

The Gospel According to Luke

“Let It Be” Chapter 1:26-38

Introduction

Mary is a difficult character to study. We have our many preconceived ideas about her. Some of us have worshipped her, or at least prayed to her. We see her (and I mean this sincerely) more as a statue than a sister in the Lord. Who was this “[maidservant of the Lord?](#)”

According to the best historical sources she was a teenager - no more than fifteen years old at the time and maybe as young as twelve. As with all poor peasant girls, she was illiterate and her knowledge of the Scriptures was very limited. The best she could hope for was to marry humbly and give birth to numerous poor children, never travelling more than a few miles from her home in Nazareth.

Speaking of Nazareth: It was a non-place. It was not even directly mentioned in the Old Testament or in the accounts of the famous Jewish historian Josephus. It was a shoddy, corrupt halfway stop between the port cities of Tyre and Sidon; it was overrun by Gentiles and Roman soldiers. When guileless, straight-talking Nathaniel mentioned Nazareth, he said, “[Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?](#)” (John 1:46).

Young Mary of Nazareth was betrothed. Betrothal, sometimes called espousal, is a legally-binding engagement. The groom and bride did not live with each other, certainly did not have sexual relations; but from their betrothal forward they were considered husband and wife. A divorce would be necessary to break their betrothal. The betrothal always lasted for a minimum of one year to allow at least a full nine months to pass. It was to make certain that the bride was a virgin at the time of the betrothal and remained so until her wedding night. If

she was discovered to be pregnant before the year ended, then it became known that she was an adulteress.

The punishment for adultery was the death penalty, though it was no longer carried-out. If not death, disowning: For the shame and guilt such a pregnancy brought upon the family, the daughter might be disowned - turned-out into the streets to make her living as the prostitute she had proven herself to be.

It was in this social context that Mary was told she would conceive and bring forth a Son. **What we look back upon with awe was an awful trial of enormous magnitude.**

Nevertheless, it was a promise to her from God – one that would be accomplished through God's power. Mary's response was prayer; not prayer to escape, or even endure her trial, but to *embrace* the promise and be *enabled* by God's power.

God's power... His promises... Our prayers: These are things believers can identify with as we study the announcement of Jesus' birth to the virgin Mary. We'll organize our thoughts around two points: #1 No Promise Of God's Is Void Of His Power, and #2 No Prayer Of Yours Should Avoid God's Power.

#1 No Promise Of God's
Is Void Of His Power
(v26-37)

In the midst of this amazing account the angel Gabriel made a statement that stands alone and reverberates throughout eternity as a spiritual principle. It's what he said in verse thirty-seven, "For with God nothing will be impossible."

There are a few other ways in which we could accurately translate his original words into English:

Luke 1:37 "For no promise from God will be impossible of fulfilment." (1912 Weymouth New Testament)

Luke 1:37 "For everything spoken by God is possible." (Word English Bible).

Luke 1:37 For no word from God shall be void of power. (1901 American Standard Version).

Gabriel appeared to Mary and made her a very specific promise. It was and remains unique in the whole history of the human race. Although there were other miraculous births, other supernatural births, there has only ever been one virgin birth.

Mary's promise was specific and unique; but it also teaches us about all God's other promises. **All** His promises, every one of them, made as they are to you and I in Scripture, are included in Gabriel's summation that **no** word of God – **no** promise from God – shall be void of His power to accomplish it! God's promises – all of them – come with the power necessary for their fulfillment.

Nothing could be more encouraging! When I'm reading God's Word, reading the Bible, and there is a **promise**, it is also the **power** to enable me. I'm getting ahead of myself, but the word used by Gabriel for "**power**" is the Greek word, *dunamis*, from which we get our English word, *dynamite*. God's Word wants to explode *into* and *through* your life.

Gabriel's appearance and announcement were certainly an explosion in first century Nazareth.

Luke 1:26 Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth,

In the previous verses, Luke had described the supernatural pregnancy of Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist. It was now the "**sixth month**" of her pregnancy. "Gabriel" was dispatched from heaven to lowly "**Nazareth**" of "**Galilee**." It wasn't Jerusalem; it wasn't Rome. It was nowhere! It was an unlikely place for the King of the Jews to be born, the last place you and I would choose.

Luke 1:27 to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary.

