



Conceived

God involves humanity in the redemptive plan of His creation.

LUKE 1:26-38

Most of us look forward to the Christmas season. We look forward to seeing family and friends, but the Christmas season can also be lonely. We can be in a crowd but still be alone. The good news of the gospel is that God has a place for everyone in His redemptive plan; He uses ordinary people in that plan. Mary's story reminds us that God invites people to be a part of bringing about the redemption of His creation.

**How can the Christmas season heighten anxiety and produce fear?
How can a person feel lonely even in the middle of a large crowd?**

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

LUKE 1:26-80

Courtship and marriage in the first-century Jewish world involved a different process than in our society. First, it was common for marriages to be prearranged between families. Rarely were marriages arranged at differing levels of social strata. This would explain both Joseph and Mary coming from a position of poverty to present an offering at the birth of Jesus (Luke 2:24).

Second, marriage began with a process known as betrothal. Similar to engagement, betrothal preceded the formal marriage and bound the couple together in many ways, though not sexually. Unlike engagement today, betrothal was binding and had the legal force of marriage that could be dissolved only by divorce (Matt. 1:18-19).

The bride was prepared for the wedding itself by bathing, anointing, and being clothed with special garments. She was escorted from her father's house to the accompaniment of song, dance, musical instruments, and torchlight. Blessings were pronounced on the new couple, and the marriage contract was read. This led to seven days of festivity following the ceremony. Only following the ceremony was the marriage to be consummated.

In Roman society, Augustus passed legislation that encouraged marriage and childbearing. It established a process of divorce that went before the public court and required the presence of witnesses. Under Jewish law, both an adulterer and adulteress could be under a death sentence for committing adultery, which would have included the betrothal period (Deut. 22:23-24). On the other hand, the betrayed party could issue a certificate of divorce to the unfaithful partner (Deut. 24:1). Mary would have understood the ramifications of being pregnant prior to her official wedding day with Joseph.

Read Luke 1:26-38, underlining words and phrases that point to Jesus' identity. What role did knowing Jesus' identity play in Mary's willingness to be used by God?

EXPLORE THE TEXT

THE GREETING (LUKE 1:26-29)

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.

VERSES 26-27

The *sixth month* is a reference to the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy with John the Baptist (Luke 1:36). The connection between the pregnancy of Elizabeth and the future pregnancy of Mary was tied together by God's promise to send His Messiah.

The *angel Gabriel* had previously appeared to Zechariah in the temple to announce John's birth (Luke 1:19) and appeared again in *Nazareth* to a young *virgin* named Mary. Nazareth was a small town in Galilee, north of Judea and Samaria. It was an unremarkable town with a shady reputation. One of Jesus' own disciples would remark, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" (John 1:46). Jerusalem and Nazareth may have seemed worlds apart in cultural importance, but they were tied together by redemption's story.

The text identifies three important characteristics of Mary. First, she was a virgin. The Gospel writers were clear that Mary had never had a relationship with a man (Matt. 1:20-21; Luke 1:31-32,34), and Matthew connected this fact with Old Testament prophecy from Isaiah 7:14. Second, the text mentioned that Mary was *betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph*. The word *betrothed* is used for the betrothal process common in that day. Third, the text indicated that she was marrying into the *house of David*. Jesus was a member of the royal line of David. This is important because of the promise given in Luke 1:32-33.

DID YOU KNOW?

The Jewish custom was for girls to marry in their early teens. Boys typically married around the age of eighteen to twenty.

VERSES 28-29

Gabriel greeted Mary then described her as a ***favored one***. This word in Greek contains the usual word for God's grace but is intensified to mean *highly favored*. The only time this word appears elsewhere in the New Testament is in a reference to the glorious grace of God (Eph. 1:6). It is important to note here that Mary was chosen by God not because of her meritorious work but by the grace of God. Her greatest qualification was not her own righteousness but the fact that ***the Lord*** was with her.

To emphasize the fact that Mary was called by grace rather than her own merit, the gospel writer noted that she was ***greatly troubled at the saying***. Her distress was not merely that an angel had greeted her but rather the news that she was highly favored by God. Those who know they fall short of God's glory are the ones most amazed when God chooses to use them by His grace! Mary wondered ***what sort of greeting this might be***. Deep down, she likely recognized she was unworthy of such a bestowment by God through the angel. Her humility is evident in this portion of the passage.

Why is it important to remember that a person's involvement in God's plans is based on grace rather than merit?

THE DECLARATION (LUKE 1:30-33)

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."

VERSES 30-31

When Gabriel announced John's birth, the angel assured Zechariah that he had no need to be afraid (Luke 1:13). He likewise told Mary: ***do not be afraid***. He again emphasized that Mary had ***found favor with God***. The emphasis was on God's sovereign choice of Mary, not on her human achievement of merit.

After dispelling Mary's fear, the angel announced the specific reason for his visit. Mary would **conceive ... and bear a son**. These two verbs parallel the language in Isaiah 7:14. Because she was a virgin, this would be an even greater miracle than the child given to Elizabeth in her old age. If Mary was distressed by the news that God highly favored her, one can only imagine what she felt as the Lord announced that she would have a child. Isaiah 7:14 had followed this proclamation with the name *Immanuel*, meaning "God with us." Here, the angel gave the specific name **Jesus** to Mary's child. Though *Jesus* (or Joshua in Hebrew) was a common name, it had a great significance to the reason God sent His Son. *Jesus* means "Yahweh saves," and Matthew would note that Jesus would save people from their sins (Matt. 1:21).

