

Mary and Joseph

Luke 1:26-38; Matthew 1:18-25

Russ Kennedy

Introduction There had been 300 long years of silence. No prophet had spoken God's Word to God's people. They were in the land. They had a large and expanding Temple. They quietly nursed the hope of the Messiah while toiling under the iron heel of oppressor after oppressor. Now the hand of Rome was at the reins of their politics. And still God did not speak. Into that silence, God sends an angel, Gabriel. God sends Gabriel to two women who are about to bear special sons through impossible births. John the Baptist's birth will point backward to Isaac and Jesus' birth will point forward to each of God's sons and daughters.

As we read and reflect on the story of Jesus' birth, I want to highlight these as they emerge: **the honor of Christ and the humility of Mary & Joseph.**

Your Ruler Comes

Luke 1:26-38

²⁶ In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, ²⁷ to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸ And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" ²⁹ But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰ And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. 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."

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. ³⁶ 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. ³⁷ For nothing will be impossible with God." 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.

The Authority of God's Messenger

(v.26-27)

The sixth month here is referring to the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy (v.36). The providences and purposes of God are so evident. When Mary went to visit Elizabeth, John the Baptist was old enough to "leap in her womb." But, this is not a message to be ignored. God sent Him. Gabriel is heard and heeded, not just because he is an angel, but because it is the Sovereign God sent him.

This is true of all of God's messengers. Our authority is not in our own persons, but because we are sent. Now, that is not to say that everyone claiming to speak for God does. This is Gabriel. He is God's messenger. He has that special function, to bring special messages to people of God's choosing. His greeting to her is expressive of all that God's

revelation is to us. When God sends His Word it is always a matter of grace. It is God bestowing His favor and giving the enablement to hear and to heed.

The Humility of God's Maiden

(v.26-29)

Notice how the text points to the humble condition of Mary.

Its Outward Evidence

(v.26-27)

We see it in the outward evidence of her sweet humility. She lives in Galilee in the town of Nazareth. People from this area and this town were generally looked down on. It was what we would have called "being from the wrong side of the tracks." It was a poor area and had way too much contact and influence from the Gentiles to suit a proper Jew. Here she is, born into the royal tribe, a direct descendent of King David yet seems not to have all the advantages that go with such a family heritage.

Three times this text points out that she is a virgin. There is the objective statement of the Scripture in verse 27 and her own expression of her pure state in verse 34. Her virginity is a humble honor. She has kept herself pure for her husband; now she learns that purity has been kept for God.

Now, we cannot pass this observation without noting a couple of very important doctrinal considerations.

The Error of Perpetual Virginity - The Catholic Church has promulgated the lie that Mary never had relations with Joseph, that she was always a virgin.ⁱ The Scriptural record tells us that Jesus had brothers and sisters and that Mary was their mother.

The Necessity of the Virgin Birth - I'll come back to this point in just a few moments. But note this: Jesus had to be born of a virgin. He could not have had a human father. The sinful nature is passed on from Adam through fathers to their children. Jesus, in the incarnation, received His human nature from His mother and continued His divine nature by the Holy Spirit. The virgin birth is both necessary and revealed. Jesus was born of a virgin in order not to receive a depraved nature. (Note: this is why we teach that Mary was not sinless in nature or act. She was not *immaculate*. She was born of a human father who passed on to her a depraved nature. She knew this. This is why she says in verse 47, "My spirit rejoices in God my Savior."ⁱⁱ

She was "pledged to be married" or betrothed. Our modern word for engagement might be used. The difference is that in their culture, a covenant bond was already established and breaking an engagement required a divorce. The marriage supper and consummation afterward were yet to come. How amazing this is. Jesus is born into a family after the covenant bond has been made and yet before physical union. Do you realize that this is true of each of us who are born into the family of God and become part of the bride of Christ? We are Jesus' bride after the marriage covenant yet before the marriage supper. Today, this day, is the time of the betrothal.

So, we ought to honor Mary. God bestowed on this humble maiden an amazing honor. But we must not elevate her as Queen of Heaven or Mother of God or co-redemptrix. These blasphemous titles dishonor and disfavor and demean her. Let us

honor her as we would any humble sinner, graced by God to be indwelt and enabled by God for His purposes and glory.

