**Bethel Christian Fellowship**

**Fair Lawn, NJ**

**The Day Mary Met Gabriel**

**Luke 1:26-38**

**December 8, 2024**

When it comes to the mother of our Lord, most people tend to go in one of two extremes. Many of us Protestants fail to give her the esteem she deserves, except, of course, when we recite the Apostles Creed. On the other hand, the Roman Catholics have elevated her to a status that goes far beyond the teaching of Scripture. Nobody would be more surprised than Mary about what they are saying about her.

According to them, Mary was born without a fallen nature and was therefore free from original sin (“Immaculate Conception”). She remained a virgin her entire life (“Perpetual Virginity”). She never died; instead, she was taken directly into heaven in bodily form (“Bodily Assumption”). The Roman Catholic Church now regards Mary as a co-mediator (or “Mediatrix”). They’ve placed her right alongside her Son; the gateway to heaven, they say, goes “through Mary to Christ.”

But the real Mary of Scripture is a much different Mary. Yes, she should be honored, but that’s because she’s a remarkable woman of faith. She was a sinner (like you and me), who believed God’s promise and yielded to His will, so that He performed a miracle in her life, and so honored her as the mother of our Savior.

J. C. Ryle was surely right when he said, “No woman was ever so highly honored as the mother of our Lord. It is evident that one woman only, out of the countless millions of the human race, could be the means whereby God could be ‘manifest in the flesh,’ and the Virgin Mary had *the mighty privilege* of being that one” (Expository Thoughts on the Gospels: St. Luke).

In the verses before us today, Luke tells the story of how Mary met Gabriel and first heard the news that she would have “*the mighty privilege*” of giving birth to God’s only begotten Son (1:26-38). There’s little doubt that his account came from Mary herself; Luke has taken great care to give us *her* perspective regarding her role in the greatest event in history. By describing her humility (1:29), and her response to the angel’s message (1:34), and her complete surrender to God’s will (1:38), Luke tells us all we really need to know about Mary.

**A. The Humble Setting (1:26-27):** “*In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin’s name was Mary.*” In light of the preceding verses, we can see that Gabriel has been kept busy (1:5-25). This is the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy, that is, from the time she conceived John the Baptist. Gabriel had already foretold John’s birth to Zechariah (her husband). Now he brings his second birth announcement, only this time to a young virgin in Nazareth named Mary.

Nazareth was a relatively obscure village, with a population of no more than 400-500 people. It was never mentioned in the Old Testament (as is Bethlehem). Nor did it have the best reputation. Nazareth was located in “Galilee of the Gentiles” (Matt. 4:15). The people in Judah despised the Jews in Galilee because of their close contacts with the Gentile population there. They especially despised the people of Nazareth; when Nathaniel, for example, heard that Jesus was from Nazareth, he asked, “Can anything good come from there? (John 1:46).

Since Jewish girls married young, Mary would have been a teenager when the angel appeared to her. She was a virgin, pledged to be married to a man of the same town, who would have been a village carpenter (Matt. 13:55). Apparently, both of them were poor (Luke 2:24; Lev. 12:8).

No one from Nazareth ever would have thought there was anything special about either one of them (nor would anyone else). “So as God brings His Son into the world,” writes one author, “He begins with a place that is small and people who are obscure, which is really a pattern of His (1 Cor. 1:26-29)” (Dale Ralph Davis, Luke: The Year of the Lord’s Favor).

**B. Gabriel’s Greeting (1:28):** “*The angel went to her and said, ‘Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.*”The opening words of Gabriel’s greeting have been translated in the Latin Vulgate version of the Bible as, “*Ave, gratia plena*” (Hail, full of grace). Roman Catholics take this to mean that Mary had received an overabundance of grace that she could then bestow upon others. But the context indicates that the opposite is true. Mary is “highly favored” because she is the *recipient* of God’s grace, not the *giver* of grace. The angel then adds, “*The Lord is with you*,” which also assured her of God’s gracious help in the role He had chosen for her. Mary, therefore, is a pattern for all believers who are the recipients of God’s unmerited favor, or free grace. She was never intended to an intermediate source of grace!

**C. Mary’s Response (1:29):** “*Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be*.” Mary knew that she was a young woman of lowly social position. Why, then, would an angel come to greet her? How it was possible for her to be addressed in such lofty terms? In what way was she “highly favored” by God? How was God with her? Mary’s response reveals her humility and honesty before God. All of this came as a complete surprise.

**D. Gabriel’s Announcement (1:30-33):** “*But the angel said to her, ‘Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of His father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.*” This is the best news that Mary ever could have heard. It’s what all pious Jewish women would have desired: to be the mother of the promised Messiah. This prophetic announcement unfolds in three parts.

**1**. She will conceive and bear a son, which is the ultimate fulfillment of what the Lord promised through the prophet Isaiah, “*The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call his name Immanuel*,” which means “God with us” (Isa. 7:14; Matt. 1:21). Further, Mary is told to name this boy, “Jesus,” which is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew name, “*Yeshua*” which means “*YHWH saves*” (Matt. 1:21.)

**2.** He will be great and will be called *the Son of the Most High*. In Genesis 14:18, Melchizedek, the King of Salem, first identifies Yahweh as “*God Most High*.” Later the “Most High” became a common title for “The Lord,” especially in the Psalms; “*I will give thanks to the LORD because of his righteousness; and I will sing praise to the name of the LORD Most High*” (Ps. 7:17). Whereas John is the “*prophet of the Most High*” (Luke 1:76), Jesus is the “*Son of the Most High*.” It now becomes clear that Gabriel is announcing both the deity and humanity of Jesus. As Mary’s Son, He is a human being; as the “*Son of the Highest*,” He is “*the Son of God*” (Luke 1:35). This is the fulfillment of yet another of Isaiah’s prophecies: “*For unto us a child is* ***born***(His humanity), *unto us a Son is* ***given*** (His deity)” (Isaiah 9:6).