Mary was somewhere in her year of betrothal, preparing for her wedding to "**Joseph**" and keeping herself pure. Joseph was a descendant of King "**David**." This is important because, even though

Joseph was not the biological father of Jesus, He would be able to trace His lineage through His step-dad back to David.

I remind you that Luke was a medical doctor – maybe with a specialty in obstetrics. When he used the word “*virgin*,” which he did twice in this verse, he knew what he was talking about.

Luke 1:28 And having come in, the angel said to her, “Rejoice, highly favored *one*, the Lord *is* with you; blessed *are* you among women!”

“*Come in*” means Gabriel entered her house. Did he knock? Or simply appear? We don’t know! He did whatever was appropriate to his mission.

Angels have great perspective, seeing they inhabit heaven. Gabriel greeted Mary with heaven’s perspective on her assignment:

1. She should “*rejoice*” at being chosen to serve.
2. She was “*highly favored*” means that her assignment would be accompanied by the strength of God’s grace sufficient for her task.
3. “*The Lord is with you*” is literally, “*the Lord with you*,” and is a prayer of Gabriel’s for God’s blessings to come upon her.
4. She was “*blessed... among women*” because every Jewish woman hoped to be the mother of the Messiah promised in Genesis to Eve.

Over the centuries folks have turned these words into a prayer to Mary – “Hail, Mary! Full of grace; the Lord is with thee.” If anything, it was a prayer *for* her – not *to* her.

Gabriel’s greeting is essentially a job description. She had been chosen to serve God and would receive all the grace needed for her service.

That is true of every servant assigned a task by God. You serve by God’s assignment, and can be sure of His sufficient grace.

Luke 1:29 But when she saw *him*, she was troubled at his saying, and considered what manner of greeting this was.

“Startled,” “confused,” and “perplexed” are alternative words that describe Mary’s initial reaction of being “troubled.” Gabriel’s words were a summary; he hadn’t yet told her what the assignment was.

There’s a lesson in Gabriel’s greeting. Your specific task is of secondary importance to the fact that God has called you to perform it and will enable and empower you to do so.

Luke 1:30 Then the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.”

Mary was afraid. Gabriel told her to stop being afraid. “Found favor with God” refers to what he is about to tell her. Her service would be a source of spiritual rejoicing.

Luke 1:31 And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name JESUS.

This seems to refer Mary to a famous passage in the writings of the prophet Isaiah, which says,

Isaiah 7:14 Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel.

Isaiah called the virgin-born Son “Immanuel,” meaning *God with us*. Gabriel called this same Son “Jesus,” meaning *The Lord is salvation*. Jesus was and is Immanuel – God with us, God and man, to bring salvation to the human race.

It became clear to Mary that Gabriel was talking about Immanuel as he continued his description:

Luke 1:32 He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David.

Luke 1:33 And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end.”

These are quotes and references from the Old Testament that describe the promised Messiah of Israel. Immanuel would be both “Son of the highest,” Son of God, and a descendant of “His father David.” He would fulfill all God’s promises to “Jacob,” shorthand for

the nation of Israel; He would establish and rule over a “kingdom” forever.

We can't be absolutely certain that Mary was thinking about the verse in Isaiah; but she reacted to the angel as if she fully understood she would be the “[virgin](#)” who would fulfill it, because she said,

[Luke 1:34](#) Then Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I do not know a man?”

When Zacharias asked Gabriel a question about how his wife, Elizabeth, could conceive, being too old, the angel struck him deaf and dumb for his unbelief. Why did Mary get a pass?

Her question was not from unbelief. Quite the opposite: She believed Gabriel, believed she would conceive. But she wanted to know how to regulate her conduct. She was a virgin; she only knew of one way to become pregnant... How should she proceed?

Gabriel described the process:

[Luke 1:35](#) And the angel answered and said to her, “*The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God.*”

Mary need do nothing to become pregnant. The conception of the “[Son of God](#),” of Jesus, would be a miracle.

I have no description for you of this process other than what is said here. Mary became pregnant by the Holy Spirit's creative action without any sexual relationship. Those who want to argue that a virgin conception is impossible are really saying that God cannot do miracles.

Jesus Himself worked miracles. It is not at all unusual to affirm that He entered the world miraculously. He rose from the dead miraculously, and He ascended into heaven miraculously; it only follows that His entrance into the world was equally miraculous.

