

THE ANGEL OF THE LORD AND MARY

Luke 1:26-38

Intro: I don't know how many times I have heard people say that Christmas seems to have come quicker this year than in the past. Of course, that is not true. Time is moving at the same rate as always, but perhaps it is because of the busyness of life that it seems to have come on us faster than usual. Whatever the reason may be, we just have this Sunday and next Sunday before Christmas Day. Christmas Day has largely become a commercial holiday when merchants expect to do the greatest percentage of their business for the whole year. But it is supposed to be a day when we remember the birth of Jesus Christ Who was born in Bethlehem almost two thousand years ago.

We have no proof at all that our Lord was born on the twenty-fifth day of December. In fact, we have no proof that He was born in December. After December 25 was chosen it was learned that this was the rainy season in Israel, and it is very unlikely that the shepherds would have been in the fields with their sheep at that time. But evidence of the celebration of the birth of Christ goes back into the early 300's after Christ, but it was in the year A. D. 354 that December 25 became the official day.

The fact that Christ has almost been forgotten in our country throughout the year, fits in with the little that is made of Him at Christmas. But this does give us who know the Lord an opportunity to tell the old, old story of Christ in an increasingly pagan nation like ours is becoming—or maybe I should say, “has become.” So with just today and next Sunday the only two Sundays we have before Christmas, and with next Sunday night set apart for the observance of the Lord's Supper, I have decided to bring a short series of messages relating to the birth of our Lord. And I am going to do what I don't usually do: I am going to include tonight in the series. So let me tell you what I am going to do—and I have never done this before.

I am going to speak this morning on *The Angel of the Lord and Mary*, from Luke 1. Tonight I plan to speak on *The Angel of the Lord and Joseph* from Matthew 1. And next Sunday morning I will conclude the series speaking on *The Angel of the Lord and the Shepherd* from Luke 2.

Recently as I was thinking of the accounts given in the Gospels of the birth of our Lord, it occurred to me that an angel had a vital part in announcing our Lord's birth to Mary, to Joseph, and to the shepherds. Of course, this

was true also of the birth of John the Baptist when “an angel of the Lord” appeared to Zacharias who was to become the father of the forerunner of our Lord. But I am limiting my messages to those incidents which refer directly to the birth of Christ. And so I am beginning today with *The Angel of the Lord and Mary*, and my text is Luke 1:26-38.

We are told in Luke 1:19 that it was the angel Gabriel who appeared to Zacharias to announce to him that he was going to have a son. And it was the same angel who appeared to Mary, according to Luke 1:26. These are the only two times in the NT that the angel Gabriel is mentioned by name, but I am inclined to think that he was the angel who appeared to Joseph and the Shepherds. I can’t prove that, but it seems very likely that Gabriel was the divinely appointed messenger who came to all of these individuals. At any rate, we know it was Gabriel who appeared to Mary, and we can only assume that it was also Gabriel who appeared to Joseph and the Shepherds.

The passage has been read to us, and so let me begin by pointing out that the angel Gabriel’s appearance to Mary was:

I. A SUDDEN, UNEXPECTED APPEARANCE (Luke 1:26-27).

We read much about angels in the Bible. In fact, the Bible is the only authoritative source of information that we have about angels. Always examine by Scripture everything that you hear about angels today, and if it doesn’t accord with Scripture, don’t believe it. Angels are spirit beings, created on a higher level than human beings, but capable of becoming visible, and even of appearing sometimes as human beings.

But one thing that was unusual about Gabriel’s appearance to Zacharias, and then to Mary, is that, as far as Scripture is concerned, it had been approximately 400 years since God had last spoken through a prophet. That is why we speak of “four hundred silent years” between the OT and the NT. It was in Jerusalem that Gabriel appear to Zacharias with the message that he and his wife Elisabeth were to become parents, but it was in northern Israel, in Nazareth, that Gabriel appeared to Mary. And yet I think that we can safely assume that Mary did not know at this point what had happened to Zacharias, nor did she knew that her cousin Elisabeth was going to have a child. But she would know about Elisabeth before Gabriel was through speaking with her. Nevertheless Mary had no reason to expect that the angel of the Lord was going to appear to her with the message that he had for her. We are told in verse 26 that it was “in the sixth month” that Gabriel appeared to Mary, and this means six months

since Elisabeth realized in herself that she was going to become a mother. This is how we know that John the Baptist was six months older than our Lord.

