

The Heights Baptist Church

* Christmas at Luke's * The Birth of Jesus Foretold * Luke 1:26-56 * 11/21/2021 *

MAIN POINT

We must be willing to humbly trust God's plans, even when they don't match ours.

INTRODUCTION

When was a time you made plans and then God changed them for you? How did you respond? How did it turn out?

In the Christmas story, we see God's use of the unexpected. In everything from the young virgin mother, to the birthplace in a stable, to revelations via dreams and angelic choirs, no detail about Jesus' entrance into the world was expected. Mary's humble willingness to trust, accept, follow, and even celebrate God through the changes these unexpected events brought to her life is a lesson for us all.

UNDERSTANDING

Mary was engaged to Joseph, which in Israel made them legally husband and wife even though the marriage wasn't finalized. In a moment, the quiet life she lived would be suddenly and dramatically altered. Her ordinary life was about to be swapped out for an extraordinary one.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ LUKE 1:26-38.

Gabriel initiated the conversation with Mary by saying, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you." Verse 29 tells us "Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be." Today we might paraphrase this by saying, Mary was quite shook up, and was trying to process what the angel said. The Greek words describing her reaction are different than we saw earlier in verse 12, where we read Zechariah was "terrified". The Greek word used to describe his reaction is "phobos" (from where we get our word phobia), which means gripped with terror or dread.

Gabriel unloaded quite a bit on Mary, apparently in a short period of time. What specific things did Gabriel tell Mary in these verses?

There also appears to be a difference between how Zechariah responded to the news of Elizabeth's miraculous pregnancy and how Mary dealt with the news that she would miraculously become pregnant. We also see quite a difference in Gabriel's response to their questions. Zechariah was rebuked for his lack of faith while Mary was given words of encouragement.

Zechariah asked in verse 18, "How can I be sure of this? I am an old man, and my wife is well along in years." The Greek words literally say, "How will I know for certain about this?" While the literal translation of what Mary asked in verse 34 can be translated, "In what way will this

happen?” She may not have been questioning the fact that God would do this, but rather asking about the process by which God would do this.

Notice the sign given by Gabriel to Zechariah was that he would become mute, while Mary, who would not have obvious signs of her pregnancy for a couple of months, was given the sign that her relative Elizabeth, who was not able to naturally conceive, was now six months pregnant. This miraculous conception could easily be checked out by Mary.

Also notice that we see the humble arrival of Jesus on his first coming, contrasted in verses 32-33, describing his glorious second coming.

Randy Hahn reminded us that “If Jesus... came to this earth at his second coming, and there hadn’t been a first coming, we’d all be in BIG trouble!” (Randy Hahn, Sermon at The Height Baptist Church, November 3rd, 2019)

What stands out to you about Mary’s response to Gabriel’s message?

In verse 34, Mary (unlike Abraham and Sarah with Hagar) seems to realize it was not her responsibility to make this happen

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ LUKE 1:39-45.

Elizabeth was given quite a prophecy concerning Mary and her baby. What is the significance of each statement in Elizabeth’s greeting to Mary?

Elizabeth named Mary as the most blessed of women. Additionally, Elizabeth acknowledged the unique nature of the Child whom Mary would bear. Elizabeth expressed her sense of unworthiness to receive Mary as a guest because of the baby she was carrying (her son John also shared this view, as seen at Jesus’ baptism). Although God worked in a miraculous way to provide a son for Elizabeth, she proclaimed the superiority of the one Mary was carrying. In response, Mary burst out in a song of praise (1:46-55).

Note that while in the womb, John is described as a “baby”, not a “fetus”, and that he leaped for joy in the presence of Jesus. This Greek word for “baby” is used in Luke 2: 12 to describe a baby after he was born, and in 2 Timothy 3:15 to describe a young child.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ LUKE 1:46-56.

Mary’s song of praise includes concepts from about ten Old Testament verses. For what does she praise God in these verses?

Mary glorified God for four specific attributes—His power, holiness, mercy, and his care for Israel. She also reflected on the “great things” God had done for her. When we reflect on God’s character and activity in our lives, we become ready and willing to follow His plans, even when they do not match ours.

Note that in verse 47, Mary describes God as her “savior”. So Mary, just like all the rest of humanity, needed Jesus to offer himself as a sacrifice to pay for her sins and make a way for her to be restored to God.

How does reflecting on God's attributes affect the way you respond to Him when unexpected things happen?

APPLICATION

Re-read verses 37, 38, and 45.

Mary was facing quite a difficult trial as she had to reveal to her fiance Joseph, her family, and the whole town, that she was pregnant. And yet she chose to trust God and humbly submit to him. She would also face a very difficult trial as she would later witness his crucifixion.

Is there a situation in your life that doesn't make sense? How does Mary's story encourage you that God knows what He's doing in that situation?