Its Inward Expression

(v.28-29)

Gabriel greets her with two amazing sentences. "Greetings, graced one. The Lord is with you." Here is a greeting from heaven by heaven's messenger saying God has favored her. God is with her. Now listen to me for a moment. Mary does not hear these words like we do. The abiding presence of God in our lives is a present reality. It was not so for them. The abiding presence of God was a thing in their past. The Presence of God's glory had dwelt in the Temple over the Ark of the Covenant. But it had departed in the days of Ezekiel. It had not returned. And now the very Presence is coming to and upon Mary.

It is not surprising that she wonders at the words and the greeting. It is an astonishing thing. It is wholly unexpected. Luke tells us that she "kept on pondering" (v.29 NASB). Mary exhibits the godly habit of quiet humility linked with constant reflection and meditation. We find her over and over again treasuring up words and events and thinking about their significance.

Her humility is evident in her surprise and consternation. This is wholly unexpected. There is no sense of inner satisfaction that she has finally been given her due. True humility is constantly surprised at the grace and favor of God: not because of a wrong view of God, but because of an accurate assessment of self.

How do I know beyond any shadow of a doubt the humility of Mary? Because God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble. May we constantly reflect and ponder the wonder of God's amazing grace so that our hearts are further humbled for ongoing supplies of sufficient grace.

The Clarity of God's Message

(v.29-37)

Luke records this in his writing "an orderly account...so that we might know the certainty of the things we have been taught" (1:1-4). The message for Mary comes to us like a great vessel laden with rich treasures of truth. Each jewel, each golden cup, each shining bracelet could be carefully examined for its worth and significance and amazing design. This morning let me go through this vault and hold up each treasure for admiration and admonition.

The heart of this message is Jesus. The central theme of the angel's announcement is the amazing wonder that God became man – Jesus became incarnate. The second person of the Godhead took upon Himself human form, *forever*.

Its Perspective

(v.29-30)

The message opens with a sense of calming perspective. Do not fear. You are graced of God. Her very sense of humility has turned away in surprised fear at what this angel has said. It is not that she fears the presence of the angel; she wonders at the meaning of the greeting. So the angel reassures her that God has not come with a message of judgment, but one of surprise and blessing. If the content of the message is going to be clear, it must arrive at home in a heart unshadowed by fear.

Its Person

(v.31-32)

Here is the announcement. You are going to have a child. Here are the jewels of truth about this child. Here are mysteries that baffle the brightest minds and thrill truth loving hearts.

In His true humanity, He will have a human conception and birth (v.31). He will be a human son. He will have a human name, Jesus (Joshua, in Hebrew). This is not some angelic or spirit being coming into the world via the channel of human birth. This will be a truly human baby. His name will connect Him with the great leader, Joshua. When Moses, the Law-giver could not enter the land because of failure, Joshua crossed the river and brought the people into their promised heritage. It reminds me so much that what the Law could not do because it was weak and powerless, Jesus, our Joshua has done. He has crossed the river for us and led us over it and is bringing us into the fullness of all that God's covenants promised.

In His supreme deity, He will be more than just another human baby with a spectacular birth (v.32a). He will be more than just Mary's son, He will be the Most High's Son. He is God. He will be great because inside the living dust of a true man will dwell the infinite Presence of God the Son. Notice the distinction made: she will give birth to a human son, but He will be declared the Son of God. Paul picks this up in Romans 1:3-4. Imagine what this would have meant for Mary! I am going to have a son and He will be God's Son *in a way no one ever was or ever will be again*.

But, O His sovereign majesty (v.32b-33)! Mary's son would be human. He would be God. And He will forever be God's High King ruling in sovereign majesty on David's throne. If she thought the words of the greeting and wonder of the grace were worth pondering, what about these words? There is almost a subtle irony in Luke's writing. "You thought that angels and greetings were amazing, listen to this!"

In these words God summarizes almost all that the New Testament is going to unfold about Jesus Christ. He is human, born a baby from a mother's womb. He is God, Divine, eternal and great. He is the King, majestic, covenant fulfilling and eternal.

Now I must ask a question of this text. Why is Jesus portrayed as ruling over the house of Jacob? Why *Jacob*? Simply this: Jacob always stands for the unmerited mercies and electing love of God for sneaking, slithering sinners. "You worm, Jacob" in one text. "Jacob have I loved" in another. All of this has happened in order that men and women and boys and girls – we who are truly worms, yet loved and chosen- might be happy citizens of this holy and never ending kingdom.

