

THE BIRTH OF JESUS FORETOLD

Luke 1:26-38

Key Verse: 1:32-33

“He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob’s descendant forever; his kingdom will never end.”

Our family has a chat room where we share good news and prayer topics. I enjoy this because I can see my grandchildren and their growth. One day, my child wrote, “I was struggling with how people saw me...I have been meditating and praying to change my way of thinking and recalibrate to put God as my God and listen to him. I was also convicted to stop loving ‘the stuff’ that God has given me but to start looking at him that has blessed me.” I was thankful for my children’s struggle of faith. Still, I felt pain for their hard struggling in the world especially during limited church worship.

These days, the word “uneasy” characterizes our daily lives. Due to coronavirus, everything became uneasy: uneasy to stay at home, uneasy to walk in the park, uneasy to meet people in the grocery store. I even felt uneasy to meet my cute and lovely grandchildren.

The people in Israel lived hard life with no word of God for 400 years. They surely felt uneasy and oppressed under Roman rule. But God broke the silence. Let’s consider God’s message and Mary’s response.

I. The angel foretold the birth of Jesus (26-33)

Look at verses 26-27. “In the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin’s name was Mary.” It was in the time of Herod King of Judea, who soon would order a massacre of infants to try to kill the baby Jesus. There was no word of God and the religious leaders were corrupt. It was not a hopeful time.

The angel came to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, not to Jerusalem, the center of Jewish life. Nazareth was such an unremarkable town. People said, “Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?”

In this story, there are only two actors: Angel Gabriel and Mary. Gabriel had visited Zechariah six months earlier to tell him about the birth of his son, John the Baptist. Gabriel also made Zechariah mute because of his unbelief. Mary was young, poor, and a virgin pledged to be married to Joseph, a descendant of David. Both Mary and Joseph were from David’s line and both lived in Nazareth.

The angel went to Mary and said, “Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.” Gabriel entered not the temple but the lowly home of Mary. What a surprise!

Mary was young and poor, not royal, not extraordinary. She would marry humbly, give birth to numerous poor children, and one day die like others before her. She was frightened to see the angel, as anyone would be. Probably, she thought, “This cannot be real!”

The angel’s greeting was not, “Shalom!” Rather, Gabriel said, “Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.” First, Mary was the recipient of special divine favor. God by-passed Judea, Jerusalem, and came to a despised town, and a humble woman. Mary was specially graced. Gabriel also declared, “The Lord is with you!” The Lord was with Mary. So, the greeting was not to intimidate Mary but to give her joy. So Gabriel’s greeting meant, “Rejoice, Mary! You who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.” God’s favor is cause to rejoice, not to fear.

[verse 29] How did Mary respond though? She was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. Perhaps Mary felt she was abundantly loved by Joseph, and therefore didn’t need any favor, even from an angel. Still, she wondered what kind of greeting it was. She “wondered,” means that she “pondered, meditated on, reflected on”—the angel’s words. Mary was not shallow, but rather reflective and meditative. We see this later when shepherds give her an angel’s message, which she treasures and ponders in her heart. She was like the psalmist who said in Psalm 119:78 says, “I will meditate on your precepts” (Ps 119:78). May God give us such hearts to listen and meditate on God’s word.

Gabriel knew Mary was afraid. But with no deviation he said, “Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God.” Usually, “favor” is to “get something from someone else free of charge, such as love and kindness or a small gift or token.” It is easy to think that God’s favor is to receive some human blessing. But the biblical concept of “favor” means “God’s grace to undeserving sinners.”

Then what was God’s favor upon Mary? Look at verse 31. “You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus.” God’s grace meant that Mary was to become the mother of Jesus. God’s grace to Mary was to be used as an instrument for his work and history of redemption. God’s grace is God’s mission. To Abraham, it was God’s grace to be chosen by God in his old age to be a source of blessing to all nations. The Risen Jesus chose his persecutor Saul of Tarsus, saying of him, “This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel” (Act. 9:15). As we Christians remember the grace we have received, we too will be driven to serve God’s mission for us in Christ.