**3.** God will give Him the throne of David and He will reign over Israel forever. His kingdom will never end. This would be the fulfillment of the Messianic hope, the centerpiece of the Davidic Covenant (2 Sam. 7:11-13, 16; Ps. 89:4, 29, 35-37; 132:11; Isa. 9:6-7; 16:5; Jer. 23:5-6).

**E. Mary’s Surprise (1:34):** “’*How will this be,’ Mary asked the angel, ‘since I am a virgin?’*” Previously, when Gabriel had told Zechariah that Elizabeth would have a son, he had asked, “*How can I be sure of this?*” *I am an old man and my wife is well along in years*” (1:18). That question was an expression of unbelief; Mary’s question, however, is different. She clearly understood what she’s been told *would happen* and would happen *soon*; but she didn’t know *how* it would happen. She knew the facts of life. Her marriage to Joseph was still several months away. In the words of Wiersbe, “She believed the promise, but she didn’t understand the performance. How could a virgin give birth to a child?” (The Bible Exposition Commentary).

**F. Gabriel’s Explanation (1:35-37):** “*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. 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. For nothing is impossible with God*.”

Gabriel’s reply is couched in the form of poetic parallelism. Thus, when he announces that “*the Holy Spirit will come upon you*” (v. 35a), he means “*the power of the Most High will overshadow you*” (v. 35b). The word used for “overshadow” is elsewhere translated to “envelop” (Luke 9:34, NIV). It is used of God’s presence resting on the tabernacle in the cloud (Ex. 40:35), and of metaphorically protecting His people (Ps. 91:4). The point is that “God’s powerful presence will rest upon Mary, so that she will bear a son who will be the Son of God” (I. Howard Marshall, Commentary on Luke). Jesus will be supernaturally conceived, and thus protected from Mary’s sinful nature being transmitted to Him.

The miracle of Christmas is that Jesus’ humanity and messiahship were derived from Mary, while His sinlessness and deity were derived from the Holy Spirit. As a result of the virgin’s conception, Jesus Christ is simultaneously Mary’s Son and God’s Son, human and divine, the promised Savior of the world. To confirm *all* of this, Gabriel seals the announcement with more good news: God had given Zechariah and Elizabeth a miraculous pregnancy as well; therefore, “*Nothing is impossible with God*” (v. 37).

**G. Mary’s Submission (1:38):** “’*I am the Lord’s servant,’ Mary answered, ‘May it be to me as you have said.’* *Then the angel left her*.”Mary’s response at the end of this one, brief conversation should win our immediate admiration. It is a model response for *any* follower of Christ. Once God’s purpose and plan had been explained to her, she never hesitated. She was entirely at God’s disposal. Yes, it was a “mighty privilege” for her; yet it was a costly responsibility. It involved a willingness to become pregnant before she was married and expose herself to the painful shame and criticism of being thought of as an immoral woman.

In Mary’s world, her betrothal to Joseph was a legally binding contract. It could be broken only by a formal process of divorce. Betrothed partners were referred to as “husband” and “wife,” and unfaithfulness during this period was considered adultery. Under the Mosaic law, the punishment was death by stoning.

Mary was being asked to risk everything that would have given stability to her life. She had no idea how Joseph would have reacted to the news, nor could she have possibly known the challenges she would face in the months ahead. Yet she submitted to God’s Word and believed His promise, calling herself a *bondservant* of the Lord. Gabriel’s mission has been successful, so we are not surprised to read, “*Then the angel left her*.” God had intervened to cause the impossible to happen. A virgin would conceive a child, and that child would be without sin.

Mary’s response illustrates two important principles: **First**, God is always in control – regardless of the circumstances. Mary *never* could have imagined the challenges she would face when Gabriel crashed into her world and first announced the Lord’s plan for her life. She *never* could have been prepared for just how difficult her life now would become. Almost *nobody* is going to believe her story when she starts “showing,” and nobody is going to be sending out invitations for a baby shower. As I’ve mentioned, she could only imagine how Joseph would take the news (Matt. 1:18-21). Nevertheless, she submitted to God’s will for her life and trusted Him to work out the details. This is especially noteworthy when we consider the fact the Mary was a very young teenager (no more than 13 to 14 years of age).

**Second**, *faith* is a decision that is independent from our *feelings*. Mary’s response to God’s Word was not “*May it be to me because I have peace about it*;” but rather, “*May it be to me as you have said*” (Luke 1:38). In the words of Swindoll, “She made a conscious decision to accept her circumstances because she trusted in the character of God. She didn’t wait for her conflicted emotions to settle down. She didn’t ask how God would work out all the details before submitting to Him. She didn’t ask for time to think it over. She made a decision to trust in the Lord’s power and goodness despite the inevitable hardship that lie ahead” (Swindoll’s Living Insights: New Testament Commentary on Luke).

Perhaps what’s most significant about Mary is not so much the question that she asked, but the questions she didn’t ask. Questions like: “But what will Joseph think?” “What will my friends think?” What about the disgrace?” “What will happen to me?” These questions, so natural under the circumstances, never crossed her mind. Or, if they did, she quickly dismissed them, and instead accepted God’s will: “*I am the Lord’s servant. May it be to me as you have said*.” If we revere Mary for any reason, let it be for her remarkable example of faith and submission to the will of God for her life. It’s a model response for *any* follower of Christ!