. The angel comes to the woman first, and she is alone (v.3). When he comes back, he finds her alone again, sitting in a field with Manoah nowhere near (v.9). Her husband gets the first word secondhand.

Next, set Manoah's request beside the answer he gets. He prays that the man of God would return and "teach us what we are to do with the child who will be born" (v.8). The angel returns, and the reply sends Manoah back to what the woman already heard (vv.12-14). No new rules arrive. What they need is already in the house.

Then watch where the thanks goes. Manoah offers a meal and asks for a name (vv.15, 17). The angel redirects the meal to the LORD (v.16), declines the name because it is "wonderful" (v.18), and rises in the altar flame (v.20). Every attempt to honor the messenger gets sent up to the One who sent him.

Finally, hear the two reactions. Manoah says, "We shall surely die, for we have seen God" (v.22). His wife answers that a God who meant to kill them would not have taken their offering or told them all this (v.23).

Mark the word "begin." The angel says the boy "shall begin to save Israel" (v.5). The last verse says the Spirit "began to stir him" (v.25). Same Hebrew verb, both times marking a start.

- Compare Manoah's reaction in verse 22 with his wife's in verse 23. What is each of them using to read the situation?
- Why do you think the angel declines both the meal and the name? What is he refusing to let Manoah do?

Explain | Consider the Context

Zorah sat in Dan's territory in the Judean foothills (Joshua 19:40-41). The Amorites had already pushed the tribe out of the lowlands (Judges 1:34), and the Philistines next door would still control the ironworking in Saul's day.

The Nazirite vow (Num 6) meant no grape products, no razor, and no contact with the dead, and was usually voluntary and temporary. Here God makes the vow for the child, from the womb, & his mother keeps part of it first (v.4).

The visitor is the angel of the LORD, sent by God and speaking as God. Manoah concludes, "we have seen God" (v.22). Christians have long heard a preview of the Son here.

Notice the job description: "begin to save" (v.5). Earlier judges close with "the land had rest" (3:11, 30; 5:31; 8:28); Samson's story never does. The Philistines are subdued only in the days of Samuel (1 Sam 7:13), who we'll see next week.

Luke retells the pattern at Christmas: a son filled with the Spirit from the womb for Zechariah and Elizabeth (Luke 1:13-15), then a son named Jesus for Mary (Luke 1:31), the child who "will save his people from their sins" (Matt 1:21).

- God started this rescue unasked, yet He also answers Manoah's prayer (v.9). What does it tell you that both are true?
- The angel gives the instructions for the child to the mother first (vv.3-5). What does that tell you about whom God entrusts with His work?

Apply | Discuss as a Group

Start with what this says about God. He moved first. Israel never asked for Samson, and God sent one anyway. Prayer still matters (Manoah's is answered, v.9), but the first move was God's, and that is good news if you feel you have not prayed enough. He who keeps you will not slumber (Ps 121:3-4).

Then look at ourselves. Israel lived under the Philistines for four decades without a recorded complaint, and when a rescuer showed up, his own people argued for the old arrangement (15:11). Some things we have lived under so long we no longer call them bondage: a habit, a grudge, a screen, a fear. Rescue feels like a threat once you have made peace with what holds you. Jesus calls that slavery (John 8:34).

Then borrow the woman's method. When her husband panics, she takes inventory of what God has already done: He accepted the offering, He showed us this, He told us what is coming (v.23). So does Paul (Romans 8:32). When a moment frightens you, start by listing what God has already given.

Last, a child is set apart for people who did not ask for him, and the cost starts with a mother who gives up wine and unclean food before he is born (v.4). Someone paid that kind of cost for you.

- Where have you stopped asking God to change something because it has been this way too long?
- Think of a frightening season. What had God already given you that you could have used to read it?
- Manoah asked for more instruction and was pointed back to what he had. What is sitting undone while you wait for a new word?

Respond | How should I live/pray?

Start with the protection you did not notice. Write down the times you were spared something you never saw coming: a job that fell through, a call you did not make, a season that ended before it broke you. Thank God for each one by name, out loud. The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him and delivers them (Psalm 34:7).

Second, name your Philistines. Pick the one thing you stopped praying about because it has gone on so long, and ask God to do what you cannot. Tell one person in this group what you asked, and ask them to check in each week through Christmas. Captivity thrives on silence.

