

Luke began his account of the life of Jesus by telling Theophilus that he had carefully compiled accurate accounts of the life of Jesus and was writing them down in order from the beginning. He began with Zechariah's encounter with the angel Gabriel in the Holy Place in the temple in Jerusalem. Zechariah's barren and aged wife was going to give birth to the messenger who would go before the long-awaited Messiah (Malachi 3:1<sup>i</sup>).

*<sup>26</sup> In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth,* Luke 1:26 In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy (see verse 36) the angel Gabriel was sent to Nazareth. While Gabriel was last seen in the Holy Place of the temple in Jerusalem, he is now sent to a little town of Davidic descendants in the north consisting mostly of laborers and farmers. It was a little town of around 300 people. The town was never mentioned in any work of literature before this. We might compare it to Bridgeport. It was a nothing town near a large Gentile city, Sephoris. The name of the town, Nazareth, was derived from a promise to bring a shoot forth from Jesse. The Hebrew word for a shoot is *netzer*.<sup>1</sup> *There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit. <sup>2</sup> And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.* Isaiah 11:1-2 When Nathaniel was told that the Messiah came from Nazareth, he asked if any good thing could come from there (John 1:46<sup>ii</sup>). The Davidic descendants who lived there had great hope, but other Jews seem to have thought it was an insignificant town. Everything surrounding the coming of the Savior speaks humility and grace.

*<sup>27</sup> to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary.* Luke 1:27 Both Mary and Joseph were descended from David whose father was Jesse. Gabriel came to Mary who was at that time betrothed. She was legally committed to Joseph. A betrothal meant a bride price was paid and the two were bound by an agreement to be consummated when Joseph finished building their room onto his father's house. Sources estimate Mary's age to be between twelve and fourteen.

There has long been a debate about Mary being a virgin because that would mean a miracle took place and a prophecy from Isaiah 7:14 fulfilled. *<sup>14</sup> Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.* The argument does not center so much around this passage as it does the Isaiah prophecy. Skeptics claim the Hebrew word *alma* should be translated young woman. But in every case in Scripture it means a virgin. They would like to claim that Mary did have relations, either with Joseph or a Roman soldier. Part of this comes from their misunderstanding of the Hebrew in the Isaiah passage.<sup>iii</sup> If skeptics can discard the fact that she was a virgin, then they don't have to consider

Jesus' claim on their lives. They don't have to acknowledge that the name of the one to be born means God with us. (For further discussion see my book Divine Messiah chapter 1.)

*28 And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!"* Luke 1:28 Gabriel is in this lowly village addressing an unsophisticated peasant girl. She was uneducated but heard the Scriptures read each Sabbath and probably overheard many discussions on Scripture and prophecy, especially regarding the Messiah. It has been said that every Jewish woman in that time prayed to be the mother of the Messiah.

It is an amazing scene, and Gabriel's proclamation is mind boggling. Since Daniel and Zechariah were overwhelmed by Gabriel's presence (Daniel 8:17-18<sup>iv</sup>), Gabriel must have toned down the magnificence and power of his presence when appearing to Mary, for she didn't have the same reaction as those men. Somehow she did know that he was an angel.

"Greetings" can also be translated "rejoice!" He began by telling her to rejoice, that she was favored, and that the Lord was with her. The Lord chose to bestow favor on her. Of all the women from the line of David, God picked this particular girl. Of course, He designed her for this task (Psalm 139:13<sup>v</sup>). From her reaction we can see the Lord was indeed with her. This is the reason every born-again believer should rejoice. You are favored for the Lord is with you (Matthew 28:20<sup>vi</sup>). No matter what is happening in our lives we can rejoice because we are favored of the Lord and He is with us through it all.

*29 But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be.* Luke 1:29 If the Lord is with us then He has an assignment for us. God told Abraham (Genesis 26:24<sup>vii</sup>), Jacob (Genesis 28:15<sup>viii</sup>), Moses (Exodus 3:12<sup>ix</sup>), Joshua (Deuteronomy 31:23<sup>x</sup>), Gideon (Judges 6:16<sup>xi</sup>), and Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1:8<sup>xii</sup>), that He was with them. Those men had some very difficult assignments. But there was never a case of the Lord promising to be with an individual woman. That does not mean He wasn't, but rather that in all the cases where God said this there was a difficult task set before men. Mary knew that from the synagogue readings each week. That may be why the saying troubled this young girl, the precedent and the implication of a difficult task which would be possible only if the Lord was with her.

