

Celebrate Jesus at Christmas!
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Opening Question: What is the BEST Christmas SURPRISE you ever had?
Mary the mother of our Lord got the ultimate Christmas SURPRISE! Beyond the story we know so well, there are some important lessons for us in how this simple, country girl responded to the news that she would give birth to the Savior of the world.

We saw in John 1:14: *“The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.”* A concise announcement of the INCARNATION; the ADVENT; the FACT that Jesus came into the world in flesh to be the light of life...to bring ETERNAL LIFE to mankind.

This morning we pause in our study of the Gospel of John, to turn to this familiar section of Luke’s Gospel. A detailed account of the ANNUNCIATION...the announcement, the Messiah would come as a baby. A poor, humble, Jewish teenager is confronted by the angel Gabriel bringing news that would turn her life and the whole world upside down.

Luke 1:30–35 (ESV)

30 And the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.

- An angel appears to Mary. Not just any angel, but God’s messenger.
- In 1:19 speaking to Mary’s “cousin-in-law” Zechariah (John the Baptist’s father), Gabriel described himself: *“I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I was sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news.”* (Tradition: An “archangel”)
- What a shocking moment! A theological scholar or a veteran servant of God would struggle with the angel Gabriel showing up. Imagine the reaction, the emotions, the anxiety of a simple country teen!
- **In verse 30: Why did Gabriel say Mary should not be afraid?**
- The word “favor” is the Greek word “charis” or GRACE, blessing, favor.
- **What’s the lesson from verse 30 for us today? When we’re confronted with unbelievable, startling circumstances what allows us (like Mary) to “fear not?”**
- **Take a guess – how often would you guess Jesus told people to fear not?**

In his book, *Imagine Your Life Without Fear*, Max Lucado tells us:

His [Jesus] most common command emerges from the “fear not” genre. The Gospels list some 125 Christ- issued imperatives. Of these, 21 urge us to “not be afraid” or “not fear” or “have courage” or “take heart” or “be of good cheer.” The second most common command, to love God and neighbor, appears on only eight occasions. If quantity is any indicator, Jesus takes our fears seriously. The one statement he made more than any other was this: don’t be afraid. — Lucado, M. (2009) Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

You think YOU have things to fear? Mary REALLY had a reason to fear! Verse 31

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.”

- As if being told she was going to conceive wasn't enough, this was not just any baby!
- In three verses, 31-33, we learn WHO this baby IS.
- Mary didn't have to fret about picking out a name! *“You're going to call him JESUS.”*
- **Anyone know the meaning of that name? What does the name “Jesus” mean?** “Jesus” is the Greek form of the Hebrew “Joshua,” it means “Jehovah is Salvation.”
- In verses 32 and 33, let's CIRCLE or UNDERLINE what we KNOW about Jesus:
- “great” - Greek word “megas” mighty, huge, important; “Son of the Most High” - Son of God; A King...successor to David's throne; His reign will be forever; His kingdom will never end. (Prophesied in Isaiah 9:7)
- It's likely that any Jew, even a teen would know who that describes. That sounds like the Messiah!

As Mary managed, by the GRACE OF GOD, to get a handle on her fear. Still there was the obvious question: HOW?

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.

- **Why was it necessary for God's son to be born of a woman? Why a virgin?**

Warren Wiersbe writes:

When Mary said “Be it unto me according to Thy word” (Luke 1:38), it meant that from then on, her life would be a part of the fulfillment of divine prophecy. God had promised that the Saviour would be a human, not an angel (Gen. 3:15; Heb. 2:16), and a Jew, not a Gentile (Gen. 12:1–3; Num. 24:17). He would be from the tribe of Judah (Gen. 49:10), and the family of David (2 Sam. 7:1–17), born of a virgin (Isa. 7:14) in Bethlehem, the city of David (Micah 5:2).

All of this occurred just as the Scriptures said, and Caesar unknowingly played an important part. ...President James A. Garfield called history “the unrolled scroll of prophecy.” If God's Word controls our lives, then the events of history only help us fulfill the will of God. “I am watching over My word to perform it,” promises the Lord (Jer. 1:12, nasb). Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Lk 2:1–7). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

- These verses are about Mary's SINGULAR role in God's plan. She was unique in history. Still, there's a lesson for us too. **When we ask God, “HOW can this be? HOW can I do this? HOW?” What's the answer in verse 35?**
- It dawns on me that the same way Jesus was placed in a virgin's womb, is the same way God places believers in His kingdom...the work of the Holy Spirit.
- Mary was asking HOW. HOW can I, a virgin, be pregnant...the logistics, specifics.

