

Topic	The Birth of Jesus Foretold
Reference	Luke 1:26-28
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400 years had passed since God had last spoken through his prophets. The prophets that foretold that a mighty one would come who would bring deliverance, but where was he? Almost a thousand years earlier God had promised King David that one of his descendants would reign on his throne forever, but no one had ruled on King David's throne for over 580 years. Had God's promise failed? And almost 2000 years earlier God had promised Abraham, I will bless you. And through your offspring, all peoples of the earth will be blessed. And God had repeated this promise to Isaac and to Jacob. But now the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were living under the oppression of an occupying army.

How could one of them possibly bring blessing to all peoples? No doubt many people were feeling a sense of hopelessness and despair, but just at the right time God acted decisively in human history. He sent his angel Gabriel to a small unimportant village to an insignificant teenage girl to deliver the most significant, the most astounding, the most impactful message ever given. Gabriel came to Mary and began his great announcement saying "greetings, you are highly favored. The Lord is with you".

Just imagine how Mary must have felt when she heard the angel's words. The scripture says she was troubled, confused. Perhaps these were some of her thoughts. An angel, why would he appear to me why I'm a poor girl? My family is not important. And I come from a town with a bad reputation. Besides I have absolutely no standing in my community. So how is it that I am highly favored by God? And why has God's glorious grace been poured out on me? The scripture says that Mary wondered what the angel meant. She was trying to figure out what his greeting was all about. She could very well have thought, what does the angel mean when he said the Lord is with you.

The Lord is with you now, that is not something that God's messengers would say to just anyone. In the Old Testament that was a greeting that was reserved for a person who had been chosen by God for a special purpose in salvation history. I wonder if Mary was aware of that. But to reassure her Gabriel told Mary don't be afraid, you have found favor with God.

I'm sure those words brought Mary some comfort, some peace of mind. To hear once again that God's grace, his blessing, his favor was upon her. It's no small thing to be favored by God, especially when you know you have done nothing to deserve it. Not only the angel had stopped there, but he didn't. He was just getting started. Gabriel basically said, Mary, let me tell you what's going to happen. You will become pregnant. You will give birth to a son. You are to call him Jesus. He will be great. He will be called the son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him a throne of his father, David. He will reign over Jacob's descendants forever, and his kingdom will never end.

I'm sure Mary must have been quite perplexed by the end of that long announcement. That was information overload. Just one of the many things that Gabriel said would have been enough to blow her mind. Take just the first thing he said, you shall conceive in your womb. Not possible. I'm just a teenager,

but I know the facts of life, I'm not married, I've never been with a man, so how can this be. And you will bear a son, no waiting around to find out whether the baby was going to be a boy or a girl. And you shall call his name Jesus. No need to think about the possible names to choose from. No wondering what shall I call my baby. Jesus, a great name, meaning God saves or God brings salvation. A not uncommon name in those day, similar to the Old Testament name, Joshua.

Jesus, as the angel would tell Joseph a few weeks later, Mary's baby was to be named Jesus because he would save his people from their sins. Mary may not have yet fully realized all of the implications of what the angel was saying, but God had chosen her to be the mother of the promised deliverer, the savior. Long awaited prophecies were being fulfilled. The Messiah whose advent the people had so intensely desired was now coming.

What an honor. What an umbling experience to be chosen by God, to be the mother of the savior. In her wildest dreams Mary may have earlier imagined being the mother of the Messiah. Having heard the prophecies from the scriptures most Jewish girls did have the hope of one day being the mother of the promised one, but when she had thought more soberly she had probably realized that there was little possibility that God would choose her. But now God had broken into her world by sending the angel Gabriel to give her an unimaginable message that she would be the mother of the promised savior. Truly that is what the angel meant when he said she was highly favored.

But the angel had just begun his wonderfully astounding announcement. Gabriel told Mary that her son would be great. Great, that's how God was described in scripture. Psalm 48. Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised. Mary's son would be great in his majesty, but also great in his meekness and humility. He would exercise great authority, but he would also be great in his servanthood. Jesus would be great in love, great in compassion and with great power he would heal the sick, cast out demons and raise the dead. He would be a great teacher, astonishing the learned. He would offer a great sacrifice, dying a great death. He would be resurrected in great power and would then ascend to great heights to a position of great authority at the right hand of God, the father.

