

Christmas 2000

Last week in the message, "The Birth of John" we saw how the climate of the time was looking for a Savior from the power of Rome. 1000s of years of prophecies pointed to this time when this climactic event would occur. King Herod was Jewish but his reign was secure because of Rome's army, and cost many Jewish lives. As king, he appointed the High Priest.

In the little village of Nazareth, a descendant of David who also looked for the coming of the Savior was met by the archangel Gabriel. ²⁶ In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee,²⁷ to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary.²⁸ The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you."²⁹ Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be.³⁰ But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God.³¹ You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus.³² 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,³³ and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end."³⁴ "How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"³⁵ The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon 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.³⁶ 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.³⁷ For nothing is impossible with God."³⁸ "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May it be to me as you have said." Then the angel left her. Luke 1:26-38 (NIV)

Just as in Elizabeth's case, the angel Gabriel announced the name of the child before He was born. Jesus means – God saves -. It was not an unusual name, in fact, one of the High Priests appointed by Herod was named Jesus. Mary had to have understood that she was to be the mother of the One whom the prophecies foretold for Gabriel refers to some of the prophecies about the Messiah. She did not understand how it was possible, being a virgin, but the angel told her she would conceive by the Holy Spirit. The angel twice refers to the child as the Son of God. He encourages her faith by telling her of Elizabeth's pregnancy and reminds her that with God nothing is impossible. Her response shows that God had chosen the right woman, "I am the Lord's servant, may it be to me as you have said."

Mary goes to Elizabeth to see and confirm what the angel has said, and sure enough, it is all true. In fact, if she was looking for a confirmation she got it and then some, for when Mary greeted Elizabeth, baby John jumped in Elizabeth's womb. Then Elizabeth gives her a prophetic word: 42b "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear!⁴³ But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?⁴⁴ As soon as the sound of your

greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy.⁴⁵ Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished!"

Luke 1:43-45 (NIV) So we see Mary had no doubts like Zechariah did. She believed the miracle would come to pass. And Elizabeth believed the prophecies through Zechariah that John was preparing the way for the Savior of the world.

Then Mary answers with a prophetic song of her own. Imagine the tingle in the air at that meeting. Both women are overcome by the Holy Spirit, and both recognize that something way beyond the two of them is taking place. Imagine witnessing Mary break out into this song.

⁴⁶ b. "My soul glorifies the Lord⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,⁴⁸ for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed,⁴⁹ for the Mighty One has done great things for me-- holy is his name.⁵⁰ His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation.⁵¹ He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.⁵² He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble.⁵³ He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty.⁵⁴ He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful⁵⁵ to Abraham and his descendants forever, even as he said to our fathers." Luke 1:46-55 (NIV)

The long awaited Savior was soon to be born and in this song, Mary rejoices that God has chosen her as the vessel. She calls her state a humble one – wife of a carpenter, not a queen or even a wealthy woman of the upper class. God gives grace to the humble. She speaks to the proud a few verses later.

Talk about having a treasure in earthen vessel. But Mary is like us all! For Christ in you is the hope of glory. From now on all generations will call you blessed for the Mighty One has done great things for you – holy is his name. Mary is no different from any born again child of God. The grace of God caused us to recognize our humble condition and we bowed to the Lordship of Christ. "I am the Lord's servant, may it be to me as you have said." We feared his justice upon our rebellious lives and his mercy came pouring in. The very life of Christ in us! Unimaginable, miraculous, and yet his very plan.

Now we get to the proud in their inmost thought. Those are too self sufficient to bow to the Lordship of Christ, to say with Mary, "I am your servant." God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble, and here Mary prophecies, "lifts up the humble." The hungry are those who recognize their need, and God fills them with good things, even Himself. But the rich, or those who think they have all they need in themselves, are sent away empty. It reminds us of Rev 3:17 "You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked." Sent away empty – without the life of Christ in us what do we have?

The prophet Micah said the Savior would be born in Bethlehem, and so the heart of kings are moved to call for a census related to taxation – sending pregnant Mary and her betrothed husband Joseph to the city of their ancestor David, Bethlehem.

The town is crowded with descendents of David and what little public lodging there is, is already filled. And so the couple is granted the shelter of a little rock grotto where the animals are fed to avoid the rain. A thousand years before David had heard in timelessness of eternity the voice of God the Father say, "Thou art my Son, this day I have begotten thee." And that determined counsel of God from before creation began took the next step. Emmanuel – God with us. The very speaking of God is now as clear as it will ever be to us– for God has come to speak to us in the very life of a man. To show us how men were intended to live.

We can look at his life and know God's will, for in these last days He has spoken to us in his Son. We have his words and his life because of this miraculous moment. No wonder angels burst into the sky above awestruck shepherds. Those shepherd's just lost their jobs – no more need of their sacrificial lambs. The Lamb of God had come. The endless cycle of sacrifice and sin, sacrifice and sin was coming to an end. Hebrews 10:5-7 (NIV)...when Christ came into the world, he said: "Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me;⁶ with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased.⁷ Then I said, 'Here I am--it is written about me in the scroll-- I have come to do your will, O God.'"

And this is how we are to live, "I have come to do your will, O God." "I am the Lord's servant, may it be to me as you have said." Surrendered to Father is the path of the humble, of the lowly who recognize how needy man is. They are filled with the goodness of God himself – but the proud leave empty – full of themselves. Phil 2:5-8 (NIV)⁵ Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:⁶ Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,⁷ but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross!

How will you leave today? Humble, obedient to your Maker, filled with the goodness of God, or proud and empty. (John 14:22-24) It is the grace of God that He has made it possible for us to choose, because of the sacrificial obedience of the Lamb of God who died in your place. He came that you might live in humble obedience to God; filled with God Himself! That is Christmas, the gift of God to you. The greatest gift that ever could be given.