

CONCEIVED

Luke 1:26-38

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. If we examine Old Testament prophecies, then we discover 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 700 years before the event, contain the most direct and specific predictions regarding the life of Jesus.

Some of these prophecies were related to the birth of a Child. For example, Isaiah wrote, "For unto us a Child is born, to us a Son is given." This is our cue to jump ahead some 700 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, its name is Nazareth. It was 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.

The Greeting – 1:26-29

²⁶ Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city in Galilee called Nazareth, ²⁷ to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the descendants of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸ And coming in, he said to her, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." ²⁹ But she was very perplexed at this statement, and kept pondering what kind of salutation this was. Luke 1:26–29 (NASB95)

It is not every day that an angel appears to someone to let him or her know the specifics of God's will for their life. However, in less than a year the angel Gabriel appeared to people twice in connection with the coming of the Messiah. Some six months earlier, he had visited Zacharias the father of John the Baptist. This time the visit was to a young woman that had been chosen to bear the Holy Child.

From Old Testament prophecies we find that she needed to meet certain criteria such as being a direct descendant of David and being virgin. Mary certainly met those two requirements. Is there a lesson here for us? Does God have something that He wants accomplished for which you are uniquely qualified to do? If we are not saying "Yes" to God, then we may miss out on the main thing that God had in mind for us to do in our lives. We may literally miss the opportunity of a lifetime unless we are saying "Yes" to God in every situation that He presents to us.

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 the 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 chose 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 nor 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.

Since a visit by an angel was not an ordinary occurrence, it tends to be upsetting to people who encountered such things. Most people would rather not be upset in this way. In fact, there is a song in our hymnal that has a verse that reads, "I ask no dream, no prophet ecstasies, No sudden rending of the veil of clay, No angel visitant, no opening skies . ." We should want to have whatever God's blessing will be and I believe that we would be blessed beyond our imaginations if we experienced such an encounter.

This angel came on a mission to make an announcement. Gabriel 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 was chosen to bear the Son of God. His unmerited favor was there because He was there. Notice that 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 really know the Lord.

Luke tells us that Mary was troubled at what she heard. I can imagine that her mind was racing in amazement, wondering what it all meant.

In almost every account of the appearance of angels 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 that God has for us in Christ. Consequently, many Christians are living in spiritual poverty even though they are heirs of God. The message of the angel was "Fear not, you have found favor with God." This should be the desire of every human heart – to find favor with God.

The Declaration – 1:30-33

³⁰ 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 name Him Jesus." ³² "He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; ³³ and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end." Luke 1:30–33 (NASB95)

In Mary's case, this favor was to manifest itself in her becoming pregnant. She would have a Son and name Him JESUS. This baby was not going to be an ordinary person, He was to be GREAT. He would teach the world a different concept of greatness: that "whosoever would be great among you, let him be servant of all." Even today, we recognize true greatness in people who devote their lives to helping others. Jesus was to be great for another reason and this was because of Who He is. "Son of the Highest" identified Him with and as God, the Creator of heaven and earth.

Greatness is also inherent in His commission to reign as King over the House of Jacob. He is a King from David's lineage but He surpasses anything David even dreamed of accomplishing. Both Mary and Joseph traced their ancestry back to David. The promises God made to David concerning his kingdom and reign 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.

Apparently, by this time, Mary had figured out that these things that were to happen were

not a normal course of events that would occur after she and Joseph were married awhile. Something special was going to take place. She had the presence of mind to ask a very important question.

The Question – 1:34-37

³⁴ Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I am a virgin?” ³⁵ The angel answered and said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy Child shall be called the Son of God. ³⁶ “And behold, even your relative Elizabeth has also conceived a son in her old age; and she who was called barren is now in her sixth month. ³⁷ “For nothing will be impossible with God.” Luke 1:34–37 (NASB95)

Mary's question of "How shall this be, seeing that I know not a man?" is her own testimony to the fact that she was a virgin. Some commentators find this question to be somewhat puzzling, in that Mary was planning to be married and there is nothing in the recorded message from Gabriel that would indicate that what was to happen was imminent. In many of the prophecies given in the Old Testament, the fulfillment of a particular prophecy was many years later. Apparently, something caused Mary to assume that the angel was speaking about something that would happen very soon. Gabriel answered that God, the Holy Spirit would initiate the life that would be in her that would be God Incarnate. The plan of salvation that existed before the world began was coming into view on the world scene at the time appointed by God.

The term “overshadow” was likely a reference to the visible presence of God that accompanied the Children of Israel as a pillar of cloud during their journey through the wilderness or of the glory of God that came upon the Tabernacle. We say that God is omnipresent (He is everywhere); however, there are situations where His presence and influence are more pronounced such as His being with the Children of Israel and in what was happening to Mary.

In the previous set of verses, Gabriel said that the Child was to be called the “Son of the Most High” and in this set of verses, Gabriel used the term “Son of God.” The term “son” in Semitic thought was used to indicate a “carbon copy” or exact duplicate. It was used to say that the person had the same qualities as the one referenced as the “father.” In 2 Samuel 7:14, God told David that Solomon would be like a son to God in that God would discipline him as a father disciplines his son. Neither one of these uses of the term “son” requires a “genetic” connection to the referenced “father.” The situation that Gabriel described to Mary was obviously one in which the relationship was more than “being like someone” or “being treated like someone.” In John 3:16, the uniqueness of the relationship that Mary’s child was to have to Jehovah God is seen in the term “*monogenes*” which is translated as “only begotten” or “uniquely begotten.” In the same way, the terminology “born again” is used by some to simply mean a fresh start in life or a significant change of direction in a person’s actions. The meaning of this phrase in the sense that Jesus used it in John 3:3 (you must be born again) was related to a “genetic relationship” (in a spiritual sense) with the Holy Spirit of God.

This is the reason that the only true and meaningful definition of the word “Christian” is “one who is born again of the Spirit of God.” It cannot apply to someone who has simply made a decision to follow the teachings of Jesus.

Gabriel told Mary about the extraordinary thing that had happened to Elizabeth. The miraculous events happening to each of these women were related and were part of a series of events of cosmic spiritual significance. There is a principle in the Scripture that says things are confirmed in the mouth of two or three witnesses. Here we were to have two “impossibilities” giving witness to the intervention of God in the affairs of man.

The Commitment – 1:38

³⁸ And Mary said, “Behold, the bondservant of the Lord; may it be done to me according to your word.” And the angel departed from her. Luke 1:38 (NASB95)

Mary's response was beautiful. It was total and complete surrender. I believe that 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). Spiritually, Christ is conceived in us by the Holy Spirit when we say "Yes" to God in faith and are born again from above.

Additional Thoughts

Both Elizabeth and Mary were faced with challenging situations. There are times in our lives when we find ourselves not knowing which way to turn or what to do. Some of the time, we know what to do but we have so much to do we don't know what to do next. Where do we turn for direction and advice on making such decisions? We have “references” such as what we were told by our parents, we know what the law of the land says, we observe what is acceptable in the community in which we live, and we have access to the Word of God. All of us have discovered that some things our parent told just weren't so, we have seen bad laws enacted (and repealed in some cases), and we know that just because society accepts something that it is not necessarily right. We would say today that the only sure and reliable way to know what we ought to do is through the Word of God. At the time of the births of John and Jesus, access to the written word of God was not as easy as it is for us today. God made sure that the message of the importance of what He was doing would get through to those involved by sending a special messenger.