What did Gabriel say about her son to be born? Look at verses 31-33. “You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will

be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end."

First, "you are to call him Jesus" (31). The focus was not on Mary, but on her son to be called Jesus. Neither Mary nor Joseph chose that name. God did. Why that name? It was because, "He will save his people from their sins" (Mt. 1:21). Jesus was a Greek form of the Hebrew name 'Joshua.' It means, "the Lord saves." Just as Joshua led Israel to the promised land, Jesus would lead his people to eternal life. The name "Jesus" has power to heal, to banish demons, and to forgive sins. His name is Jesus.

Second, "he will be great" (32a). Gabriel said, "He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High." There is no one in the world as great as Jesus. But the real greatness of Jesus does not rest on his human qualities and achievements, but on the fact that he is the Son of the Most High God. Though Jesus is the Son of the Most High God, he gave up all the power and glory of the heavenly kingdom and came to this world in human form to save the world. He is our "great high priest" who has ascended into heaven (Heb. 4:14). He is "Mighty God" (Isa. 9:6). Truly, He is great because as a shepherd, he never gave up on any person, but had the faith, hope, and love of God toward every kind of person. He is great because he obeyed the will of God unto death—even death on a cross.

Third, "his kingdom will ever end." Look at verses 32b-33. "The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever, his kingdom will never end." God had sworn with an oath to David that He would raise up one of his own sons and establish his kingdom. He would rule his kingdom with righteousness and justice. He would be the Messiah prophesied to David (2 Samuel 7:12-16), who has the rightful authority to rule over Israel, and His kingdom would never end. Even David fell asleep and his body decayed. Not so with our Lord Jesus! Only Jesus and his kingdom is forever. One day every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord!

Savior, Son of God, and King were the three titles that the angel told Mary to give Jesus. Every kingdom has a king. In the Kingdom of God, Jesus has been made both Lord and Savior. To acknowledge the Lordship of Jesus is essential for salvation. Acts 16:31 says, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved – you and your household." The purpose of Jesus' coming to this world was to bring us back to his eternal kingdom as heirs of his kingdom!

I thought a little more about the meaning of Christmas this year. Living through a pandemic causes us to feel uncertain about the future. Then I read this passage and learned what I needed most in this time. It is Jesus Christ who is the Lord of all and whose kingdom is forever. When coronavirus began to spread in the United States, I was surprised to learn how helpless humans are to a virus. By the invisible virus, so many people were infected and so many lives were lost, and still it is going on without weakening around the nation and the world. When I heard that older people and those

with underlying medical problems are more likely to develop serious illness, I sighed deeply thinking that I am getting older. But I said, "We will win the victory over COVID19." Because Jesus is our King and his kingdom is eternal, now I am sure I will not allow the virus to rule over my life and I will not be defeated by the virus.

II. Mary's response of faith (34-38)

What was Mary's response to the angel's message? Look at verse 34. "How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?" As we know well already, Zechariah had asked the angel, "How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years" (Lk 1:18). But his question was asked in skeptical unbelief, so he was rebuked by the angel. Mary's question was a little different; she asked in wonder-filled faith. She believed the promise, but she didn't understand how it would happen. How would a virgin give birth to a child? Actually, her question resulted in more explanation from the angel.

The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So, the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God." Gabriel answered that the power of the Most High God, in the Person of the Holy Spirit, would overshadow Mary. The word overshadow means "to cover with a cloud," just like the power of God that was with Moses. Now the power of the Holy Spirit was going to do a unique work in the life of Mary.

This verse teaches us two things. First, the virgin birth of Jesus would be the work of the Holy Spirit and the work of the mighty hand of God. It also teaches us Jesus' Godhood and manhood. Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit, so he is the Son of God. He was born of the Virgin Mary, so he is a son of a human, who can sympathize with our human weaknesses. Joseph, her fiancé, was not the biological father of Jesus, but his legal father.