Now consider Matthew 28:20<sup>xiii</sup>. Jesus assigned the disciples the task of making disciples and teaching what Jesus had taught. Then He told them that He was with them always. That is the Great Commission. It's a difficult task. In fact, it is impossible, unless the Holy Spirit resides in us. But if He is with us, we too can rejoice. He will do the work in and through us, for nothing is too hard for Him.

*30 And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God."* Luke 1:30 When Gabriel told Zechariah to not fear it was because of the awesomeness of his presence. When he told Mary the same it was because she feared

the meaning of the greeting. Gabriel reassured her by repeating that she had found favor with God.

How did she obtain that? How does anyone find favor with God? It is by grace, but Hebrews 11:6 tells us what is required of us. *<sup>6</sup> And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.* Mary had faith and sought the Lord. She believed that God exists and that He rewards those who diligently seek Him. She responded to the grace of God extended to her with faith. Are you doing the same?

The favor of God does not mean wealth or pleasure or peaceful circumstances. It means that God can work in and through you for His glory and your eternal blessing. Only those who have faith in the goodness of God will choose to believe and seek Him.

*<sup>31</sup> And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus.* Luke 1:31 God's favor upon Mary meant that she would be the mother of the Messiah. The many women who were praying to have that blessing may have been hoping to give birth to one who would become a victorious king who would liberate Israel and thereby bring honor to their mother. They may have been hoping for the renown it would bring them to have raised such a special son. Mary's troubled heart at the greeting of Gabriel tells us she was of a different character. In the next chapter Simeon will predict how much it will cost her to have this honor (Luke 2:34-35<sup>xiv</sup>). The privilege of serving God comes with a cost (Matthew 16:24<sup>xv</sup>).

The Hebrew people saw one's name as their destiny. The name Jesus means the salvation of God. Very few in the line of David gave that name to their baby boy because of the expectations that came with that name.<sup>xvi</sup> Imagine naming your child Hercules or Superman. The name was not Mary's choice, but the command of Gabriel who is a messenger of God.

*<sup>32</sup> 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, <sup>33</sup> and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.*" Luke 1:32-33 If the name wasn't enough in itself, Gabriel went on to give a brief summary of the destiny of this baby. He will be great! The same was said of John the Baptist in verse 15, but John will say he is unworthy to untie Jesus' sandal strap (3:16<sup>xvii</sup>). In other words the great John the Baptist will say Jesus is immeasurably greater. Jesus will declare himself greater than the temple (Matthew 12:6<sup>xviii</sup>), than Solomon (Matthew 12:42<sup>xix</sup>), or Jonah (Matthew 12:41<sup>xx</sup>), for He is one with God (John 10:30<sup>xxi</sup>). John the Beloved will say that Jesus being the Word of God was ever with God and is God (John 1:1<sup>xxii</sup>). Great is almost an understatement.

He will be called Son of the Most High. That reminds us of Isaiah 9:6<sup>xxiii</sup> in which the Son is given to us who will be called the Everlasting Father and Mighty God. It also

should remind us of Psalm 2, the Son whose inheritance is the heathen, to whom the kings should bow, and who judges the wicked (Psalm 2:7-12<sup>xxiv</sup>).

He is given the throne of His father David. David was promised an heir who would reign forever. The Isaiah 9 passage concludes by telling us that this Son will sit on David's throne and reign forever (Isaiah 9:7<sup>xxv</sup>). The language from Gabriel is full of prophetic implications that those Davidic descendants knew quite well (2 Samuel 7:8-16<sup>xxvi</sup>).

*<sup>34</sup> And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?"* Luke 1:34 Unlike Zechariah's question from doubt, Mary's question was one of wonder. It reminds me of Abram and Sarah who laughed at the promise of a son in their old age. Sarah's laugh was from doubt, but Abram's was from the wonder of such a thing being possible. How will this come about (Genesis 17:17<sup>xxvii</sup>)?

Just as it was a wonder that Mary's womb would contain the Savior, we might ask how Christ is formed in any of us? How can sinful man have the holy Creator present and powerful in our lives? It is the miraculous work of the Holy Spirit that convicts us sin and our need for a Savior. When we realize what Jesus did to make forgiveness possible, the Holy Spirit helps us invite Him to be the Lord of our lives and then to live a new life with His presence in us, growing daily into His likeness.

