

“THE VOICE OF MARY”  
Luke 1:26-38  
Christmas Eve, December 24, 2020

Oh, the little town of Nazareth. Its home to around 400 people. Many of my family had moved here to get away from the struggles of living in the city. They wanted to live a simple life as farmers, where they could live quietly while at the same time, devotedly to our Lord, the god of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Nazareth is on the top of a hill in the hill country of Israel, about 12 miles southwest of the Sea of Galilee. There was good soil there and it served our people well, though the fields and fruit trees and vineyards were all around the house. Our sheep and cattle grazed just outside of town, but often moved around in order to keep them fed with green grass. The surrounding country was beautiful, so even though life was hard, it was good. We eked out a living, paid our taxes, and tried to live in peace with the groups around us.

We really didn't need too much to live. My family had built a home into the porous rock, using the stone as anchors to the corners of the house. We also had dug underground cisterns for water, vats for oil, and silos for grain. That way we could store our food and oil all year round. There was a single, ancient spring for water in the middle of town where we would go every day to refill our supply at home.

My father raised wheat and barley so that we could make bread. It also fed the chickens and ducks. Our goats and cattle provided milk we used to make cheese and butter. Our sheep provided wool for us to spin and weave cloth so that we could make clothes for our family. We would dye some of the thread to embroider beautiful patterns in the cloth. If we had more than enough for our family, we would sell it to the neighboring villages.

While Dad did all of the things outside, Mom and I ruled the house. That was our domain and our kingdom, so we made the best for our family. We spend the day cooking the meals, providing a balanced diet for my brothers and sisters. We had rules to follow that told us what foods we could and

couldn't eat. Sometimes that meant that I had to go get vegetables from Dad in the field, clean them up and bring them inside so Mom and I could fix it. We worked hard to provide for our family. Being the oldest girl, I had the task of helping Mom the most, especially after I turned 13. I had to learn how to do everything in the house so that I could provide for my husband some day.

We would usually pass the day by singing, or telling stories about our ancestors in the faith, remembering how they remained faithful to God even through very difficult times. And we taught the other children the important lessons they needed to learn as they grew up. Home was a place of learning and care.

And while prayer services were officially held at the synagogue in town, we would pray for our family, our village and for those we knew were sick or hurt. Every night before we went to bed, we would follow our routine of praying for each other, seeking God's blessings on our little town and the people who were living there. We were observant in not working on the Sabbath, we observed the Passover regularly, occasionally making the trip to Jerusalem to celebrate there. And we were careful to observe the traditions of Moses and the prophets. We were faithful in all we did.

We did our best to live a worthy life as King Lemuel's mother had told him in the book of Proverbs (31) and as King Solomon had written in his Song (Song of Solomon). We did everything we could for the glory of God. As devout Jews, we were tasked with caring for the family and being diligent so that Dad could be proud of us.

And it was often that Mom would send me to one of our neighbor's houses with some soup or something special when they had one who was sick in their family. And there was old widow Hannah, whose husband had died earlier this year. We tended to each other as families and helped out each other when things got tough.

One day, Dad and Mom called me into the house. Joseph, was there, and he had asked for me to become his wife. I was so young! I didn't know if I was ready for that or not. What would Mom do without me? What would it be like to live with Joseph and not at home? There were so many questions.

Joseph was a fine man, though, and well thought of in our community. We were related through King David, as both our families were descendants of his. I had known him since I was very little, but had not ever thought of being his wife some day. Dad and Mom thought that we would make a pretty good family together, so Joseph was given permission for me to be his wife. But in our culture, I would stay at home for another year before the wedding. That way I could learn all that I needed to learn to take care of my own family.

Joseph was a craftsman, able to do much with just about any kind of material. He had already established a business in town making tables, chairs, cooking utensils, bowls and cups, and even building houses. He was currently building a new home for one of my older cousins. He was a hard worker and most folks in town knew him as “the carpenter.” He did much more than just carpentry, but that was what he was known for. He did very good work. He even did some work in the neighboring town of Sepphoris, just a little way away from Nazareth.