And he will come again in great glory and Gabriel continued and he will be called the son of the Most High. The title of Most High is ascribed to God in the Hebrew scriptures. El Elion Hebrew for God most high refers to the one who was most highly exalted. The one was surpassing supremacy. The only one with the absolute right to lordship. The one before whom every knee must bow.

Gabriel was saying that Mary's son would bear the character and the nature of the Most High. He was also saying that Mary's son would be unique, different from anyone else would ever lived. He would not only be the son of Mary, he would also be the son of the Most High God. And there was more to the angels astounding message. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father, David. David, a man after God's own heart, the writer of the psalms, the greatest king of God's chosen people. That means Mary's son was going to be a King. He would be the one who fulfill the promises God had made in his covenant with King David.

In 2-Samuel chapter seven, God says to David, I will raise up your offspring after you. And I will establish his kingdom. Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne will be

established forever and Gabriel continued and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever. This would have been an illusion to the prophetic words from the book of Numbers chapter 24, a star shall come forth from Jacob and the scepter rise up out of Israel. Out of Jacob will come he that shall have dominion. Yes the promise was being fulfilled that one was coming, who would rule over all, who would trust in the God of Jacob. Then Gabriel added and his kingdom will have no end.

Imagine that, a King who will rule over his kingdom forever, no term limits, not just a few years in power to then be replaced by someone else. Unlike the dynasties of men, all of which will eventually crumble and disintegrate, his kingdom will never end. Mary's son and his kingdom could not be overcome by anyone or anything. He would be victorious over all his enemies, even death itself. Such a one could not be an ordinary man.

Gabriel's words, his kingdom will have no end confirmed the proclamations that had been given earlier by many prophets, such as when Daniel said in chapter 7, behold one is coming like a son of man coming with the clouds of heaven to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom that all peoples, nations and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed. Wow! What a message. No wonder Mary is astounded. No wonder she had questions. You know, that's really more than anyone could take in one brief encounter. Too much to process. Of course, she's going to have questions and she did.

So she asked how can this be? I'm a virgin. She doesn't say it's impossible, but she honestly asked a very practical question. How can all of this happen when I've never been with a man? Well, Gabriel was ready for that question and he gave an answer that brought some clarity. But he spoke about an event that would still be veiled in mystery. He did not give a lot of details because he spoke of something totally incomprehensible to the human mind. This event would be something unparalleled in all of human history, the conception and nine months later the birth of Mary's baby would not be an ordinary occurrence. Not only would it be extraordinary, it would be the greatest miracle of all time.

Something that has happened only one time in all of history. With just a few words, Gabriel gave a brief explanation of the incarnation. The great, awesome, holy son of God was getting ready to take on human flesh, unfathomable that the preexistent eternal son of God would come to earth as a baby born of Mary. Gabriel also said to Mary, the Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Gabriel let Mary know that this could happen only through the work of God. Humanly it was not possible, but the Holy Spirit of God working in her world somehow would bring about this miraculous wonder. The body of Jesus would somehow be created by the direct power of God.

That the Holy Spirit would come upon Mary must have amazed her, because up to that point in time God's spirit had not been poured out upon all who believed. Only people who had been chosen for special tasks such as Moses or David. Those are the people upon whom God would pour out his spirit. Mary was being chosen for a very important role in God's salvation plan.

Listen to the promise once again. The power of the most high will overshadow you. Mary must have been filled with awe and amazement at what God was about to do. The word overshadow carries the connotation of the Holy powerful presence of God and it was used to refer to God's shekinah glory. That

was the cloud of light by which God had manifested his presence in the tabernacle and later in the temple. The cloud of the glory of God would hover over the mercy seat on the Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies.

In Exodus 40 we read then the cloud covered the tent of meeting and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. The cloud both revealed God and his mighty power and also veiled him in mystery. Mary is to be overshadowed by the power of God.

Gabriel's answer continued. Therefore, the child to be born will be called Holy the son of God. The child whose birth would be enabled to the power of the Holy Spirit would be Holy. Holy in the aspect of purity being free from sin. The one coming into the world to offer his body as a sacrifice for the sins of all people must be a perfect sacrifice without spot or blemish, without sin. But Holy also in the sense of being set apart, different from anything else. As the scripture says, there is no one Holy like the Lord. Jesus is Holy because he is the son of God. Yes, this really is a mystery. The son Mary will bear has no human father because her son is the son of God. A finite human mind can't understand this because it's a miracle that only God can do, but with God nothing is impossible. And that's how Gabriel ended his announcement to Mary, for no word from God will ever fail. Nothing is impossible with respect to any of God's promises.