*<sup>35</sup> 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."* Luke 1:35 Gabriel explained that the child would be conceived through the Holy Spirit. I watched one of those so called science shows in which they explained how there was one chance in a billion that virgin could become pregnant on her own just as some creatures display the ability. They offered no evidence that it had ever happened to a human. It is simply an excuse to avoid the supernatural. Mary had the DNA line of David from which the promised Messiah was to come, and God supernaturally added a Y chromosome. It was a miracle, and it was also the only way Jesus could be born without sin.

*<sup>36</sup> And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren.* Luke 1:36 Then Gabriel had a surprise announcement that would confirm to Mary all that he had said. Mary's much older cousin Elizabeth was six months pregnant. Mary must have thought that if that was true then everything this angel said had to be true.

*<sup>37</sup> For nothing will be impossible with God."* Luke 1:37 Gabriel reminded Mary of Abraham and Sarah by quoting from the Greek version of Genesis 18:14<sup>xxviii</sup>, "Nothing will be impossible with God!" That meant that if God could do the miracle for Sarah and Elizabeth then He could certainly fulfill the declaration just given to her to become the mother of the Messiah by the power of the Holy Spirit (Zechariah 8:6<sup>xxix</sup>).

*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.* Luke 1:38 Mary's response shows us that God chose the right woman. Would that we always had the same answer to God's assignments in our lives. "I am Your servant Lord; help me obey your leading!" Mary's will was to do God's will. I believe Mary realized from Gabriel's greeting that this was going to be anything but glamorous. A woman becoming pregnant during her betrothal time when apart from her betrothed could mean her execution by stoning. And she must have wondered how Joseph would react (Matthew 1:19<sup>xxx</sup>). In view of all this she had already submitted her life to be God's servant. She had already decided she would yield to God's Word. By the grace of God may we all have the same commitment no matter the assignment God calls us to. May we all be submitted without reservation and in joyful expectation to God's will for our lives.

We sing I Surrender All, but do we really? Mary was blessed with a unique and unforgettable task because she was surrendered. **It is the surrendered life that will experience the presence and power of God**, and the adventure of involvement in eternal matters. The un-surrendered life is caught up with that which quickly passes and is of no eternal significance (Colossians 3:1-2<sup>xxxi</sup>). Have you made a conscious decision which it will be for you?

As we read the Word of God and pray, the Holy Spirit prompts us to action. It may not be as clear as the encounter Mary had with Gabriel, but it is God's call to us nevertheless. We can believe God can work in and through us and surrender ourselves as God's servants, or we can refuse and go our own way. But how much more fulfilling and exciting to join with God in His work in the world! Frightening as it may be, it's nothing like what Mary faced. Be courageous! Receive God's favor by believing and acting, knowing your reward is in heaven (Matthew 6:20<sup>xxxii</sup>). When the Spirit of God calls you to action, remember Mary's response.

## Questions

- 1 Where did Gabriel appear before and why?
- 2 Describe what we know of Mary?
- 3 Why can we rejoice?
- 4 How did Mary obtain God's favor?
- 5 Why did women want to give birth to the Messiah?
- 6 What passages of Scripture does Gabriel point to?
- 7 Why did Mary question the angel?
- 8 How was it possible? What does that say to us?
- 9 What sign did Gabriel give Mary to help her believe?
- 10 Why should Mary's response be ours too?

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<sup>i</sup> **Malachi 3:1 (ESV)** <sup>1</sup> "Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts.

<sup>ii</sup> **John 1:46 (ESV)**

<sup>46</sup> Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see."

<sup>iii</sup> The singular "you" in the passage addresses the boy the king brought with him, and the plural "you" is addressing the house of David. See *Divine Messiah* pg 11.

<sup>iv</sup> **Daniel 8:17-18 (ESV)**

<sup>17</sup> So he came near where I stood. And when he came, I was frightened and fell on my face. But he said to me, "Understand, O son of man, that the vision is for the time of the end."

<sup>18</sup> And when he had spoken to me, I fell into a deep sleep with my face to the ground. But he touched me and made me stand up.

<sup>v</sup> **Psalms 139:13 (ESV)**

<sup>13</sup> For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb.

<sup>vi</sup> **Matthew 28:20 (ESV)**

<sup>20</sup> teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

<sup>vii</sup> **Genesis 26:24 (ESV)**

<sup>24</sup> And the LORD appeared to him the same night and said, "I am the God of Abraham your father. Fear not, for I am with you and will bless you and multiply your offspring for my servant Abraham's sake."

