

“MARY DID YOU KNOW?”  
Isaiah 7:10-16, Hebrews 1:1-13, Luke 1:26-45  
November 28, 2021

Greg Asimakoupoulos tells this interesting account. “In 1983 the First Presbyterian Church of Concord, California was in the headlines. Pastor Leon Thompson had convinced his 500 member congregation to purchase the pornographic theatre adjacent to the church. The community was thrilled by the church's gutsy move. The only catch was that the theater proprietor still had another several months on his lease. For the better part of a year First Presbyterian Church was the landlord collecting rent on a theatre that showed X-rated adult films.

“Willing to be misunderstood and criticized, the church took the heat in order to guarantee that the theatre would be closed down. Within two years the old Galaxy Theatre was the Presbyterian Community Center. Where once degrading sexual fantasies flickered on the big screen, Bible studies and recovery groups now met.

“In the actions of First Presbyterian Church we see a reflection of the incarnation of Jesus Christ. To battle sin head on, he entered into our sinful world and risked rejection and being misunderstood in order to pay the price for our redemption.”<sup>1</sup> I wonder if we could be so bold.

**When God began His plan of Salvation for the world, He did it in a most unusual way.** We heard a bit about it in the Old Testament lesson of Isaiah 7:10-16 today. When God wanted to assure King Ahaz that He was in control of what was going on against Jerusalem, He sent Isaiah to the King with an invitation to ask for any sign, anything, so that God could bring assurance to him.

But Ahaz refused to ask for a sign, so God gave him one of the most unusual signs we could ever imagine – a virgin woman becoming pregnant without the help of a man, and giving birth to a son as the One who would save His people from their sins. It was even more wacky than a church purchasing a pornographic theater. The meaning was misunderstood among the people, however, and the saving would take much more time before its completion. But the beginnings were nonetheless miraculous.

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<sup>1</sup> (PreachingToday.com, *Perfect Illustrations*, [Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2002] pg. 55

You see, **God saw the condition of our souls.** He saw the condition of the world, running amuck and prevalent in sin. God knew that there was no way for humanity to save themselves on their own, for there is nothing great enough that we could ever pay for the atonement of the penalty of our sin. Animal sacrifices did not remove the sin, but put a temporary stop-gap to the condition as the person making the sacrifice symbolically transferred their sin to the animal, and then the animal was killed as a sign of the sins being put to death as well. Yet a permanent resolution to the problem of sin was not possible from human activity. The solution had to come from God.

**God's solution was to send His Son, Jesus, to the earth.** Hebrews 1 describes Jesus' credentials in order to bring about Salvation to the world. As the Son of God, "*He is the one through whom God created the universe, the one whom God has chosen to possess all things at the end. He reflects the brightness of God's glory and is the exact likeness of God's own being, sustaining the universe with His powerful word...*" (1:2-3). No one else has, nor will anyone else have, these credentials. Jesus is the One and only Begotten Son of God, with God from the very beginning, having "*the very nature of God, but He did not think that by force He should try to become equal with God. Instead of this, of His own free will He gave up all He had, and took the nature of a servant. He became like man and appeared in human likeness*" (Philippians 2:6-7).

And how could Jesus be both God and man? How could Jesus be "*greater than the angels*" (Heb. 1:4) while at the same time be lower than the angels? You see, **Jesus had to become like us in every way, except for sin, so that through Him we might be made like Him.** And the way that God designed it that Jesus could become like us, was for the Holy Spirit to impregnate a woman with the DNA of God. God's very essence was implanted in the young virgin so that the child within her would be called holy, the Son of God, not the result of the will of a man, but completely of the will of God.

Listen to how it happened. This is Luke 1:26-38. (READ Luke 1:26-38) (*The rest comes later.*)

Since the angels are God's messengers "*sent by Him to help those who are to receive salvation*" (Hebrews 1:14), the angel Gabriel was sent to invite Mary to do a great work for the Lord. He explained

what God had planned, and invited Mary to be the one whom God would use to bring about the birth of His Son here on the earth.