What are some practical ways you can remind yourself to trust that God is sovereign, and working His plan in your life as you love him (Romans 8:38)?

PRAYER

Thank God for His sovereignty and presence even when life doesn't make sense to you. Ask Him to give you the faith to humbly accept His perfect plans, wherever they may lead us.

COMMENTARY

Luke 1:26-56

1:26-27. The announcement of Jesus' birth carried the authority of God. It came in the sixth month, a reference to the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy with John the Baptist. The term virgin emphasized the purity associated with a young, unmarried woman. Although engaged to a man named Joseph, Mary did not yet live with Joseph. In first-century Jewish culture, engagement (or betrothal) bound them together legally as husband and wife. The wedding and consummation of the marriage, however, followed at a later time. Luke identified Mary's husband, Joseph, as a member of the house of David. The Jews knew from the Scriptures that the future Messiah would be a descendant of the great King David. This fact supported the identification of Jesus as King. The Child to be born, then, would be identified with the lineage through which the Messiah had been promised (see Isaiah 7:14; 9:6-7; and 11:1-5).

1:28-30. Mary was favored because the Lord set His undeserved grace upon her, not because she had earned good standing. Understandably, she was deeply troubled (Greek "diatarasso"; "confused, perplexed") by Gabriel's visit and greeting, wondering how she had come to receive such an honor. Gabriel's admonishment that Mary not be afraid was common for anyone who was visited by an angel (See what Gabriel said to Zechariah in Luke 1:13).

1:31-33. Mary's conception would be miraculous because she was still a virgin (v. 34). The name Jesus is equivalent to the Hebrew Yeshua (Joshua), meaning "the Lord is salvation." In Genesis 14:18, God is referred to as "God Most High." Humanly speaking, Jesus' lineage would be traced legitimately through the royal family of David because Joseph, Jesus' adoptive father, was a descendant of David. This made Jesus heir to David's throne according to God's eternal covenant (see 2 Sam. 7:13,16). And his lineage through Mary showed that as a human, he was

the seed of Eve, and a descendant of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Judah, Jesse, and David, as prophesied in the Old Testament.

1:34-35. The difference between Mary's response (how can this be) and Zechariah's (v. 18) is that Mary asked her question not from unbelief but from puzzlement (v. 38; see note at v. 20). The answer to Mary's question about how she could get pregnant without being intimate with a man is that the Holy Spirit would overshadow her and cause her to conceive. Because the Holy Spirit was the agent of conception, the child (the holy One; 2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 4:15) would be the Son of God. The Jews believe the sinful nature is passed on through the father, so Jesus was the son of Mary (fully human), and conceived by the Holy Spirit (fully God, and without sin).

1:36-38. If ever Mary was tempted to doubt God's promise to her, she could recall Gabriel's words that nothing will be impossible with God, as had been shown in the lives of Abraham and Sarah (see Gen. 18:14). Mary's response is a classic model of humble commitment (I am the Lord's slave) and willing obedience (may it be done to me according to your word).

1:41-45 The baby (John) being filled with the Holy Spirit (v. 15) fulfilled Gabriel's prediction to Zechariah. But Elizabeth was filled with the Spirit also (v. 41), and the Spirit's revelations to her were apparently the source of her knowledge about the blessed roles and identities of Mary and her unborn child. When baby John leaped inside Elizabeth, she understood that he had experienced great joy at Mary's presence.

1:46-55 Mary's hymn of praise is known as the "Magnificat," so named for the Latin term rendered as proclaims the greatness (Greek megaluno). It is similar in tone to the song of Hannah (1Sam 2:1-10).

1:46-49 There is a beautiful balance in Mary's hymn of praise. She expressed humble recognition of the greatness and holy nature of God and His grace (favor) on His voluntary slave, but also an awareness that God's unique calling on her life would result in all future generations calling her blessed. She viewed herself as both humbled and exalted.

1:50-53 These verses recall the descriptions of God's justice found throughout the Psalms (e.g., Ps 100:5; 103:11). Those who fear Him is an OT expression that is equivalent to the NT idea of faith. Fear of God is faith in God. His arm is figurative for God's power. God is a Spirit being (Jn 4:24) and does not have a physical body, but bodily metaphors are effective in communicating some of God's attributes and actions. God is against the proud... the mighty, and the rich, who imagine themselves self-sufficient. By contrast, He champions the cause of the lowly and the hungry, for they acknowledge their need for Him.

1:54-55 In sending Jesus to be born to Mary, God mercifully helped... Israel, in keeping with promises He had made centuries earlier to Abraham and his descendants (see Gen 12:1-3; 22:15-18).

1:56-57 Mary visited Elizabeth shortly after hearing she was "in the sixth month" of her pregnancy (vv. 36,39-40) and stayed with her about three months. Mary may have returned to Nazareth either shortly before or after the birth of Elizabeth's son, John.