One big difference between Elisabeth, besides the fact that Elisabeth was much older than Mary, was the point that Elisabeth was married to Zacharias, but Mary was not married, and never had been married. But our KJV says that she was “espoused to a man whose name was Joseph.” This means that they were engaged to be married, but not married. And, although there was practically no attention paid to the royal family in Israel in those days, it is stated here that Joseph had royal blood in his veins. He was “of the house of David.” Mary had been promised in marriage to Joseph, but the marriage had not taken place.

II. GABRIEL’S MESSAGE (LUKE 1:28-33).

As the angel Gabriel appeared, Mary had no idea why he had come to her. The word “angel” means *a messenger*. She undoubtedly knew that angels came from God to bring messages to people on earth, but beyond that she expected nothing, and knew nothing. But the angel was not long in telling her why he had come.

The first part of his message was this: “Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women” (Luke 1:28). To be “highly favored” meant that she had been “endued with grace.” She was literally *compassed about with the grace of God*. This word does not mean that she was sinless. In fact, it means the opposite. However, Mary had kept herself pure by God’s grace, and God was about to bestow upon Mary an honor by grace which no other woman had ever received, nor will any woman ever receive such an honor again. “The Lord is with thee” is a statement indicating that God had set her apart for a very unique place in life. The statement, “Blessed art thou among women,” does not appear here in the best MSS, but it does belong in verse 42 where it was said by Elisabeth about Mary. No woman had ever been honored like Mary was about to be honored although many women have had special places of blessing in the plans and purposes of God. *What the angel was about to tell Mary was the honor of all honors for a woman.*

Notice her reaction in verse 29. She was “troubled at his saying.” Robertson says that she was both puzzled and upset, and for her to “cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be” means that she was tossing around in her mind several possibilities as to what Gabriel meant. But we can doubt if she really expected to hear what Gabriel was about to

say.

Gabriel knew that she was afraid, perhaps even somewhat terrified by this sudden turn of events. And so he sought to calm her fears by telling her not to be afraid but to realize that she was being blessed with a special evidence, a very special evidence, of the grace of God. The word for “favor” is the Greek word for *grace*. Thus in verse 28 where we have the words “*highly favoured,*” and here in verse 30 where we have the word “*favour,*” we have strong evidence that what God was preparing to do through Mary was not because she deserved it, but because of the grace of God.

This is an answer to all of those who would deify the virgin Mary. She was not immaculately conceived, as our Lord was. I have no hesitation in saying that Mary was one of the most wonderful of women ever to live, but she was not God. She was not perfect. If she had have been perfect, she never would have said in the words we find in verse 47, “My spirit hath rejoiced in God my Savior.” If she had been divine, she would not have needed a Savior, but by her own testimony, that is what God was to her, her “Saviour.”

So if you are inclined to think of Mary as a Person equal to the Members of the Trinity, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, I hope that you will put that out of your mind forever! What God was preparing to do with her was done all in grace, unmerited favor, and Mary would have been the first to say so.

But we still haven’t gotten to the angel Gabriel’s message. What was it that he had come to tell Mary? Listen to his words again in verses 31, 32, and 33. (Read.)

Mary was going to have a baby. He would be “a son.” And the angel told Mary was His Name would be: “Jesus.” Next Sunday, the Lord willing, we will see that when the angel of the Lord spoke to Joseph about Mary, he gave Joseph this same Name, and explained its meaning: “For He shall save His people from their sins.”

Vincent, in his *Word Studies of the New Testament* made this comment:
Jesus. The Greek form of a Hebrew name, which had been borne by two illustrious individuals in former periods of the Jewish history-- Joshua, the successor of Moses, and Jeshua, the high priest, who with Zerubbabel took so active a part in the re-establishment of the civil and religious polity of the Jews on

their return from Babylon.

And then he added:

The meaning of the name, therefore, finds expression in the title Saviour, applied to our Lord in Luke 1:47; 2:11; John 4:42.

And Gabriel continued: “He shall be great.” This adjective in a unique way belongs to the Lord Jesus Christ. None was ever as great as He, and none will ever surpass Him in His greatness. He is great as a Person. He combines perfect manhood and absolute Deity in Himself. He was great in His teaching. No one ever spoke as He did. He was great in His power. All authority in heaven and earth is His. He was great in His life. No one could convict Him of any sin. He was great in His compassion toward sinners. He was great in His death. He did not die because of any wrongdoing that He was guilty of, but by His death He forever guaranteed the salvation of all who will ever be saved—past, present, or future. And so He was great in putting away the sins of His people. He was great in His resurrection. He had conquered death and the grave, and has become the firstfruits of our resurrection and transformation into His very likeness. He is greater than all. As I said, that word “great” belongs to our Lord.

