

Messiah's Messenger

Now our scene shifts in the historical narrative from Judea to Galilee and specifically Nazareth. Here we are introduced to Mary arguably a teenage promised/pledged to a man named Joseph a descendant of King David.

Luke 1:26-38 (ESV)

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.

Luke 1:26 (ESV)

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth,

What a contrast from the Temple in Jerusalem to a seemingly insignificant town in Galilee called Nazareth. Galilee was among the gentiles and so most 1st century Jews considered Jews from that area unclean.

John 1:45-46 (ESV)

Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." ⁴⁶ Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see."

Luke 1:26-27 (ESV)

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.

As with Daniel each time Gabriel appeared, he brought important messages from God. This time was no exception.

Mary's plans interrupted

Nazareth in Galilee located on a major trade route, Nazareth was frequently visited by Gentile merchants and Roman soldiers. Jesus was born in Bethlehem but grew up in Nazareth. Nevertheless, the people of Nazareth would reject him as the Messiah.

Mary was not a prophet or a priest; she was not in God's temple performing acts of service. Instead, she was simply a young woman who was living at home and planning her wedding, for she was engaged to be married to Joseph. In ancient Jewish marriages, the word "engaged" (or "betrothed") had a different meaning than today. First, the two families would agree to the union and negotiate the betrothal, including a price for the bride that would be paid to the bride's father. Next, a public announcement would be made. At this point, the couple was "pledged." This is similar to engagement today, except that it was much more binding. At this point, even though the couple was not officially married, their relationship could be broken only through death or divorce. Sexual relations were not yet permitted, yet

they would refer to each other as husband and wife. This second step lasted for a year. During that time, the couple would live separately, with their parents. This waiting period would demonstrate the bride's purity. If she were found to be pregnant during that time, the marriage could be annulled. After this waiting time, the couple would be married and begin living together. What Mary was about to hear from the angel would have significant impact on her engagement.

Mary was young, poor, female—all characteristics that, to the people of her day, would make her seem unusable by God for any major task. But God chose Mary for one of the most important acts of obedience he has ever asked of anyone. You may feel that your ability, experience, or education makes you an unlikely candidate for God's service. Don't limit God's choices. He can use you if you trust Him. Take him at His Word.

Illus: Jesus' disciples

Luke 1:28-29 (ESV)

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.

When Gabriel appeared to Mary, he called her a favored one. She was favored because she would be a special recipient of God's grace. That the Lord was with Mary indicates that God would give her his help in the privilege and responsibility she was about to receive. While Zechariah had been terrified at Gabriel's very appearance, Mary was more fearful at the words Gabriel spoke. This young virgin from a small town was confused and disturbed as to why she was being greeted in such a way by this heavenly ambassador.

Luke 1:30-33 (ESV)

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."

Gabriel repeated to Mary that she had found favor with God. The words meant that Mary had become the recipient of favor bestowed on her by a superior—in this case, by God Himself. It did not point out any special virtue in Mary—she was not sinless. Some have suggested that Mary was favored because of what she was in herself, that she had grace to bestow on others, and that she remained a virgin forever.

However Scripture gives the opposite understanding. God chose Mary, blessed her, and she humbly accepted His call to be the mother of Messiah. Then she went on to have other children.

The result of this favor came in God's choice of Mary to be the mother of Jesus. Gabriel explained that this child would grow in her womb, be born as all human children are born, and be named Jesus. This son will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest. The word "Son" was a designation of the Messiah. God would miraculously create a human child who would actually be *his* Son, the long-awaited Savior.

Isaiah 7:14 (ESV)

Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.

Jesus, a Greek form of the Hebrew name Joshua, was a common name meaning "Yahweh saves." Just as Joshua had led Israel into the Promised Land, so Jesus would lead His people into eternal life.

The symbolism of Jesus' name was not lost on the people of His day, who took names seriously. In Jesus' name people would be healed, demons would be banished, and sins would be forgiven.

God's favor does not automatically bring instant success or fame. His blessing on Mary, the honor of being the mother of the Messiah, would lead to much pain: her peers would ridicule her; her fiancé would consider leaving her; her son would be rejected and murdered. But through her son would come the world's only hope, and this is why Mary has been praised by countless generations as the young girl who "found favor with God." Mary's submission was part of God's plan to bring about salvation. If sorrow weighs you down in this season and dims your hope, think of Mary and wait patiently for God to finish working out his plan.

Luke 1: 33 (ESV)

and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.”

Centuries earlier, God had promised David that his kingdom would last forever:

2 Samuel 7:16 (ESV)

And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.

This promise was fulfilled in the coming of Jesus, a direct descendant of David. Jesus was born in the line of David and thus could be a king to reign over the house of Jacob. His will be an eternal kingdom, a kingdom with no end. God had promised to continue the house (or dynasty) of David forever. David's earthly dynasty ended four centuries after his reign, but Jesus Christ, a direct descendant of David, was the ultimate fulfillment of this promise. Christ will reign for eternity—now in His spiritual kingdom and in heaven, and later, on earth, in the new Jerusalem.

