

Christmas 2019 Message

Mary's Story Luke 1:26-2:17

Welcome to our second Christmas message. Last week we heard about Joseph; this week we are going to consider Mary. Both Joseph and Mary had very different experiences on that very first Christmas. Mary was engaged to be married to Joseph. Joseph's occupation was that of a carpenter. We are not told as to whether Mary had an occupation or not. We are not told their ages even though artists usually depict Joseph as looking relatively old and Mary as being young. The reality is that we do not know; God and Scripture are silent on this detail.

Our Scripture in Luke's Gospel has over 70 verses to consider. This is Mary's story of the events that led up to the birth our Lord Jesus Christ on the first Christmas. The scriptures are all taken from the New King James Version unless otherwise stated. The events will be broken down into sections as follows and the relevant scriptures referred to at the same time.

The sections are:

1. The visit by the angel Gabriel.
2. Mary visits her cousin Elizabeth.
3. The birth of John the Baptist.
4. The decree of Caesar Augustus.
5. The birth of the Lord Jesus Christ at Bethlehem.
6. The first visitors to see the Lord Jesus Christ.

1. The visit by the angel Gabriel (Luke 1:26-38)

Gabriel appears

"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 favoured one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!"

This is only the second time that we are introduced to this angel and given his name. Previously Gabriel is mentioned in the book of Daniel, chapters 8 and 9. Now Gabriel is active in Luke chapter 1, first concerning the birth of John the Baptist and now concerning the incarnation of the Son of God. Gabriel introduces himself with a joyous greeting, "Rejoice, highly favoured one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!" God was bestowing His gracious favour upon Mary. Out of all the virgins in the nation of Judah, Mary has been selected to give birth to the Saviour of the world, not that she was aware of this fact initially. This would make Mary very special in the eyes of God and she will be the happiest of all women. However, the initial reaction of Mary is different. It is not every day that an angel of the Lord appears to anyone!

Mary's initial reaction

"But when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and considered what manner of greeting this was."

Mary was a bit troubled, no doubt at the sight of the angel even though his greeting was full of joy and happiness. Mary was rightly concerned as to what was behind this greeting. What did it really signify?

Gabriel's message

Gabriel is undeterred and presses on with his mission. He seeks to allay fears by explaining fully why Mary has found favour with God.

"Then the angel said to her, Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son and shall call His name JESUS. 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."

Suddenly, Gabriel is giving Mary a lot of information about what is going to happen to her. The detail is almost overwhelming. Mary is going to conceive a child. The child will be a boy. Mary will give the child the name Jesus. The child is very special and will be great and known as the Son of the Highest indicating that He is God. He will inherit the throne of David and His reign will be forever, no end to His kingdom.

Now, Gabriel is speaking to Mary who is engaged to Joseph, but the marriage ceremony has not been completed and so they are not yet man and wife. It is not surprising that Mary was concerned and replies, "How can this be, since I do not know a man?"

The miracle of the incarnation

"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."

Here Gabriel explains how the virgin birth will come about. The Holy Spirit and the power of God will be involved. As it states in Hebrews 10, *A body You have prepared for Me*. This and the following news from Gabriel, removes the fears that Mary had. This statement of Gabriel is extremely important because no man of Adam's race was involved in the conception of the Lord Jesus. This child was unique and special!

News about Elizabeth

Gabriel now speaks of Mary's relative Elizabeth.

"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."

It is possible that Mary had not heard of the news that Zacharias and Elizabeth were expecting a child. Mary would know that, because of their ages, they will have assumed that they would never have any children, but everyone had forgotten that God works the impossible. He works miracles!

Mary bows to the will of God

"Then Mary said, behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word. And the angel departed from her."

Mary is a remarkable young woman. Although initially afraid at the sight of the angel Gabriel, all that he has said results in Mary bowing to the will of God. What at first seemed frightening has resulted in acceptance, joy and praise to God.

2. Mary visits her cousin Elizabeth (Luke 1:39-56)

In this section of chapter 1 we have a very interesting conversation as Mary and Elizabeth greet one another. Mary's greeting as she arrives to visit Elizabeth causes an amazing event. First the baby in the womb responds by moving, described as leaping and Elizabeth becomes filled with the Holy Spirit.

“Now Mary arose in those days and went into the hill country with haste, to a city of Judah, and entered the house of Zacharias and greeted Elizabeth. And it happened, when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, that the babe leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. Then she spoke out with a loud voice and said, Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! But why is this granted to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For indeed, as soon as the voice of your greeting sounded in my ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy. Blessed is she who believed, for there will be a fulfilment of those things which were told her from the Lord.”

Elizabeth speaks of Mary's privileged role and acknowledges that Mary's unborn Son is none other than Elizabeth's Lord. This knowledge comes about because Elizabeth is filled with the Holy Spirit. And Mary responds by saying,

“My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Saviour. For He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant; for behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed. For He who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is His name. And His mercy is on those who fear Him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with His arm; He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He has put down the mighty from their thrones and exalted the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things, And the rich He has sent away empty. He has helped His servant Israel, in remembrance of His mercy, as He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his seed forever.”

Mary in this burst of praise speaks of her low position which contrasts with God. God is giving her a very happy experience and position in life. Then Mary recounts the graciousness of God speaking of His mercy to the godly and reversing the exaltation of man and raising up His oppressed. Mary sees that this was the answer to God's promises given to Abraham so long ago. “And Mary remained with her about three months and returned to her house.” We can only imagine the conversations that these two godly women had during those three months.

