

THE BIRTH OF JESUS FORETOLD

Luke 1:26-38

Key Verse: 1:38

"I am the Lord's servant,' Mary answered. 'May it be to me as you have said.' Then the angel left her."

Study Questions:

1. Read verses 26-30. Who was Mary? What can you learn about her in these verses? How did the angel greet her, and why was she troubled at his greeting? What does it mean to find favor with God?
2. What was the favor or grace God gave Mary? (31) [How did Paul view God's grace or favor? See Ro 1:5; Php 1:29; Eph 3:8; Eph 2:10.]
3. Read verses 31-33. What did the angel tell Mary about the son she would bear? List all the things you can learn in these verses about who Jesus is and what he came to do.
4. What is the spiritual meaning of "David's throne" and "kingdom that will never end"? (2Sa 7:11-13; Da 7:14,18,27) Jesus became our eternal king through his death and resurrection. Explain in at least 3 pages.
5. What was Mary's response? How does this reveal her great faith? What was the basis of her decision of faith? What can we learn from her? (Write at least six pages of answers to the questions.)

Today's passage is the angel's Christmas message to Mary, a beautiful country girl. The key point of the message is the birth of Jesus through Mary, who was engaged to Joseph. Let's see how she responded to the angel's message, and learn something about Mary. In his message, the angel introduces who Jesus is and the kingdom of God. Today let's think about Mary's absolute obedience.

First, you who are highly favored (26-30).

Look at verse 26. "In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee..." "In the sixth month" refers to Elizabeth, who had been pregnant for six months. Look at verse 27. "...to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's

name was Mary." Mary was a country girl who lived in a small village called Nazareth in Galilee. It was probably a small, clean country village. Perhaps in the daytime, one could hear the sweet song of the oriole crying among the trees. And at night, from across the hills, anyone could hear the lonely hoot of the owl. How happy the boys and girls must have been when they met by chance and looked at each other with an air of innocence. Certainly Mary was the happiest one among all the girls, and she could not contain the joy of her beautiful dreams of a sweet home she would have with Joseph. Her sweet dream seemed to last forever.

One day something unusual happened! Look at verse 28. An angel came to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you." Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be (29). Mary really liked Joseph. Mary had made a personal commitment to Joseph. So Mary's heart was filled with Joseph. Mary felt that she was in the same boat with Joseph. She was ready to enjoy the time of the gentle breeze of life as well as the life of the turbulent waves of the sea together with Joseph. She didn't need anyone else's favor, not even an angel's. The angel was afraid that Mary was startled, not knowing what was interrupting her life of dream. Mary wondered what kind of greeting this might be. She looked very quiet. But to a young girl, the angel's message was thunderous.

The angel was sorry that Mary was afraid. So the angel realized that Mary should know who Jesus is, and what his kingdom is like, because the kingdom of God solves the fundamental problem of all mankind. So there was no deviation for the angel in carrying out his mission. Look at verse 30. "But the angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God.'" Mary was abundantly happy with Joseph's favor. Why did the angel bother Mary with another favor? Generally, favor means to get some help from someone else. Secular Christians think that to be favored by God is to receive many human blessings. But the Biblical concept of "favor" is different. The Greek word "favor" has the nuance of the word "grace." Here, grace is the beauty of Jesus. The Bible tells us that those who know the beauty of Jesus have something to do for the glory of God. So Paul sees that grace is given to us to do God's mission (Ro 1:5; Php 1:29).

What was God's favor for Mary? Look at verse 31. "You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus."

God's favor for Mary was to bear the baby Jesus and deliver him before her marriage. What a difficult mission it was for her! She was a woman pledged to be married to Joseph. At that time, in the Jewish world, engagement was tantamount to marriage. Mary's beautiful dreams were about to be realized. But before marriage, Mary had to conceive and bear the baby Jesus.