What scholars and theologians call the “[Doctrine of the Virgin Birth](#)” is a huge subject. It comes to this: Jesus' humanity was sinless and the

circumstances of his birth call attention to the miracle that was involved when Mary, a sinner (Luke 1:47), gave birth to one who was not “in Adam” as she was, nor therefore needed a Savior as she did. Rather, Jesus was destined through the maintained sinlessness of His unflawed human nature to become the perfect sacrifice for human sins, and so the Savior of His mother and of the rest of the Church with her.

Gabriel gave Mary a faith-builder:

Luke 1:36 Now indeed, Elizabeth your relative has also conceived a son in her old age; and this is now the sixth month for her who was called barren.

Elizabeth had decided to keep herself hidden for the first five months of her pregnancy. While Mary may have heard the strange reports that Zacharias had seen a vision and was promised a son, no one knew yet if it were true. It was true and, in a verse or two, Mary would go to greet Elizabeth and have her own encounter with Gabriel confirmed.

Gabriel’s specific message was ended and he took the opportunity to share an eternal principle:

Luke 1:37 For with God nothing will be impossible.”

Luke 1:37 “For no promise from God will be impossible of fulfilment.” (1912 Weymouth New Testament)

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We stand in awe, **but this was awful!** It was an awful trial that would continue Mary’s entire earthly life. Decades after the birth of Jesus, when He was going about ministering, He was considered by many the illegitimate son of Mary and Joseph. In other words, His mother was still considered an adulteress. Add to that the prophecy given to Mary at the dedication of Jesus in the Temple that a “**sword shall pierce through [her] own soul**” (Luke 2:35). Add to that the fact that Jesus at certain points in His ministry treated His mother and brothers

and sisters as if they were no different than any other sinners needing salvation. Add to that that she would see her son crucified.

There are many happenstances, many circumstances, that seem awful; some last your lifetime. They are your place of service; you are chosen for them; you can expect God's grace to be sufficient in them.

You can go through life trying to end your trials; or simply trying to endure them. God would rather you embrace them and know that His promises enable and empower you in and through them.

Mary was definitely going to be the virgin birth mother of Jesus. How would she respond? She'd pray and say, "*Let it be!*"

#2 No Prayer Of Yours
Should Avoid God's Power
(v38)

Luke 1:38 Then Mary said, "Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.

"**Maidservant**" sounds a little respectable. It's a politically correct term. It's like saying you are a "domestic engineer" instead of "housewife."

"**Maidservant**" means female slave. It was Mary's perspective on her life. She was God's slave. Whatever her Master told her to do, she set out to do it.

Until we understand our life does not belong to us, we will never experience the enabling, empowering dynamite of God. We're not volunteers; we're menservants and maidservants – male and female slaves. It's a perspective that changes your awful trial into awe.

Mary was praying; not to Gabriel, but to God in Gabriel's presence. Her final words are powerful: "*Let it be to me according to your word.*"

God's Word is never void of His power. Why, then, are our lives so defeated? *Because sometimes we want to avoid God's power!* We

do not want to embrace our service, especially if it is difficult. We want out, or around, what God is calling us to go through. It's not that God's Word is void, but that we avoid it.

Conclusion

Mary may have been going through Isaiah at the synagogue. I say that because her prayer reminds you of this famous passage, in Isaiah 55:8-13,

Isaiah 55:8 "For My thoughts *are* not your thoughts,
Nor *are* your ways My ways," says the LORD.

Isaiah 55:9 "For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
So are My ways higher than your ways,
And My thoughts than your thoughts.

Isaiah 55:10 "For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven,
And do not return there,
But water the earth,
And make it bring forth and bud,
That it may give seed to the sower
And bread to the eater,

Isaiah 55:11 So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth;
It shall not return to Me void,
But it shall accomplish what I please,
And it shall prosper *in the thing* for which I sent it.

Isaiah 55:12 "For you shall go out with joy,
And be led out with peace;
The mountains and the hills
Shall break forth into singing before you,
And all the trees of the field shall clap *their* hands.

Isaiah 55:13 Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress tree,
And instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree;
And it shall be to the LORD for a name,
For an everlasting sign *that* shall not be cut off."

God's Word comes to make us fruitful **wherever we find ourselves planted.**

It is never void of His power... But we must not avoid it!