Third, take a child. Samson's mother gave up her own comfort for a boy who would matter to people she would never meet. Choose a child within your reach, a grandchild, a student, a kid at church or on your street, and pray for them by name every morning until Christmas. That is intercession: standing in the breach between them and what you cannot see coming (Ezekiel 22:30).

Then rest in the Protector who has come. Samson was set apart from the womb, and he squandered much of it, though Hebrews 11:32 still counts him among the faithful and the LORD worked even through his worst choices (Judges 14:4). He handled a dead lion (14:8-9), lost his hair (16:19), and died in the ruins of a Philistine temple (16:30). The angel only said he would "begin." At the cross Jesus said, "It is finished" (John 19:30). He is the Protector Samson's story longs for and Samson could not be. Isaiah promises a child called "Wonderful Counselor" (Isaiah 9:6), a word from the same root the angel used when Manoah asked his name. And Christ did not stop at the cross. He is at God's right hand, interceding for us (Romans 8:34; Hebrews 7:25).

- Which protection will you thank God for this week, and on what day will you do it?
- Picture Christ at the Father's right hand, interceding for you by name today. Which of your fears would change?

Response Tool: Five Daily Prayer Prompts

As you leave today, let these five questions carry the weight of your response into the week ahead — not as a checklist, but as an ongoing conversation with God. Introduce the five daily questions as a simple spiritual practice that can help us intentionally live out our faith in our workplaces, homes, families, and communities.

- God, where do you want me to go?
- God, who do you want me to see?
- God, what do you want me to say?
- God, what do you want me to pray?
- God, how do you want me to serve?

After this time of reflection, transition into a time of prayer requests. Allow time for members to share and, if appropriate, allow others in the class to pray for each other.

Additional Commentary

- On nazir (נזיר), "Nazirite" (vv.5, 7): from nazar, "to separate, consecrate." The vow law is Numbers 6:1-21, where the uncut hair is nezer, "consecration" (6:7), the word used of the high priest's diadem (Exod 29:6). "Nazarene" (Matt 2:23) is usually tied to a different root (nsr, "branch," Isa 11:1), and Jesus came eating and drinking (Luke 7:34).

- On pil'i (פלאי), "wonderful" (v.18): from pl', the root of yippale', "too hard," in Genesis 18:14 (Advent 1) and of pele', "wonder," in Isaiah 9:6. The angel's question, "Why do you ask my name?", repeats the reply Jacob received at Peniel (Gen 32:29). Translations differ on who "works wonders" in verse 19: the LORD, the angel, or what the couple saw.

- On mal'ak YHWH (מלאך יהוה), "angel of the LORD": mal'ak is "messenger." Here he is "a man of God" (v.6), "the angel of the LORD" (v.13), and "God" in Manoah's mouth (v.22), as with Hagar (Gen 16:7-13), Moses (Exod 3:2-6), and Gideon (Judg 6:11-24), where the messenger is distinguished from the LORD and speaks as Him. Exodus 23:21 says "my name is in him." Manoah's fear rests on Exodus 33:20 and matches Gideon's (Judg 6:22-23).

- On yachel lehoshia' (יחל להושיע), "shall begin to save" (v.5): yachel is the Hiphil of chalal, "to begin," the verb that opens verse 25 (tachel, "began to stir"). The root yasha', "to save," gives the judges their title moshia' (3:9, 15) and the name Yeshua, which Matthew 1:21 ties to Jesus' work. Samson "judged Israel twenty years" (15:20; 16:31), with no rest formula.

- On Shimshon (שמשון), "Samson" (v.24): built on shemesh, "sun," with an ending of uncertain force. Unlike Isaac (Gen 21:6) and Ishmael (Gen 16:11), the text gives no explanation of the name.

- On pa'am (פעם), "stir" (v.25): a rare verb, used elsewhere of a disturbed human spirit (Gen 41:8; Ps 77:4; Dan 2:1). When the Spirit later empowers Samson the narrator switches to tsalach, "rush" (14:6, 19; 15:14); compare Gideon, whom the Spirit "clothed" (6:34). This stirring happens at home, in Mahaneh-dan, before any exploit (cf. 18:12).

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