Our God is the holy God. Our God is Almighty God. This great God not only gives his amazing grace to each person through his Son's blood, but also he gives his work to do for his glory. To carry out God's mission is not easy. To be frank, God's mission requires all our hearts, souls, and spirits, even our lives. According to the custom of the law, the baby Jesus was brought to the temple to be presented to the Lord (2:22). Simeon, who was one of those waiting for the Messiah, said, "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel" (Lk 2:34). He also prophesied about Mary. He said, "And a sword will pierce your own soul too" (2:35). To carry out her mission as the mother of Jesus was so costly and painful. Sinful men want to be great, and at the same time they want to be very ordinary. God's mission for Abraham was to overcome his desire to be a petty man and grow up to be a source of blessing to all peoples of all nations. God's mission for King David was to fight against all the stronger enemies in the promised land and subdue them. It required King David's life. But King David obeyed God's will absolutely when he knew that God planned to establish a theocratic kingdom in which his people could live in peace and love. Once, King David was almost killed in the battle (2Sa 21:15-17). God's mission for John the Baptist was to prepare the way for the Lord. John's mission was to preach the message of repentance as a part of preparing for the coming of the Messiah. It required his life to carry out the mission. But he obeyed God's mission absolutely. Man is happy when he experiences God's grace. Man is happy when he finds the meaning of life in God's mission (Eph 2:10).

God made woman a suitable helper (Ge 2:18). In other words, he made woman the mother of the universe. Sorry to say, since Adam's Fall, the woman's desire is cursed (Ge 3:16). Most women are enslaved by the cursed marriage problem. There are many women who did not solve their marriage problems, even after their marriage. So, as a woman, it must have been difficult for Mary to give up her dream of marriage. Mary also lived in a rigid, traditional Jewish society. Those who became pregnant before marriage were supposed to be stoned to death. No sooner did God's grace come upon her, than she became the object of scorn and disgrace to the

Jewish world. Humanly speaking, it was impossible for Mary to obey.

God's mission as the mother of Jesus was too painful to bear. What is more, to explain her situation to her fiance Joseph was a question, "to say or not to say?" But Mary was a godly woman even if she was very young. She decided to obey God's will absolutely. However, her dream of marriage and her bond of love with Joseph were broken to pieces. Robert Schumann (1810-1856) died young from exhaustion. After his death, Johannes Brahms (1833-1897) proposed to his widow, Clara Schumann. Clara liked Brahms' musical genius. But she clearly rejected his proposal. She wanted to make her husband's music compositions famous in the world by her instinctive arrangements on the piano. She was happy. But Brahms never married the rest of lifetime. Clara was victorious and successful in making her husband a world-famous composer. But Clara cannot compare to Mary, because Mary gave her dream of marriage to God.

Second, Jesus is great because he is the Son of God.

In verses 31-33, the angel continues to speak his message to Mary so that Mary may know indeed who Jesus is so that her absolute obedience may come from her soul. In his message, the angel introduces first, who Jesus is, for Mary needed this knowledge of Jesus in order to carry out God's grace and mission. Look at verse 32a. "He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High." Kings and nations rise and wane. They are like grass and flowers (Isa 40:6-8). But Jesus is the one and only Son of Almighty God. Jesus is the Son of the Ruler of history, and his kingdom is forever. Our God is the only living God and he rules world history according to his time schedule. Our God is Spirit and is immortal. Therefore, Jesus is great because he is the Son of God.

General Montgomery (1887-1976), at the end of his book, mentioned the world's greatest leaders from the point of view of world history. They were Mohammed, Buddha and Jesus. He included Jesus as one of the greatest because of Jesus' power and authority in his words. Throughout history, many have said many things about the greatness of Jesus as a philanthropist, a poet, a teacher, a general, a man of deep humanity, a man of sorrows, a man of God's heart, and so on. These days, in view of psychophysiology, many see Jesus as a poor carpenter. Nonetheless, there is no one in the world as great as Jesus. The greatness of Jesus

does not rest on his human qualities, but on the fact that he is the Son of the Most High God.

