

## THE ANNOUNCEMENT

Accounts of the events surrounding the birth of Jesus have many ties to passages in the Old Testament that find their fulfillment in the coming of the Messiah. For example, Isaiah 9: 1-7 relates well to the New Testament account in Luke 1:26-38.

As we examine Old Testament prophecies we see that the birth of Jesus of Nazareth was an event planned by God from (before) the beginning. There are references to the coming of the Messiah in the Books of Moses. Many of the Psalms are Messianic in nature and Isaiah's prophecies, written some 800 years before the event, contains the most direct and specific predictions regarding the life of Jesus.

But [in the midst of judgment there is the promise and the certainty of the Lord's deliverance] there shall be no gloom for her who was in anguish. The former time the Lord brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time He will make it glorious, by the way of the Sea of Galilee, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations. The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in the land of intense darkness and the shadow of death, upon them has the light shined. You, O Lord, have multiplied the nation and increased their joy; they rejoice before You like the joy in harvest, as men rejoice when they divide the spoil of battle. For the yoke of [Israel's] burden, and the staff or rod for [goading] his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, You have broken as in the day of [Gideon with] Midian. For every tramping warrior's warboots and all his armor in the battle tumult and every garment rolled in blood shall be burned as fuel for the fire. For unto us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon His shoulder, and His name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father (of Eternity), Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and of peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from that latter time forth, even for evermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this. (Isaiah 9: 1-7, Amplified Bible)

Isaiah wrote this prophecy as if it were a completed fact. I guess in God's sight all of history can be viewed as a completed fact. He knows the end from the beginning. As we study His Word, we too can know the outcome of this age. At the very least, we know goodness and righteousness will triumph over evil.

At the time of Isaiah's writings, the Northern Kingdom of Israel was a political mess. There were alliances being formed and broken with the surrounding nations and when the alliances didn't work out, the stronger nations would invade Israel to punish them. The territories occupied by the tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali usually caught the brunt of the attacks. Hence Isaiah's reference to anguish and gloom and contempt. But things were going to be different. The darkness would be replaced with great light. If you compared maps of the Holy Land that show the area divided into tribes with the area in the time of Christ, you quickly see the town of Nazareth is in the territory of Zebulun and the area of the main ministry of Jesus, Capernium and the Sea of Galilee are located in the area given to the children of Naphtali

The reference to multiplying the nations and increasing their joy could refer to the time in which we live today. The gospel of Jesus Christ was to be taken beyond the nation of Israel. We have certainly seen nations multiply and

those who do turn to Him find joy.

All these things were to be related to the birth of a Child. In verse 6, Isaiah wrote, For unto us a Child is born, to us a Son is given. This is our cue to jump ahead some 800 years, to the time when that Child was to be born. We come to a land that no longer flowed with milk and honey, to a land where many people worked hard to earn a meager existence. We come to a time that had an uncertain peace, where the known world was under the control of Rome and human life was of little value unless you were a Roman. Let's make our way to a small town about 15 miles due west of the southern tip of the Sea of Galilee, it's name is Nazareth. It's a typical country town, with typical people with all the typical things happening in it. Well, not quite! In fact, there is something very strange going on. Let's read about it in Luke's account.

Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And having come in, the angel said to her, "Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!" But when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and considered what manner of greeting this was. Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. "And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name JESUS. (Luke 1:26-31)

The phrase "in the sixth month" refers to another significant event Luke recorded earlier in this first chapter. Six months earlier Zachariah, the father of John the Baptist had a visit from Gabriel. He was told he and his wife Elisabeth would have a son in their old age. Since Elisabeth was past child-bearing age this was an exceptional but not unique situation. It had happened to others (Sarah the wife of Abraham and Hannah, Samuel's mother). But, what was to happen to Mary was unique, it had never happened to anyone before and it was to never happen again.

It is certainly not an everyday occurrence for people to be visited by an angel. However, the events surrounding the birth of Jesus were so significant they could not be left to chance. These visits of the angel Gabriel to Zachariah and Mary were for the purpose of communicating to them their involvement in **the** most significant happening since the creation. Sometimes we get so busy with the routine things of life we fail to listen when God has a message for us. However, when Gabriel came to Mary, there was no way she was going to fail to listen. He had her complete attention.