The angel Gabriel pointed out some of the greatness of our Lord. (Read verses 32 and 33.)

This meant that she was to become the mother of the Messiah according to the flesh. He was not only “the Son of the highest,” but he would be the Son of David, God and Man in one Person, “the highest” being a title of God, “the most high God,” a title depicting His absolute sovereignty not only upon the earth, but also in the heavens. He is the greatest of all. He will come the second time as Jacob’s king, and His kingdom will be forever. And it will encompass all of the nations of the earth. What folly and blasphemy for Cassius Clay, the boxer, to claim to be “the greatest.” That title belongs to the Lord Jesus Christ.

So we have our Lord’s first coming and His second coming referred to in the message of the angel Gabriel.

But this leads to a very important question.

III. MARY’S QUESTION AND THE ANGEL’S ANSWER (Luke 1:34-37).

Mary’s question means, “How can all of this be since I am not married?” And let me point this out: If Mary had been Deity, she would have know

how such a thing could be. Besides, if she had a child like all other women do, then her child would have had a human father as well as a human mother, and so he could not have possibly been “the Son of the Highest,” *the Son of God!*

The answer to Mary’s question had been made before the foundation of the world. Do you want the truth about the conception of our Lord Jesus Christ as a Man? You have it in Luke 1:35. (Read.)

Here is the truth as to how a human mother could give birth to a divine Son. The angel Gabriel gave in these words the explanation of how one could be born Who was, and is, both God and Man. No explanation is necessary beyond this. The truth is all here. We could read the latter part of verse 35, “Therefore that which shall be born of thee shall be called holy, the Son of God.”

Now is the time when Mary learned about Elisabeth. The birth of Mary’s Son was certainly to be a miracle. Nothing like that had ever happened before, nor has it happened since. But the birth of John the Baptist was also a miracle. And Zacharias’ response to the angel Gabriel was the reason he could not speak for nine months. What did he say to Gabriel? (Read Luke 1:7, and then verse 18.)

And this is what the angel Gabriel said to Mary about Elisabeth, doubtless for Mary’s encouragement. And then Gabriel added what we have in verse 37: “For with God nothing shall be impossible.” The old ASV gives this translation of Luke 1:37, “For no word from God shall be void of power.” *This means that God never makes a promise but what He has the power to see that it comes to pass.*

This satisfied Mary, and so she responded as we see in verse 38. (Read.)

The angel was faithful in delivering God’s message to the virgin Mary, and the Word from God produced faith in Mary’s heart. Her attitude was one of total submission to the God and His purpose for her.

How did Mary present herself to the angel, and, consequently, to God? She said, “Behold the handmaid of the Lord.” What is a handmaid? This is the feminine form of what the Apostle Paul delighted to call himself, a δούλος of Jesus Christ. Mary said, δούλη. She was giving herself in complete submission to do the will of God. She was saying, “However, Lord, you want to use me, I am ready!” What delight Gabriel must have had when he returned to heaven to tell the Lord what Mary had said!

Mary wasn't God, but Mary was godly! She is not just a good example for you ladies, but she is a good example for us men, and for you young people, and even for you dear children. How I wish and pray that I will always be able to say, "Behold, the bond-servant of the Lord; be it unto me according to Thy Word." That is the ground on which we need to live.

Concl: I wonder if this is the way that Mary thought about how the Lord wanted to use her: "God has promised down through the years of time that He would provide a Savior for us from our sins. And I am just as much in need of that Savior as anyone else is. Therefore, if I am to be His servant to mother His Son, in what better way can I show my love for Him than in being willing to do His will for His glory."

You know, as I have read my Bible this year I have been impressed at the many times the Bible likens great travail, great pain, to what a woman goes through in bringing a child into the world. That is really the supreme example of experiencing pain. Ladies, how would you like to give birth to a child in a barn with no one to help you but a husband who has had no classes on how to help, or what to do. Don't think that it was an easy thing for Mary to be the mother of our Lord in His humanity. You can be sure that the Devil opposed it in every way that He could. But, oh, what must have been her joy to hold that precious baby in her arms, a miracle of the grace of God, and to know that He was to be the Savior of the world. And yet she must have known, too, that it meant He would have to be a sacrifice for her sins, and for the sins of everyone whom the Father had given to Him. When you think of it, there is really no end to contemplating what it cost the virgin Mary to become the one through whom Jesus Christ would be born.

Every day should be for us a day when with all of our hearts we thank God for sending His Son to be our Savior, the only Savior, the One Who became a man that He might suffer and die to save us from our sins.