The news traveled quickly in town, and everyone was excited. Everyone that is, except the other young women who had hoped Joseph would ask for their hand in marriage. All of us young girls dreamed of marrying a well-to-do man who would provide for us. And being in a small town there were only a few good men available. I guess that made me a pretty blessed woman to have found favor with Joseph.

But one day a few months after Joseph had asked for me to be his wife, something very strange happened. We were all outside, picking olives from the trees, when everything seemed to stop around me. Suddenly there was a man shining brilliantly stood before me. I had never seen him before, and his brilliance startled me, so he said to me “*Peace be with you! The Lord is with you and has greatly blessed you!*” (Luke 1:25). What kind of greeting was that? I knew that God had blessed us, but what did he mean, “*The Lord...has greatly blessed you?*” Well, he saw my fear and my confusion, so he introduced himself to me.

“I am Gabriel, a messenger from the Lord God of Israel. *Don't be afraid, Mary; God has been*

*gracious to you. You will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High God. 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!”* (Luke 1:30-33).

That was a lot to say in just two sentences! Ok, I was engaged to Joseph, so maybe he was telling me that we would have a son early in our marriage. But the more I thought about it in those few moments, I came to understand that Joseph was not going to be the father. I didn't understand how that might happen, so I asked, *“How can this be, since I am a virgin?”* (Luke 1:34).

Gabriel explained that God's Holy Spirit would come onto me and God's power would rest upon me (1:35), and in that way the child would be holy and called the Son of God.

O my goodness! I knew about God promising His Messiah would come to free the people of Israel of our sins, but I didn't know how He would do that. Now, here was Gabriel, an angel of the Lord God, telling me that God had chosen me to be the mother of the Messiah, even before I was married! Who am I that I have found favor with God to do this great thing? What an honor? But how will I be able to do this? How will God do this, I wondered?

Gabriel wasn't finished yet, however. To encourage me he went on, *“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”* (Luke 1:36-37).

Elizabeth pregnant? At her age? After all these years and now God has granted her a child? Me, at my age, not yet married, and I'm going to have a son? God was certainly doing some strange things. All kinds of questions started arising in my mind, but I remembered that if God had been with my ancestors and called them to do wonderfully surprising things, and they were able to accomplish those strange things by keeping their faith in God, then maybe God would allow me to do the same thing in this great thing that He was asking me to do. He hadn't failed any one of them when they walked in faith, so He would not fail me as I walk in faith to do this, too.

Gabriel seemed to be waiting for an answer, so I told him, “*I am the Lord’s servant; May it happen to me as you have said*” (Luke 1:38). I wasn’t quite sure what I was getting into, but if God had faith in me to give me this beautiful, yet difficult task, I would do it for Him. He would see me through it. Having said that to Gabriel, he smiled and suddenly vanished again. And my world came back into normal. Only it would never be normal again.

How would I explain this to my Mom and Dad? Would they believe me? And what will Joseph do? Will he believe me? Oh, there’s so much that I need to talk about, but who can I see? Who will believe me? Wait, Gabriel said Elizabeth was now pregnant. I will go talk to her. She will understand.

So I went to see Elizabeth, and sure enough, she knew all about what was going on. It surprised me, but she knew that God had called me to become the mother of His Son. God spoke to me through her to encourage me that it would be ok. I spent three months with Elizabeth and Zechariah and when her son was born, I came home to Nazareth.

Time went fast from then on. I talked to Joseph, and at first he was angry, but God’s angel graciously convinced him what was happening, so he, too, decided to do this great thing for God. So together we faced the struggles ahead of us, especially the journey to Bethlehem because of the decree that everyone had to return home to their own ancestral birth place. I convinced Joseph that I needed to go along. I’m not sure how we made it, but everything worked out alright. Everything was a blur to me. But Jesus was born while we were there in Bethlehem, and I love Him so much. I will always love Him, and I will remember all these things for the rest of my life.

Upp! That’s Him crying now. I need to go. Shalom!