- The angel said, I have MORE news for you. Not only are YOU going to have a son, so is your elderly cousin Elizabeth. She's in her sixth month. Then verse 37 says it all:

Luke 1:37 (ESV)

37 For nothing will be impossible with God.”

Imagine what was going through the mind of young Mary. Imagine the fear, the anxiety about suddenly showing up pregnant? Yet, how does she respond to the angel?

Luke 1:38 (ESV)

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.

- “Mary said, ‘Behold...’ Up to now the angel had been saying BEHOLD. **What does it mean when someone says “behold” in the Bible?**
- Behold is a ‘demonstrative particle.’ In other words, ‘LOOK, take note, I’m going to DEMONSTRATE something.’ **What did Mary demonstrate with her words in this verse?**
- **How are Mary’s words in verse 38 an EXAMPLE or MODEL for you and me?**

Such an elegant response to God’s calling: *“I am your servant...let it be as you’ve said.”* No arguing or second guessing, just OBEDIENCE. What an example! It’s no wonder that one day her son Jesus would say to the Father: *“Not my will, but thine be done.”*

- Mary packed her meager things and hurried to her cousin Elizabeth. When she came through the door, Elizabeth yelled: “The mother of my Lord is here!”
- How did she know that? No phone. No Facebook. No texts. Just the Holy Spirit.
- And the baby in Elizabeth’s womb...little John...the baptist...jumped! Wow! And Elizabeth’s husband said...nothing! Go back to verse 20 later and you’ll get it.
- Then Elizabeth AFFIRMED her cousin Mary’s faith in verse 45:

Luke 1:45 (ESV)

45 And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.”

- *“Mary, you may be fifteen...but the Holy Spirit has made you wise for your years!”*
- Mary breaks out in song. A song of praise supernaturally placed in her heart.

Luke 1:46–49 (ESV)

46 And Mary said, “My soul magnifies the Lord,

47 and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

48 for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant.

For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed;

49 for he who is mighty has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.

- Mary's song in verses 46 through 55 is known by the latin name: The "Magnificat."
- Mary MAGNIFIES the Lord. She gives all praise to "God my Savior."
- Again, Mary's responds with praise and adoration giving all credit to God.
- In verse 48 Mary confesses to her "humble" situation in life. Just a poor country girl.
- **Why do you think God chose a humble girl in a nothing town to bear His Son?**

Kent Hughes writes:

Martin Luther remarked, "He might have gone to Jerusalem and picked out Caiaphas's daughter, who was fair, rich, clad in gold embroidered raiment and attended by a retinue of maids in waiting. But God preferred a lowly maid from a mean town." (Hughes continues) And if the Incarnation happened today, it would be the same. The Lord would not be born in Jerusalem or Rome or Geneva or Canterbury, but on the ordinary streets of some nameless town.

As we study the Annunciation, we must accept the essential spiritual fact of the Incarnation and the gospel: the Lord comes to needy people—those who realize that without him they cannot make it— those who acknowledge their weakness and spiritual lack. The Incarnation, salvation, resurrection, Christmas are not for the proud and self-sufficient. — Hughes, R. K. (1998). Luke: that you may know the truth (p. 30). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books.

- Any other thoughts or questions before we close?
- Turn ahead to Luke chapter 2, verse 4. We know what happened nine months later.

Luke 2:4–7 (ESV)

4 And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, 5 to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. 6 And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. 7 And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

So, What's the Takeaway?

- Our lesson writers pose this question: How can I best celebrate Jesus this Christmas season? I think following Mary's lead from this scripture is a great way to answer it.
- In spite of her circumstances, her fears, her humble situation, Mary said YES to God!
- We too can say, *"Lord, let me rededicate myself this Christmas to always responding: "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word."*
- Just as Mary's obedience fulfilled prophecy, our response to God fulfills His will for us.
- As Wiersbe said: *If God's Word controls our lives, then the events of history only help us fulfill the will of God.* What God puts in our lives is a part of His plan.
- Finally, let's celebrate this Christmas with praise on our lips much like Mary's song:
- *"My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant." He came to DIE so I can LIVE! "...he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name."*