We're told that "*Mary was deeply troubled by the angel's greeting, and she wondered what his words meant*" (Luke 1:29). **Mary recognized what God was asking of her**, and she knew that there was usually a man involved in the creating of a child. I wonder if she knew about the promise of God to Ahaz that *a virgin would conceive and bear a son...*" (Isaiah 7:14). Young women were not allowed to be trained in the Temple like the men were, so unless she heard it from the local Rabbi of the Temple in Nazareth, or from her parents, it is doubtful that she would know of Isaiah's words.

But Mary knew that God was very creative and had great power to do anything. She would have known about how God saved His people from slavery in Egypt, how whole enemy armies were wiped out miraculously, and how great battles could be won by just a few men. She would have known about Hannah's cry for the Lord to give her children, and how God answered her prayer by enabling her to conceive and give birth to Samuel, who would become the prophet of Israel. Her faith in the Lord would have been great, for Gabriel tells her, "*The Lord is with you and has greatly blessed you!*" (Luke 1:28).

The assurance that "*the Lord is with you*" could have reminded Mary that even the lowliest of persons is known by God and can do great things for God through His presence. **God saw Mary's heart and knew her faith, so she was chosen to become the surrogate mother of God's Son.** It might have been that Mary was given the character of being a very determined person, even in the face of difficulties or opposition. She may have been blessed with being a strong willed woman who had a fierce loyalty to the work of the Lord. In any case, Mary was highly favored by God to perform this task which He wanted her to do.

But listen to how Gabriel presents God's invitation. He starts out by saying, "*God has been gracious to you*" (Luke 1:30). **Remember that grace is the unmerited favor of God.** In His great grace, God may have provided all of the abilities that Mary needed to determinedly follow Him, for God

qualifies those whom He has called into His service and prepares them for doing the work that He has called them to do. As she was growing up, Mary could well have devoted herself to the Lord's work, knowing that He would never leave her nor forsake her. Her life was such that God's favor was shown to her, even as a young woman.

Then comes the description of what God was asking of her, "*You will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus...*" (1:31). **Now, the name Jesus is a transliteration of the Hebrew, "Joshua," meaning 'Jehovah is salvation,' or 'the Savior.'** It was a common name among the Jews, but as Gabriel tells Mary that her child will be called Jesus, the name then fits the work that He was going to be doing, saving His people from their sins.

And the next few items that would confirm this. Gabriel says, "*He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will make Him a king, as His ancestor David was, and He will be the king of the descendants of Jacob forever; His kingdom will never end*" (1:32-33)! This was God's great plan for His people Israel, that they should receive His Messiah, Jesus, and then they would be the messengers to the rest of the world of the salvation of God for all people. God was setting the people of Israel up to become a blessing to the rest of the world as they proclaimed and followed Jesus as the holy Messiah King, their Savior, who is the very Son of God Himself.

And God was choosing Mary to become the vessel by which He would bring this child into the world. If the Son of God were to suddenly show up to become the Savior of the people of Israel, they would receive Him more as an angel. But God desired that Jesus become just like us in human form, so that He could teach us about God, and help us to understand the love of God for us. Then He would provide us saving from our sins, allowing us to come back into a relationship with the Lord God through the perfect sacrifice that would eliminate the penalty of sin, which is death and separation from God.

**What an astounding request that Gabriel was making to Mary on God's behalf.** Out of all the women of the Jewish nation, God was choosing Mary to do this great thing, not because she was perfect, not because she was more important than anyone else, but God's favor rested upon Mary for her

to be faithful as His servant. To be the mother of Jesus was an awesome task put before her, but she would not have to do this alone. God would be with her, allowing her to find the endurance and grace to be misunderstood for His glory. And that was the importance of Gabriel's message, "*Don't be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God*" (1:30). If God was calling her to do this great thing, then God would make sure that Mary had the support and encouragement that she needed.