3. The birth of John the Baptist (Luke 1:57-80)

This next section is a kind of parenthesis to our story about Mary. We will therefore simply read the verses as they speak for themselves on this remarkable story of John's birth and the surrounding events regarding his parents, his name and the prophetic praise from Zacharias.

“Now Elizabeth's full time came for her to be delivered, and she brought forth a son. When her neighbours and relatives heard how the Lord had shown great mercy to her, they rejoiced with her. So it was, on the eighth day, that they came to circumcise the child; and they would have called him by the name of his father, Zacharias. His mother answered and said, No; he shall be called John. But they said to her, There is no one among your relatives who is called by this name. So, they made signs to his father — what he would have him called. And he asked for a writing tablet, and wrote,

saying, His name is John. So, they all marvelled. Immediately his mouth was opened, and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, praising God. Then fear came on all who dwelt around them; and all these sayings were discussed throughout all the hill country of Judea. And all those who heard them kept them in their hearts, saying, What kind of child will this be?"

"And the hand of the Lord was with him. Now his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied, saying: Blessed is the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited and redeemed His people, and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of His servant David, as He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets, who have been since the world began, that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us, to perform the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember His holy covenant, the oath which He swore to our father Abraham: to grant us that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our life. And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Highest; for you will go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways, to give knowledge of salvation to His people by the remission of their sins, through the tender mercy of our God, with which the Dayspring from on high has visited us; to give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace. So, the child grew and became strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his manifestation to Israel."

4. The decree of Caesar Augustus (Luke 2:1-5)

We now resume Mary's story with the decree of Caesar Augustus.

"And it came to pass in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This census first took place while Quirinius was governing Syria. So, all went to be registered, everyone to his own city. Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed wife, who was with child."

When we consider this decree being issued by the ruler of the then world Empire, we can only say it is remarkable. It is remarkable because God's hand was in it from beginning to end. God was working in this most miraculous way through His young servant Mary and then causes Caesar to make a very specific decree about taxing and registering in the family's place of birth. As Joseph was of the family of David, then he and Mary had to journey to Bethlehem. This would cause a mighty upheaval throughout the whole Empire, not just in Judea. But there was an additional reason as this fulfilled an Old Testament prophecy of Micah chapter 5 verse 2, "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be Ruler in Israel, whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting."

Now Mary was nearing her full term for the pregnancy so this would be an arduous journey. Joseph would set out in good time to be there well before the birth. Notice that Mary is still considered to be engaged to Joseph and their marriage would not be consummated until after the birth of Jesus.

5. The birth of the Lord Jesus Christ at Bethlehem (Luke 2:6-7)

"So it was, that while they were there, the days were completed for her to be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling clothes, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn."

Contrary to what is normally described, this scripture reminds us that they had been in the inn for a few days before the birth happen. So, "it was, that while they were there, the days were completed for her to be delivered." The popular nativity presentation of Joseph and Mary arriving late to find the Inn full and they are lodged in the stables may not be right. We know from Matthew's account that Joseph was a kind and caring person and there was no way he would treat Mary in an unkind, uncaring manner.

Why then do we have the comment about no room in the Inn? Well, I mentioned earlier that there would be a great upheaval in the whole Roman Empire, not just Judea. Thousands of people moving and wanting temporary lodgings.

The Inn was probably overcrowded, and the Inn keeper would be endeavouring to maximise business. Not much has changed in the world of business! There would be no room for privacy in order to give birth with decency. The only location free from strangers was the stables. It was here that the birth could take place in privacy and probably accompanied by the local midwife.

6. The first visitors to see the Lord Jesus Christ (Luke 2:8-17)

"Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. Then the angel said to them, Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be the sign to you: you will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying: Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men! So it was, when the angels had gone away from them into heaven, that the shepherds said to one another, Let us now go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us. And they came with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger. Now when they had seen Him, they made widely known the saying which was told them concerning this Child."

Unknown to the world, this momentous event that would have a worldwide impact might have passed unnoticed if it was not for an angel arriving where a few shepherds were camped overnight, watching their flock of sheep. This angel of the Lord was accompanied by the shining of the glory of the Lord from heaven. As with Mary nine months earlier, the appearance causes great fear. They too need to be reassured that their fear was unfounded. Once again great joyful news is declared. It is news for all people; the event has universal significance. "For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord." This is the announcement concerning the long-awaited Messiah who is both God and Man.

At this point, heaven bursts forth with an angelic host that has praise on their lips saying, "Glory to God in the highest." Not only glory to God, but peace on earth. Why peace on earth? Because the Prince of Peace was here. This fulfils the prophetic promise of Isaiah chapter 9. Good will toward men is declaring God's intention to bring in blessing upon mankind. With their mission accomplished, the angelic host leave and no doubt a silence descended upon the countryside. Then the shepherds decide that they must go to Bethlehem. They had no doubts as to the truth of what they had been told but they wanted to see this amazing event for themselves. They found Joseph, Mary and the babe, just as the angel had declared. What was the impact on the shepherds? They told everyone they could what they had heard and witnessed concerning the child.

This Christmas, as we consider again the amazing event that occurred over two thousand years ago, are we still joyful about God's intervention in this world to bring us salvation? Christmas is not about presents to each other or using the time for feasting and drinking. Christmas is the time when we should remind the world of God's amazing love to the whole of mankind.

God's richest blessing to you and thank you for listening to Truth for Today talk 1125, Mary's Story.

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