Now let's see how Mary will respond to this news. How will she react to this message from God? Earlier in the dialogue with the angel, the scripture says that she was greatly troubled at his words. I wonder if she was still troubled. She could have thought of virgin giving birth who will believe that, or how will I break the news to my parents? And what will Joseph say? What will be the look in his eyes? Will people begin to look at me as that kind of girl or she could have thought this is a great privilege, but on the other hand, it's a huge responsibility. Wouldn't there be maybe somebody better suited for this role than me. Somebody more qualified, somebody with more financial resources or political connections. I don't know that I can do what God is asking me to do.

Listen to the lyrics of a Christmas song, which expresses thoughts that Mary might've prayed to God.

Do you wonder as you watch my face,
if a wiser one should have had my place,
but I offer all I am for the mercy of your plan.

And that is how Mary responded with faith. And in humble submission, she said, I am the Lord's servant. May your word to me be fulfilled. That's an incredible response. God is going to make dramatic changes in her life, but she willingly submits to God's plan, trusting him to lead and provide.

Moments earlier the angel had said to Mary, the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Mary would now allow both her womb and her world to be overshadowed by the Most High. Sometimes people are hesitant, maybe even afraid to say to God I am a Lord's servant, may it happen to me according to your word but when Mary responded in faith and obedience to God's call in her life, she experienced profound joy. Listen to these words, she is saying to God a short time later, my soul exalts the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my savior. Mary's submission to God brought her great joy. It resulted in true worship and it opened the door to a purpose that was far beyond her imagination.

God broke into Mary's world and into all of human history. Today, he wants to break into our world into our lives. Are we willing to let him?

God's announcement to Mary came totally unexpectedly and today God's messages to us will sometimes come at unexpected times. For example, you may have tuned into this service today, just out of habit or out of curiosity and you weren't really expecting God to speak to you during this time of worship, but is God trying to get your attention today? Is he speaking to you now about your relationship to him and about your service for him?

For Mary, the message from God came when she was not expecting it, but still she was willing and ready to listen. Are you listening to God today or are you so distracted listening to other voices that you don't seem to notice when God's trying to get your attention when he wants to tell you something. Would you be willing to hear a message from God today, especially if he wanted to make major changes in your life.

Yeah. Especially if an angel were to appear of course I would. I would listen to them. I'm sure if we, we would all perk up if an angel were to appear, but would we really listen and respond even if an angel came. Because someone far superior to any angel has come and we have his words recorded for us in the Holy Bible. Hebrews chapter 1 tells us, long ago at many times and in many ways God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his son and then the text goes on to say, Jesus is far superior to any angels. So, I ask us all again, when God speaks to us even though it may be unexpectedly, are we ready to hear what he has to say?

When we listen to God, we will find that he offers us his grace and his blessing. And we find out that we too are highly favored in God's eyes. **And remember, it's no small thing to be favored by God, especially since we know we don't deserve it.**

God wants to bless us by sending Jesus into our lives. When we accept Jesus as he truly is, there will be a difference in our lives. Remember the Holy baby born to Mary was named Jesus because he would save people from their sins. That is the greatest need of all people who have ever lived, to be saved from sin to receive forgiveness, to be able to enter into a right relationship with God so that we can live in harmony with him. Yes, there are many needs that people face, but the greatest need is for God's work of salvation through Jesus.

We all sin. Instead of believing God, we listen to other competing claims for our loyalty. We tend to live our lives in a way that it is focused on ourselves and our desires, or maybe on other people or on other things rather than letting God be central in our lives. We go our own direction instead of going down the paths of God. We disobey God and we bring shame and guilt upon ourselves, and there is no way we can make amends for our sin. The Bible tells us that the wages of sin is death. Sin brings death, physical death, spiritual death, and eternal death. Sin is that serious.

And that's why Jesus came to earth. He came to provide forgiveness and reconciliation with God. He offered up his life as a perfect sacrifice, dying in our place for our sin. Jesus died for our sin. But in victory,

he Rose from the dead three days later, proving that the penalty for sin is now been paid for all who received Jesus in repentance and faith.