Luke 1: 34 (ESV)

And Mary said to the angel, “How will this be, since I am a virgin?”

Unlike Zechariah, who desired a sign as proof of the angel's words, Mary's question displayed her faith. She merely asked how NOT if this miraculous event could occur because she was a virgin.

She was engaged to be married and probably planned on having children. Engagements usually occurred when girls were in their early teens. Mary may have been as young as thirteen when this event took place. Her question reveals spiritual sensitivity—Mary understood that Gabriel was referring to a miracle child to be born while she was still a virgin, prior to her marriage to Joseph. She naturally wondered how this was going to occur.

The birth of Jesus to a virgin is a miracle that many people find difficult to believe. Some have said that the concept of a virgin birth was picked up from other ancient sources. However, this concept has no precedent in either Jewish or pagan stories. That Jesus would be conceived without sexual activity between a man and a woman, that he would be conceived by God's power, was never imagined—until it happened.

Luke was a medical doctor, and he knew perfectly well how babies are made. It would have been just as hard for him to believe in a virgin birth as it is for people today, and yet he reported it as fact. Luke was also a painstaking researcher who based his Gospel on eyewitness accounts. Tradition holds that he talked with Mary about the

events that he recorded in the first two chapters. This is Mary's story, not a fictional invention.

Why is the Virgin Birth important to the Christian faith? Jesus Christ, God's Son, had to be free from the sinful nature passed on to all other human beings by Adam. Because Jesus was born of a woman, he was a human being; but as the Son of God, Jesus was born without any trace of human sin. Jesus is both fully human and fully divine. Because Jesus lived as a man, human beings know that he fully understands their experiences and struggles. Because he is God, he has the power and authority to deliver people from sin.

We can tell Jesus all their thoughts, feelings, and needs. He has been where they are, and he has the ability to help.

Luke 1: 35 (ESV)

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.

Gabriel explained how Mary would become pregnant and yet remain a virgin. The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you—these words picture the powerful presence of God. This would indeed be a special baby, for he will be holy. Jesus was born without the sin that had entered the world through Adam. He was born holy, just as Adam had been created sinless. Believers must be careful not to explain that Jesus was sinless simply because he did not have a human father. To do so would mean that Mary would have been sinless, which she was not.

Through the birth of Jesus, God himself entered the world in human form. This is the miracle!

In contrast to Adam, who disobeyed God, Jesus would completely obey his Father, enabling him to face sin's consequences in sinners' place and make them acceptable to God. This Son would be born totally because of God's initiative and by His grace. Jesus came as a gift from God.

Luke 1: 36-37 (ESV)

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.”

Mary did not ask for a sign, but it seems that Gabriel gave her one by explaining that Mary's relative Elizabeth was also pregnant as the result of God's grace. Gabriel gave Mary a person to whom she could go for support during what could prove to be a difficult time for Mary as she humbly fulfilled God's will. This also illustrated for Mary the fact that nothing is impossible with God. God took a barren woman who was past childbearing age and caused her to become pregnant. God took a virgin and caused a child to grow in her womb. With God, nothing is impossible.

Luke 18:27 (ESV)

But he said, “What is impossible with man is possible with God.”

Genesis 18:14 (ESV)

Is anything too hard for the LORD? At the appointed time I will return to you, about this time next year, and Sarah shall have a son.”

Jeremiah 32:17 (ESV)

‘Ah, Lord GOD! It is you who have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and by your outstretched arm! Nothing is too hard for you.

Mark 10:27 (ESV)

Jesus looked at them and said, “With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God.”

Luke 1: 38 (ESV)

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.

God's announcement of a child to be born was met with various responses throughout Scripture. Sarah, Abraham's wife, laughed. Zechariah doubted. By contrast, Mary submitted, knowing that she was merely the servant of the Lord. She believed the angel's words and agreed to bear the child, even under humanly impossible circumstances, even with difficult social consequences. A young unmarried girl who became pregnant risked disaster. Unless the father of the child agreed to marry her, she would probably remain unmarried for life or stoned. If her own father rejected her, she could be forced into begging or prostitution in order to earn her living. She risked losing Joseph, her family, and her reputation. And her story about being made pregnant by the Holy Spirit risked her being considered crazy as well. Still Mary said, despite the risks, "Let it be with me according to your word." When Mary said that, she didn't know about the tremendous opportunity she would have. She took the risk of faith; she didn't consult with anyone else; she didn't take time to weigh the pros and cons. She only knew that God was asking her to serve him, and she willingly obeyed. We need Mary's kind of trust and responsiveness. Too many wait to see the bottom line before offering themselves to God. God wants willing servants.

Closing comment:

Mary's believing response was to radically surrender herself to the Lord as His willing servant! She experienced the grace of God and believed the Word of God and therefore she could be used by the Spirit of God to accomplish the will of God!

Closing Prayer