This had never happened before, or since for that matter, that God would enable a woman to become pregnant without a man's involvement. God was going to be doing a marvelous thing in Mary that would fulfill the prophecy of Isaiah, as well as bring His Son into the world as a human. God's plan of Salvation for the world would begin through her, and the child she would bear would become the Savior of the world.

So it was understandable that Mary questioned what Gabriel was telling her. "*How can this be since I am a virgin,*" she asks. She didn't seem to have a problem with Jesus becoming a king, and that His reign would last forever, but she wonders about the whole biology part of her conceiving a child. And Gabriel gives her this wonderful explanation, "*The Holy Spirit will come on you, and God's power will rest upon you. For this reason the holy child will be called the Son of God*" (1:35). Ahh, that explained it. God would make it happen. Though the details were lacking, Mary knew that when God did something, it always turned out to be good.

So Gabriel gave her the most recent example of God's great work, "*Remember your relative Elizabeth. It is said that she cannot have children, but she herself is now six months pregnant, even though she is very old. For there is nothing that God cannot do*" (1:36-37). If God can give an old woman, who is long past the age of bearing children, the ability to conceive and finally be blessed with a child, could not God do an even greater thing with Mary?

It brings us back to a great question asked throughout the ages, "Is anything too difficult for God" (Jeremiah 32:27)? **People today seem to want to put a limit upon what God can and cannot do.** We think that God is more like us and limited in what He is able to accomplish. We question His

ability to do more than what we can see or hear or touch or think. We forget that He is the One who created the universe, the One who put the stars in their place and called them all by name. We forget that He is the One who put the Earth in just the right place in the solar system so that we would be warm enough for life in this watery world of ours. And God made it so that we could enjoy different seasons by tilting the Earth on its rotational axis as it rotates around the Sun, enjoying warm days of summer and cold days of winter. God is the One who made all life; the fish, the plants, the birds, and the animals, and finally humans. If God could do all of that, certainly He could bring about another wonder of sending His Son to the Earth in human form through the power of His Word. No man needed to be involved, for God would make it happen all on His own.

**Mary is satisfied about the ability of God to do this great work in her**, so she concedes to allow Him to use her to accomplish it. Unlike Ahaz, Mary believes in all that God had planned for her to benefit her people. *“I am the Lord’s servant,” said Mary; ‘May it happen to me as you have said’* (1:38). And getting that permission for God to do His great work in her, Gabriel leaves, and the Holy Spirit overshadows Mary, and the earthly life of Jesus begins at that moment within Mary’s womb.

What a tremendous example of faith! With her future full of unknowns, Mary begins a very tenuous journey, uncertain of how those around her would respond, but fully confident of what God was going to do. She knew that if God had called her to do this, He would protect her, direct her, and provide for her in just as equally astounding ways.

So to gain as much encouragement as she could, Mary decided to visit her elderly cousin, Elizabeth. (READ Luke 1:39-45) Isn’t God good! **When Mary needs a friend to talk to who wouldn’t think she’s nuts, God provides her with an older mentor to provide her with the courage she would need for the years to come.**

Elizabeth knew the heartbreak of a childless life. She knew the agony of seeming unanswered prayers. She knew the faith it took to live righteously while not knowing the fullness of God’s plan for her; the many years of yearning to have children for Zechariah; the shame of being barren and the

disappointment of unfulfilled dreams. Elizabeth was on the other end of the age spectrum than Mary, but there was great wisdom in her, learned through the ages of relying fully upon her Lord God, even when life turned out differently than she had planned. What a marvelous encourager she would be for Mary.

And when God does open up her womb to become pregnant for the glory of God, the Holy Spirit works in Elizabeth's life to confirm to Mary the plans that God had for her life, too. So when Mary shows up at her home, Elizabeth is simply delighted in all that that God was doing. And the child growing within her recognizes the child growing in Mary, and he moves within her as if to acknowledge the presence of the Holy God the Son.