Through one man Adam's disobedience to the holy command of God (Ge 2:17), sin came into the world (Ge 3:7). Sin has its wage. It is death (Ro 6:23a). Mohammed, Buddha, Julius Caesar and Napoleon Bonaparte were nothing but Adam's descendants, and they all died in Adam (1Co 15:22). Their misery was that they died in great fear and uncertainty after hard toiling. But Jesus is not a descendant of Adam; he is the Son of God. Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. 1 Corinthians 15:22 says, "For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive." Though Jesus is the Son of the Most High God, he came to this world. He humbled himself and was born in a manger of a stable. In this way, Jesus humbled himself in order to save men from their sins. Moreover, Jesus emptied himself and became as nothing. Jesus cared for all kinds of needy people as their friend and shepherd. Jesus taught them the word of God and planted the hope of the kingdom of God in the hearts of God's flock. Finally, he gave his precious life on the cross as a ransom sacrifice for men's sins in obedience to God's will. Jesus is truly great because he saves men from their sins. Jesus is great because he is the Son of God.

Third, Jesus is the eternal King (32b).

Look at verse 32b. "The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David..." God promised David that from his root the Messiah would come (2Sa 7:12). However, David was the shadow of Jesus, the King of love and peace. Kings of the world live for a brief time and die. But Jesus became the eternal King. Our eternal King Jesus destroyed the power of sin and death. Thus he became our eternal king. Our eternal King gives eternal salvation from sin, eternal life and the kingdom of God to those who believe in him.

Fourth, his kingdom is forever (31-33).

Finally, Gabriel talks to Mary about the kingdom of God. Look at verse 33. "...and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end." The prophet Daniel wrote in his apocalyptic prophecy concerning the eternal kingdom of Jesus our Lord (Da 7:14,18,27). The kings and kingdoms of the world are temporal, for they are like pieces of

wood, clay, bronze, iron, and so on. There is nothing eternal in this world. This universal truth has been the agony of the kings of nations in history when they wanted to keep their kingdoms forever. The kingdoms of the world all crumbled like iron eaten by rust. Only the kingdom of Jesus is forever.

England grew as such a glorious kingdom with so many colonies that the people renamed this nation, "The United Kingdom." But now, English people do not know whether they should call their country England or the United Kingdom. Only the kingdom of Jesus is forever. The kingdom of God is our final destination. When we have faith in the kingdom of God, we can have the peace of God in our hearts and live as holy pilgrims. After being convinced, Mary's soul inclined to hear the angel's message.

Fifth, "I am the Lord's servant" (34-38).

What was Mary's response? Look at verse 34. "'How will this be,' Mary asked the angel, 'since I am a virgin?'" Mary was not negative, but had a scientific question. Her question shows a positive response. The angel taught her in verse 35: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you." When the angel expounded that Mary's pregnancy was not an accident, but was precisely the work of the Holy Spirit, Mary accepted the angel's message absolutely. Now Mary was ready to respond to the angel's message. The angel continued to say in verses 36,37, "Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month. For nothing is impossible with God." Again the angel convinced Mary that nothing is impossible with God. She realized that her destiny is absolutely in the hand of God. She also realized that even if she had rejected God's plan, God would carry it out anyway. She could have been very rebellious and rejected the angel's message, but Mary decided to obey. Look at verse 38. "'I am the Lord's servant,' Mary answered. 'May it be to me as you have said.' Then the angel left her." When Mary said this, she was not speaking from her emotions, or with blind resignation to fate; she said this on the basis of God's promise.

God had to choose a woman to be the mother of Jesus. Of all women, God chose Mary--a woman pledged to be married. Why? Was it because she looked so beautiful, like the picture of Mona Lisa? No. God

chose her simply because she loved God and was happy to obey God's word absolutely. An obedient woman may be the symbol of a mother. So Mary was the most proper person to be the mother of Jesus. One woman's obedience to God is truly great. May God bless American women to be as obedient as Mary.

We learn, in this passage, how precious one woman of obedience is. We also learn that we can be true holy pilgrims when we have faith in God's promise of eternal life and believe in the kingdom of God.