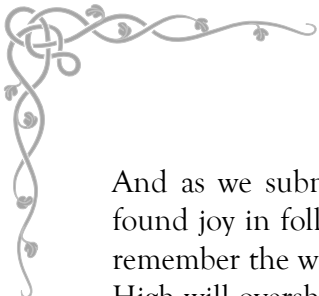
Come to him, confess your sin, ask him to do change your mind and your heart and give you a new quality of life. And also remember that the one born to Mary is great, the son of the Most High, and he wants to make great changes in your life and do great things in and through you. He deserves to have the highest place in your life. But yet when we are honest, we must all admit that there are times when we try to put someone else or something in a higher place than Jesus. So, when we realize that we need to admit it and confess it as sin.

The angel also announced that Jesus is King and not just a King, he is King of Kings and Lord of Lords. He reigns over an eternal kingdom and today his kingdom is one of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit as it is established in the hearts and lives of all who have the God of Jacob as their refuge. He reigns over all who have willingly acknowledged him in faith as the rightful ruler of their lives.

Are you in his kingdom? Have you bowed your knee before him? Are you bowing before his supremacy and obeying his rightful rule? And I don't mean just a one-time experience, although the beginning experience is important, but does your daily life reflect that Jesus is indeed your King. Jesus reigns today in the hearts of all who have received his grace and forgiveness, of all who acknowledge him as King and his reign will extend throughout all eternity as we are with him in heaven forever. Sometimes when we hear God's voice, we might tend to think, well that sure is hard to believe. How can I accept that? And even sometimes when we do understand his message for us, we might still reply, Oh, I couldn't do that. Surely God does not expect that of me. I don't have what it takes to serve God. We might be tempted to pray. Thy will be changed instead of thy will be done.

I remember in the year 2005, as we were in the States thinking and praying about a move David had confided to me that he believed God had spoken to him about transferring from Germany to South Asia to be involved in training and he asked me to consider it. But I shied away from trusting God with our future and from believing that God had a better plan than my own, because I didn't think I was qualified or that I could do it, the work and the living, and I was not ready for God to make certain changes in my life. I knew I would lose the opportunity to teach music and to perform. I knew that the move would take us 10,000 plus miles away from our family. And I really didn't want to give up my own comfort moving from a first world to a third world culture, from a safe and familiar lifestyle to a somewhat unsafe and unfamiliar way of life. But Jesus spoke to me through his words one day. I was reading in Luke 9, where Jesus says, if anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.

Like Mary God spoke to me through this word and was asking me to respond to him. Would I believe that God really was leading us in this new direction and be willing to make the move, which would of course mean denying some of my dreams and my desires, or would I resist and make it very difficult for David to follow what he believed the Lord wanted us to do but being humbled by God's word. I did agree to go and yes I gave up some things that were important to me, but God fill the void with experiences that I will never forget and he gave me a strong calling to our task. And so the feelings of resistance and insufficiency left me as I yielded myself to God.



And as we submitted to God's leading, we were able to experience God's empowerment and we even found joy in following his plan. So, when thoughts of inadequacy or unwillingness come into our minds, remember the words of the angel to Mary, the Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. God's Holy Spirit working within us will enable us to do his will and empower us to fulfill his calling because nothing is impossible with God.

The story of Christmas calls us to be overshadowed by the Most High and to trust that no word from God will ever fail, then we can pray let it happen to me according to your word.

Mary responded to God's call and his grace saying truly I am the Lord's servant. Let everything you said happen to me, this was surely one of the most courageous statements ever spoken yet it was uttered in humility and in confident trust in God.

Let us learn from Mary's bravery and from her faith and humility. Let us all get down on our knees and say, I am the Lord's servant. Let us bow before him and say, let it be to me according to your word. Let's pray together, Almighty God as we hear how you broke into Mary's world and we see the wonders that you did in her life. We want to invite you to break into our world, break into our life, speak to us, show us your paths for us to go. Father God, there might be some listening this morning who have never accepted Jesus as their Lord and their savior. I pray that if that's the case that today they would hear your voice speaking to them as you call them to you and that they would turn and come to you in repentance and faith, confessing their sin and allowing Jesus to take control of their life as the rightful King. And the many of us who have already received Jesus in our lives, I pray that we would open our ears, turn our attention more towards you so that when you speak to us, we will hear. Pray that we would also spend time in your word so that you can speak to us through your word. And I pray that we would daily serve Jesus allowing it to be evident in our lives, that you are indeed the King of our lives as you empower us through your mighty Holy Spirit.

So we want to, once again, give our life to you and humble faith, give our lives to your service as Mary did. May we give all that. We have to Jesus. All to Jesus we want to give. In Christ's name I pray. Amen.