Mary was a teenager, a young woman. She was looking forward to her marriage to Joseph, the carpenter. They were engaged, and in those days, engagements were binding commitments. Even though the marriage was not consummated during the engagement period, to undo this commitment was like getting a divorce. Luke was careful to point out that Mary was a virgin. This reference supports additional prophecy in Isaiah 7:14 (Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a son and shall call his name Immanuel.) There is great significance (beyond the obvious) of the virgin birth. Consider the fact that mankind was enslaved to this world system whose ruler is Satan. When Adam choose to obey Satan rather than God, he lost his dominion over creation in the same way that the possessions of a slave become the property of the slave-owner. All the children of the slave become the property of the

slave-owner and slaves nor their children have any rights – they are property. If Jesus had been born of the seed of Adam, then He too would have been subject to Satan. However, being born of the Holy Spirit, He was of a different origin and, additionally, if He refused to serve Satan (that is, commit sin), then He would not be under the penalty of sin not the dominion of Satan. Consequently, His virgin birth and sinless life are two very important principles. If Jesus was born of a virgin, then He could **not** be of the seed of Adam.

Both Mary and Joseph traced their ancestry back to David. The promises God made to David concerning his kingdom and reign will one day find fulfillment in this Child of Mary. Of earthly lineage, He is heir to the throne of Israel. Of spiritual lineage, He is heir to the throne of the universe.

Turning to the announcement Gabriel made to Mary, he said, "Hail, thou that are highly favored, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women." God's grace had been bestowed upon Mary in that she had been selected (chosen) to bear the Son of God. The grace is there because God is there. Gabriel said "the Lord is with thee." I wonder if we, today, realize how highly favored **we** are in that God has chosen to be with **us** through His Holy Spirit. Truly, blessed are we among all people, if we know the Lord.

You can imagine Mary was frightened and confused by this greeting. Just seeing an angel could be pretty upsetting. I'm sure she wondered, "who is this and what does this mean?" Gabriel told her to not be afraid. Almost every appearance of angels recorded in the Bible, we see a word of reassurance to not be afraid. When we get close to the spiritual world and make contact in such a manner as is described here, then the element of the unknown and our own lack of power work together to produce fear. If fear has its way, then we are reluctant to step out in faith to experience all God has for us in Christ Jesus in our Christian walk. Consequently, many Christians are living in spiritual poverty though they are heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ. "Fear not," he said, "you have found favor with God." What a message!

How was this favor to manifest itself? Mary was told she was to become pregnant and have a son whom she was to name, Jesus. So far, this all sounds fairly reasonable to Mary. After all, she was planning to marry Joseph and they would want to have children and every Jewish family wanted sons and Jesus was not an uncommon name in that area.

But the angel did not stop there, he had something else to say.

"He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. "And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end." (Luke 1:32-33)

This baby that Mary was told about was NOT going to be an ordinary person. He was going to be a great person. What is involved in being a great person? Perhaps we can learn from what this great Person taught. Remember Jesus taught His disciples that if any would be great among them they should be the servant of all. Even today, we recognize true greatness by this measure: there are the Mother Teresas, the Albert Schweitzers, there are those in our community whom you know of who would qualify for greatness. Jesus was to be great for another reason and that was simply because of Who

He is: "Son of the Highest" identifies this person with the Lord God of the universe, the Creator of heaven and earth. Greatness is also inherent in His commission to reign as King over the house of Jacob. He will be a King from the lineage of David. Ever since David was king, every other king was compared to David and none of them measured up to David. In this coming king, He will surpass anything David even dreamed of accomplishing. His Kingdom will never ever end.

By this time, Mary has figured out the angel is not talking about a normal course of events. This is not something that is to "just happens" after she and Joseph have been married awhile. Something special was going to take place. Mary was apparently pretty calm, at least she was thinking straight enough to ask a very important question. Let's look at her question and the answer the angel gave.