Its Process

Mary now asks a question. This is not a question of unbelief, but one of belief. This is not as though she were saying, "This not possible. This cannot happen." Rather, her question is one about method. Since she is a virgin, how will God bring this about? It is correctly translated, "How will", not "How can." She is expressing her belief while asking about how this is going to come about. Remember, whatever process God is going to use, she will have to experience. "I believe it will take place: please tell me how."

The answer comes most mysterious. It gathers up the hovering Presence of the Spirit at creation and Pillar in the Wilderness and the Cloud on Mount Sinai and the Glory in the Temple in Isaiah at brings them into the womb of young virgin and implants there the very life of God. It is a mystery beyond our ken. We cannot understand how it is possible. But it is what God did.

The end result is "the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God." Notice, what will be born is Holy and is God. There is no sin in Him. He will not receive the sinful nature; He will receive the divine nature. All of the Satanic efforts to corrupt and contaminate the human race and thus thwart the manifest purpose and plan of God, come to naught in the heart beat moments when the Holy Spirit brings into Mary's womb the second Person of the Godhead, Jesus.

Its Pattern

Ah the wonderful mercies of God. Here is encouragement and motivation for a young heart. He tells of Elizabeth's pregnancy. Mary does not know of it for Elizabeth stayed in seclusion until the 5th month when no one could laugh and doubt, when she would be obviously pregnant. It is a heartening spring from which Mary may drink encouragement. If the barren in her old age can have a child, then this is not as difficult as it sounds.

Its Power

Lest Mary have to wonder, here comes the Word of God actually imparting grace to her humble heart. Listen to these words, "Nothing is impossible with God." Literally, it says, "Not one of these words is impossible with God." I know this seems like the obvious. And I reckon that I should not be so sharply critical of Christian slogans and bumper sticker theology. But at least (or at most) this true and this is Truth. Not one word of what God says He will do is impossible for Him to do.

Your Redeemer Comes

Matthew 1:18-25

Joseph is quite an enigma in Scripture. The whole of what we know about him is revealed in a few short paragraphs. He is not mentioned at all after Jesus enters his ministry. Although it is not sure, most believe that Joseph died early in Jesus' life. So the Scriptural account of his life is brief.

Yet, he was chosen to be the man to rear the Lord Jesus. He would be the one to love Jesus' mother, to nurture and admonish Jesus as he grew up, to read Him God's Word and teach Him a trade and life's lessons. We know that Joseph lived long enough to pass on his carpentry skills and to be identified in the community as Jesus' father. He is usually portrayed as a simple man. I am inclined to differ with that view and quite sharply so. Yes, he was a humble and seemingly, a reserved man. But no one simple minded could be faced with the enormous responsibility that he had. Whatever his personality was—however he carried himself with his family and friends—we know that this man was deeply godly and filled with grace and character.

¹⁸ Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. ²⁰ But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." ²² All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:

²³ "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel" (which means, God with us). ²⁴ When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, ²⁵ but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.

The Character of God's Man

(v.18-19)

Joseph is a man with a problem. How he handles this is going to be a real test of his character. These verses give us just briefly what he faced. He was engaged to a young lady. They were betrothed. They had taken their marriage vows in front of witnesses and promised to give themselves solely to each other. The marriage supper and the consummation were joyous events yet in the future. Now he is confronted with the fact that his betrothed is pregnant. In fact, she claims to have conceived by the Holy Spirit. He knows *he* is not the father. But how could *this* be possible?

What an agony he is in. When he reads Deuteronomy 22:13-30, he finds that Mary is to be taken out and stoned if he brings a public accusation against her. Yet he loves her. The text here shows us what kind of man he was.

HE WAS A RIGHTEOUS MAN. He has been justified by faith. He was a man who was committed in principle and practice to doing what was right. He was a man of integrity and honesty. He had a deep sense of the holiness and character of God. He was someone who believes that God was pleased when his people are holy.

HE WAS A MERCIFUL MAN. He did not want to expose Mary to public humiliation. He loved and cared for her. In spite of his rights in this situation to humiliate her and to protect his reputation, he was moved with mercy.

His purity and mercy met one another in the best solution he could think of. He would give her a writ of divorcement, but do it privately and secretly. In this way, he would not partake in what appeared to be her sin and would not be identified with it while not subjecting her to the painful humiliation of a public trial. But still he was considering what he should do. Character is both developed and displayed in the fire of testing. What we are made of inwardly and spiritually is exercised and exhibited by agonizing decisions. The hotter the fire and purer the gold.