<sup>viii</sup> **Genesis 28:15 (ESV)**

<sup>15</sup> Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land. For I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you."

<sup>ix</sup> **Exodus 3:12 (ESV)**

<sup>12</sup> He said, "But I will be with you, and this shall be the sign for you, that I have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain."

<sup>x</sup> **Deuteronomy 31:23 (ESV)**

<sup>23</sup> And the LORD commissioned Joshua the son of Nun and said, "Be strong and courageous, for you shall bring the people of Israel into the land that I swore to give them. I will be with you."

<sup>xi</sup> **Judges 6:16 (ESV)**

<sup>16</sup> And the LORD said to him, "But I will be with you, and you shall strike the Midianites as one man."

<sup>xii</sup> **Jeremiah 1:8 (ESV)**

<sup>8</sup> Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, declares the LORD."

<sup>xiii</sup> **Matthew 28:20 (ESV)**

<sup>20</sup> teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

<sup>xiv</sup> **Luke 2:34-35 (ESV)**

<sup>34</sup> And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed <sup>35</sup> (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed."

<sup>xv</sup> **Matthew 16:24 (ESV)**

<sup>24</sup> Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

<sup>xvi</sup> Jakob Van Bruggen, *Jesus The Son of God*, p175

<sup>xvii</sup> **Luke 3:16 (ESV)**

<sup>16</sup> John answered them all, saying, "I baptize you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

<sup>xviii</sup> **Matthew 12:6 (ESV)**

<sup>6</sup> I tell you, something greater than the temple is here.

<sup>xix</sup> **Matthew 12:42 (ESV)**

<sup>42</sup> The queen of the South will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came

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from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold, something greater than Solomon is here.

<sup>xx</sup> **Matthew 12:41** <sup>41</sup> The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here.

<sup>xxi</sup> **John 10:30 (ESV)** <sup>30</sup> I and the Father are one.”

<sup>xxii</sup> **John 1:1** <sup>1</sup> In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

<sup>xxiii</sup> **Isaiah 9:6 (ESV)** <sup>6</sup> For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

<sup>xxiv</sup> **Psalms 2:7-12 (ESV)** <sup>7</sup> I will tell of the decree: The LORD said to me, “You are my Son; today I have begotten you. <sup>8</sup> Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession. <sup>9</sup> You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel.”

<sup>10</sup> Now therefore, O kings, be wise; be warned, O rulers of the earth. <sup>11</sup> Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling. <sup>12</sup> Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in him.

<sup>xxv</sup> **Isaiah 9:7 (ESV)** <sup>7</sup> Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

<sup>xxvi</sup> **2 Samuel 7:8-16 (ESV)** <sup>8</sup> Now, therefore, thus you shall say to my servant David, ‘Thus says the LORD of hosts, I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, that you should be prince over my people Israel. <sup>9</sup> And I have been with you wherever you went and have cut off all your enemies from before you. And I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. <sup>10</sup> And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may dwell in their own place and be disturbed no more. And violent men shall afflict them no more, as formerly, <sup>11</sup> from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel. And I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover, the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a house. <sup>12</sup> When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. <sup>13</sup> He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. <sup>14</sup> I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men, <sup>15</sup> but my steadfast love will not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. <sup>16</sup> And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.’”

<sup>xxvii</sup> **Genesis 17:17 (ESV)**

<sup>17</sup> Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed and said to himself, “Shall a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?”

<sup>xxviii</sup> **Genesis 18:14 (ESV)**

<sup>14</sup> Is anything too hard for the LORD? At the appointed time I will return to you, about this time next year, and Sarah shall have a son.” (Gabriel was quoting the Septuagint version, one Mary was probably more familiar with.)

<sup>xxix</sup> **Zechariah 8:6 (ESV)**

<sup>6</sup> Thus says the LORD of hosts: If it is marvelous in the sight of the remnant of this people in those days, should it also be marvelous in my sight, declares the LORD of hosts?

<sup>xxx</sup> **Matthew 1:19 (ESV)**

<sup>19</sup> And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly.

<sup>xxxi</sup> **Colossians 3:1-2 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. <sup>2</sup> Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.

<sup>xxxii</sup> **Matthew 6:20 (ESV)**

<sup>20</sup> but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.