Second, the baby would be a "holy one" and would not share the sinful human nature of man. The apostles Paul, Peter, and John all write that Jesus knew no sin (2 Cor. 5:21, 1Pt 2:22, 1Jn 3:5). Mary's womb became a Holy of Holies for the Son of God. Whether one believes it or not, Gabriel described the virgin birth of Jesus Christ, son of Mary and Son of God.

The angel ended his message by giving Mary a word of encouragement. Look at verses 36-37. "Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. For no word from God will ever fail." Elizabeth's miraculous pregnancy in her old age had been hidden from Mary since Elizabeth was in seclusion for five months. Now her aged relative Elizabeth was with child, proving that "no word from God will ever fail." Nothing is too hard for

God! God accomplishes his purposes through the power of his word. Psalm 33:9 says, "For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm." God had a specific purpose and mission for Mary and the mighty hand of God was with her. Nothing is impossible with God.

Mary instinctively knew her story would be questioned after she became pregnant. Indeed, Joseph first doubted it. Her marriage dream would be shattered. She would become the object of scorn and discouragement to others. The enemies of Jesus would imply that he was illegitimate. This would cause unbearable shame for Mary. Considering these daunting realities, Mary could be expected to say, "Uh, thanks but no thanks," or, "Can I pray about this first and let you know my decision?" Look at verse 38. "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. 'May your word to me be fulfilled.' Then the angel left her." At the crucial moment of God's history, she surrendered herself to the will of God. She did not speak out of her emotions, or in blind resignation to fate, but on the basis of God's promise. She had simple and absolute faith in the promise of God.

For Luke the theologian, Mary is a fine example of belief. Her obedience made her the mother of Jesus and at the same time she became a model woman of God. As a model for those who experience the birth of Christ in their lives, she has one word for them: 'submission.' We cannot experience Christ and his ongoing power without totally surrendering ourselves to him. Each Christmas we have said, along with Mary, "I am the Lord's servant. May your word be to me fulfilled." We know that these are words that bring God's blessing. This is the way Jesus taught us to pray: "Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (Mt 6:10). Last month, two church members tested positive for COVID 19. Dr. Joseph Chung, who is one of the oldest seniors in our church called me and said, "Artesian Avenue is full of coronavirus." I didn't say anything to him, but I think he was asking whether we should cancel our small early morning prayer meeting at the church, with less than 10 people. The next morning, he and his wife missionary Esther Chung were in the sanctuary of our church for early morning prayer meeting as usual. I am sure at that time they made a decision like Mary: "I am the Lord's servant! May it be to me as you have said."

After her decision to be the mother of the Messiah as a virgin, did she become the most unhappy woman in the world? No! Rather, Mary confessed, "From now on all generations will call me blessed" (v. 48). Yes! It is true. From that time on all generations have called her blessed! How could she have been blessed as a teenager girl? Mary was humble and poor in spirit. Mary's reflective, meditative nature made her open to the Word and work of God. Mary believed God regarding his word and power. Mary knew that her personal sacrifice was for God's salvation plan for all people. Finally, she gave herself in profound submission to God, saying, 'I am the Lord's servant. May your word to me be fulfilled.'" For this she was and is called blessed.

Throughout our lives we constantly make big decisions that shape our future circumstances. And these decisions determine the sort of person we become; for

example, whether to start a family, the choice of a college major or career. Especially, in this time of evil and uncertainty, we need a solid direction of life. These choices involve dramatically new experiences that we can know very little about in advance. So how do you make big decisions? If we want to inherit Mary's blessings, we must display Mary's qualities, especially humility and desire to serve God's kingdom.

First, we must cultivate a humble heart. Second, we must intentionally nurture a reflective heart on God's word. Third, we must have a submissive heart. Last of all, we must be willing to serve King Jesus and his kingdom as our priority in life. May we all confess like Mary, "I am the Lord's servant. May your word to me be fulfilled," and serve Jesus' eternal kingdom. Amen!