The Communication of God's Word

(v.20-23)

The Bible says that after he considered this solution, an angel came to him. At the point that he is about to make a mistake, God gives clear and unmistakable direction for Joseph's life. This godly man is going to be sustained in his faith by the receiving of God's Word. Truth is our great need in the midst of perplexing problems.

"Do not be afraid; do not hesitate to take Mary as your wife." Ah, here it is. Have courage and conviction to do what is right. Sometimes we just simply have to have the courage to do what the Bible tells us to do. We are a fearful and hesitant lot. We can think of all sorts of things that can go wrong. Fear and hesitancy are the mortal enemies of godly obedience.

Here is what is actually going on. God tells Joseph the facts that he would otherwise not know. The Bible gives us the perspective on life. It tells us what is actually going on. Now notice, I did not say it gives us *a* perspective on live. Rather, the Bible is *the* perspective—because it is God's perspective.

God had purposed that Mary would bear a son, that he would be named Jesus and that He would save His people from sin. This is God's purpose for this infant boy. We can only know God's purposes by coming to His Word. Yes, people may help us—but they will help us best in direct relation to how of the Word is in their help.

In the prophecy of Isaiah 7:14, God had spoken a promise. Believing that promise enabled Joseph to do what he did. He watched the very details of what God said unfold before his very eyes.

A virgin conceived - His lovely maiden was expecting and that is what this text said would happen. As astounding and unbelievable as that may be, it still was so.

A child born - This was still yet a future realization for him. He had several long months to wait to see this part of God's promise fulfilled.

A Name understood - This child would gather up all the Emmanuel texts in the Old Testament and be the reality they pointed to. He would truly be "God with us."

This is what sustains the faith of all believing people. We hear God's promises and believe them to be true and live in the great realities they are. Some we will see fulfilled quickly; others will wait months and for some, it may well be long into eternity.

The Commitment to God's Method

(v.24-25)

All of these phrases drive home the importance of obedience. As foolish and scandalous as his actions were going to appear to be, he still committed himself to simply doing what God had said. In doing so, his character demonstrated itself in godly conduct. He wakes up and did right away what the angel had told him to do. There was no longer any struggle or turmoil or anguish. His love for God and his love for Mary met in an immediate obedience.

We need this in a real way today. Today, Christians want lots of time to begin to think about maybe obeying God if we understand all the ramifications. We ponder it. We predict what will be all its outcomes. Sometimes, loved ones, we just simply have to hear God's Word and do it. We have to do this individually and corporately. You, each of you, ought to have an internal commitment that says, "When I hear what God's Word tells me to do, I will do it." And we as a church must do that as well.

Matthew makes a point that Joseph and Mary did not consummate their marriage until after Jesus was born. For 9 months, they lived as man and wife and yet chose not to enjoy their physical union until later. We do not know whether this was required or not. We do know that the testimony of Scripture points to their sacrificial obedience.

Joseph committed himself to obedience all the way to the end. When the child was born, Joseph and Mary named Him Jesus. Their commitment to God's method of obedience carried them all the way through in every detail.

Conclusion

The response of Mary ought to ring in our hearts and lives as well. What she says here is faith, believing God in an obeying way (v.45).

- Servanthood -She here declares that she is utterly at God's disposal. She is a servant. She is willing to give up her rights to bow to the will of God.
- Submission - Servants submit. This is the common expression today, "Make it so." May God's will be done on earth, in her life, as it is done in heaven and declared by God's messenger from heaven.
- What a couple this is. Mary, a servant submitting herself to be at God's disposal and Joseph, a just and merciful man committing himself to immediate, sacrificial and complete obedience.
- We can observe that this is how all God's people have their character developed and displayed.
 - There comes a problem which tests and tempts us.
 - We go to God's Word to find God's precepts, perspectives, purposes and promises.
 - We obey from the heart immediately and completely and sacrificially.
- Joseph is an example of justice and mercy coming together. And that is precisely what the cross is. It is the justice of God being satisfied so that the mercy of God may be exercised. At the cross, Jesus received God's justice so that we can receive God's mercy.
- It is our obedience that we must examine. Joseph left us a marvelous example to follow. Let us examine ourselves to see if we are committed to obeying God.
- Jesus has come to save his people from their sins. Has he saved you from yours? Will you not this morning trust Him and bow to Him and be saved?

May God give us grace to be humble servants who submit with delighted joy to this son of Mary, this Son of God, this High King, our great Savior and eternal Sovereign.