Then Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I do not know a man?" And the angel answered and said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God. "Now indeed, Elizabeth your relative has also conceived a son in her old age; and this is now the sixth month for her who was called barren. "For with God nothing will be impossible." Then Mary said, "Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her. (Luke 1:34-38)

Mary's question of "How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?" is her own testimony to the fact that she was a virgin. Gabriel's answer attributed the means of accomplishing this miraculous event to the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God is the agent for action. Because God's Spirit was the Initiator and Source of the life of this holy person that was to be born, he would be called the Son of God. Previously, Gabriel said He would be called the Son of the Highest. I think it would be helpful for us to return to the passage in Isaiah we read earlier and now look at the names Isaiah mentioned. There are four titles in Isaiah 9:6: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Prince of Peace, and Everlasting Father. If we add to these names the titles the angel gave, Son of God and Son of the Highest, and consider the name Jesus means "Jehovah is salvation", then we have a good word picture of this Miracle Child.

We can look back on the earthly ministry of Jesus and see how He lived up to those titles. [Wonderful Counselor] If we study the Sermon on the Mount, we see it is a textbook of counseling material. Many people today spend great sums of their resources going to counselors to get help for themselves to straighten out their lives. In many cases the problems they are experiencing would disappear if they would apply the counsel of Jesus as given in the Sermon on the Mount. [Mighty God] When we examine the miracles and mighty works Jesus did, we conclude that the might and power of God was with Him. [Everlasting Father] Taking His own testimony of "I and My Father are One," we see He not only had the power of God, He was, in fact, God Himself. [Son of God] If we realize that the term "son" can mean "another expression of the same person," then we can pick up another name from the 7th chapter of Isaiah, Immanuel, which literally means "God with us." As we apply these titles to Jesus, we see, even though we have difficulty

understanding it, not only is He the Son of God, He is God Himself, come in the flesh.

The title Prince of Peace finds application in at least two dimensions. First, we obtain "peace with God" through the work of the cross which Jesus came to accomplish. Because of man's sinful nature he was at odds with God. There was separation between God and man. Man did not and does not have the ability to bridge the gap; therefore, God took the action to close that gap to make us "at one" with Him. This is peace with God. This action is a demonstration of the meaning of the name Jesus, "Jehovah is salvation." You may remember that an angel later made a visit to Joseph in a dream and told him, "You shall call His name Jesus, for it is He who will save His people from their sins." Once we have experienced this peace with God and accept His Lordship in our lives, we then have the freedom to practice the principles of the Kingdom of God. Living out our salvation in the everydayness of life then will bring to us a condition of inner peace which spills over into our relationships with others. This aspect is what I believe is meant by the term "peace of God." This is the second dimension of this title Prince of Peace that works to bless us who have the Lord Jesus in our lives. [Son of the Highest] In His resurrection from death, Jesus was shown to be Lord of all things. [Jehovah is Salvation] The work of the Cross was the means by which He brought salvation to mankind.

Gabriel had more news for Mary and that concerned the extraordinary thing that had happen to Zachariah and Elisabeth. This was of significance as related to the news Mary had just received about herself. It communicated to Mary that what was happening to her was a part of a series of events of cosmic significance. I think God realized there would be those who would try to discount the ministry of both John the Baptist and Jesus as being nothing out of the ordinary, so He chose to do the impossible from man's point of view. A barren woman past the age of child bearing having a child and then a virgin having a child. If one impossibility was not enough to convince them, then perhaps two would work. With God nothing is impossible.

Mary's response is beautiful. It was total and complete surrender. When she called herself a "hand maid" she was using the term that meant a "female slave". In that society, the owner of the slave had complete authority over the slave. Mary was willing to be that surrendered to God.

God wants each of us to have that kind of devotion and commitment to Him. As we surrender to Him in the same attitude that Mary did, we will find that what happened to Mary in the physical will happen to us in the spiritual. Physically, Christ was conceived and grew in her. Spiritually, Christ is conceived in us by the Holy Spirit when we experience being born from above. If you have never truly surrendered your life to God through Jesus, then invite Him to come and take control and be Lord of your life.