At that moment the Holy Spirit exposes Mary's situation to her, and Elizabeth is elated! *"You are the most blessed of all women, and blessed is the child you will bear! Why should this great thing happen to me, that my Lord's mother comes to visit me?"* (1:42-43). There is recognition of the work of the Lord God in Mary. Maybe it's the way she glows with joy in the presence of a woman who understands the work of the Lord. Maybe it's the humility of a young girl having been asked to do a great thing. **Elizabeth is immediately aware through the Holy Spirit that God has chosen Mary to be the "mother of my Lord."**

Nowhere in the New Testament is Mary called "Mother of God." Though Jesus is God, Jesus is not the fullness of God. He is the Son of God, sent to the Earth for the salvation of all people. He is the Messiah, and all of the Old Testament proclaims Him as Lord of all. Elizabeth rightly describes the situation, that Mary would be the human mother of the Son of God.

**Imagine how encouraging that was for Mary.** Here in her teenage years, for a woman old enough to be her grandmother proclaiming to her that she is blessed by God to be used in such a way as to bring about the birth of the Messiah, would have added an exclamation point to all that Gabriel had told her. Because she believed what he had said, Mary finds comfort and peace in being blessed by the ones she would find the greatest courage through.

Naturally, Zechariah would have been the one to have said the blessing over Mary, but because God had made him mute because of his unbelief in his own promise of having a son through Elizabeth, he could not offer it. It would not be until after John's birth and naming that Zechariah would receive his voice again (Luke 1:63). So Elizabeth blesses Mary. And Mary is filled with praise for all that the Lord was doing through her.

Mary stays with Elizabeth and Zechariah for three months, probably leaving just after Elizabeth gives birth to John. So imagine the conversations the two women would have had with each other. Imagine the questions that they would discuss with each other, the concerns that would be raised, and the reaction of the people toward Mary's decision to allow God to use her in this way. Think of the studies they would have had about the promises of God being fulfilled throughout the history of Israel. Consider the encouragement that Elizabeth would have poured into Mary to give her the endurance needed to fulfill God's plan in her life.

**What a witness to the power of a godly mentor in the life of a young woman.** When all of the questions of life come to mind in order to try to discourage and dishearten, Mary had Elizabeth to give her promise after promise and inspiration after inspiration in order to guide her to make her life count for the glory of God. At the end of those three months, Mary is ready to face any possible reaction from the people around her back in Nazareth. She probably had a response to her parent's questions of how this could have happened. She may have had words of encouragement for Joseph when he found out that she was pregnant, and the child was not his. The three months with Elizabeth bolstered Mary's faith and gave her the ability to continue on this tremulous road she was now on.

**Women of the church, can you become the Elizabeths of our society today, giving encouragement and hope to the lives of young women who are facing major decisions in their lives? Can you be there for them, ready to guide them and support them?**

Mary was at the start of a great journey, empowered by God, supported by Elizabeth, protected by the Holy Spirit in order to bring about the birth of our Savior, Jesus. Did she know all that was

before her? No. But she knew who was beside her, she knew who had called her to do this great thing, and she knew the One who was inside of her. Though the way would be tough, it would not be impossible, if only she would keep her faith and trust in the One who had called her into it.

Let's pray. Father God, thank You for loving us enough to make a way for us to find eternal life with You. Thank You for providing a Savior for us in the most unexpected way so that we might see the greatness of Your grace. Thank You for the faith of Mary, who trusted in Your plan for the Salvation of the world. Give us all such faith so that we, too, might put our trust in You so much that we might fulfill Your plan for our lives. Help us to learn from Mary's call into ministry, and accept our own calling, knowing who is beside us, who has called us to do the great work before us, and the One who is inside of us to bring us to life in Him. Give us the faith to trust You, no matter what You call us to do. This we pray in Jesus' Name. AMEN.