How does the name given by Gabriel point to the purpose and role of Jesus?

VERSES 32-33

These verses note three remarkable things about Mary's child. First, the angel predicted **he will be great**. The angel had also announced this of Zechariah and Elizabeth's son, John, but it was qualified with the words, "before the Lord" (Luke 1:15). John's greatness was incomparable to the greatness of Jesus. Instead, the angel followed Jesus' pronouncement of greatness with the description, **the Son of the •Most High**. This was a pronouncement of Jesus as God's own Son, since God gave Mary a child without the means of an earthly father. *The Most High* is a common way Luke referred to God (Luke 1:35,76; 6:35; Acts 7:48). The third remarkable characteristic of Mary's child would be that **the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David**. The Messiah was expected to be of David's family tree (2 Sam. 7:12-16; Ps. 89:29). Not only was Jesus God's Son, but He was David's descendant, qualifying Him to fulfill the Messianic promises of God.

As the Messiah, Jesus would **reign over the house of Jacob forever**. The *house of Jacob* was a term to describe Israel (Ex. 19:3). Every king had reigned only for a season, but the Messianic kingdom would **have no end**. The kingdom of God was designated as being eternal in the Old Testament (Mic. 4:7), and God had promised to

David that He would raise up a descendant who would establish David's line forever (2 Sam. 7:12-13). Jesus fulfilled all of these expectations as the promised Messiah.

Why is it important to view Jesus in the context of the Messianic promises of the Old Testament?

BIBLE SKILL: *Use other Scripture to help understand a Bible passage.*

Look up these passages and compare what was prophesied with what happened with Jesus: Genesis 3:15; Psalm 2:7; Isaiah 7:14; 9:6-7; Numbers 24:17; 2 Samuel 7:12-16. How do these passages help us understand Jesus' identity? What does Jesus' miraculous conception mean to you personally, especially in regard to salvation?

THE QUESTION (LUKE 1:34-37)

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."

VERSE 34

As if the virgin birth was not sufficiently noticed in verse 27, Mary made it clear in verse 34. When the angel announced she would have

a child, she asked, **How will this be?** Physically, it was impossible to have a child because she proclaimed, **I am a virgin.** Mary knew she had not had sexual relations yet, so she wondered how she would have a child. Zechariah had asked for a sign that he and his wife would have a child beyond their childbearing years (Luke 1:18), but the announcement to Mary was even more unbelievable because she was a virgin. An older woman might have a baby, but who ever heard of a virgin conceiving? This was another confirmation that even though both John and Jesus were great, Jesus' birth was unlike any that has ever occurred.

VERSES 35-37

To answer Mary's question about how this would happen, the angel did not turn to physical descriptions but to a spiritual cause. He said, **the Holy Spirit will come upon you.** This is similar wording to Acts 1:8, where the filling of the Spirit would result in the evangelization of the world. It parallels the way the Holy Spirit hovered over the face of the deep in creation. It also recalled the way the presence and glory of God covered the tabernacle in the Old Testament (Ex. 40:35; Ps. 91:4). Jesus' birth was the result of the Spirit's activity. Because of the Spirit's agency, this child would **be called holy—the Son of God.** Without the Spirit's activity, she never would have had the messianic child.

**As fully God and fully man, Jesus alone
was qualified to serve as mediator
between God and humanity.**

As a reminder that **nothing will be impossible with God,** the angel revealed to Mary that her **relative Elizabeth** was in her sixth month of pregnancy. God had already done the impossible in Elizabeth and could do it in a greater way in Mary. Like Mary, we often stumble when trying to explain that Jesus was fully God and yet fully man. As fully God and fully man, Jesus alone was qualified to serve as mediator between God and humanity (1 Tim. 2:5-6). Though He never sinned, He died a sinner's death so that He could bear our sins and exchange His righteousness for ours (2 Cor. 5:21).

How was Jesus a demonstration of God’s power to redeem? How does the announcement by Gabriel support the teaching that Jesus was fully God and fully human?

KEY DOCTRINE: *God the Son*

In His incarnation as Jesus Christ, He was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary (Luke 1:35).

THE COMMITMENT (LUKE 1:38)

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.

VERSE 38

Mary’s response to the angelic announcement of Jesus’ birth demonstrated both humble commitment and willing obedience. In humility she said, ***I am the servant of the Lord***. Who was she to tell God how to run His kingdom? She was merely His servant. In willing obedience, she replied: ***let it be to me according to your word***. Without regard to social cost, possible tension with her betrothed, or any other challenges she might face, she submitted to the Lord’s will.

Mary responded in faith to God’s plan, even when it appeared uncertain or costly. After faithfully delivering the message to Mary, ***the angel departed from her***. The angel would not stay and walk her through the commitment she had made. She would rely upon the One who called her to give her strength and power to endure whatever lay ahead for her as she gave birth to Jesus.

What are some of the costs a person may face as a result of following God’s direction? How do those costs compare to the blessings of following God’s direction in our lives?

APPLY THE TEXT

- God places people in positions to be used by Him.
- Jesus is the promised Messiah who will reign eternal.
- God’s power is seen in His redemptive plan.
- Believers are to humbly submit to God’s purposes.

How is God using your past and position to open doors for you to be involved in His redemptive plan?

How has God demonstrated His power in your life? Who do you know that needs to be encouraged by you sharing how God demonstrated His power to you?

As a group, evaluate your collective commitment to sharing God’s redemptive plan with those who have not heard of Christ. What steps do you need to take to more effectively share God’s redemption?

PRAYER NEEDS
