

²⁶ Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by 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. The virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸ And having come in, the angel said to her, "Rejoice, highly favored *one*, the Lord *is* with you; blessed *are* you among women!" ²⁹ But when she saw *him*, she was troubled at his saying, and considered what manner of greeting this was. ³⁰ Then 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 bring forth a Son, and shall call His name JESUS. 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. ³³ And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end." ³⁴ Then Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I do not know a man?" 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. 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. ³⁷ For with God nothing will be impossible." 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. ³⁹ Now Mary arose in those days and went into the hill country with haste, to a city of Judah, ⁴⁰ and entered the house of Zacharias and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹ And it happened, when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, that the babe leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. ⁴² Then she spoke out with a loud voice and said, "Blessed *are* you among women, and blessed *is* the fruit of your womb! ⁴³ But why *is* this *granted* to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? ⁴⁴ For indeed, as soon as the voice of your greeting sounded in my ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy. ⁴⁵ Blessed *is* she who believed, for there will be a fulfillment of those things which were told her from the Lord."

1st Sunday in Advent.

Introduction

Today is the first Sunday of Advent. We are leaving Revelation for 6 Sundays and concentrating on some of Biblical accounts of the first Christmas. Last year we learnt about Christmas from John's Gospel and this year we will learn about Christmas from Luke's Gospel.

It is always good when we start learning from a new book in the Bible that we get to know a little about the person who wrote the material.

Luke was a Greek "Doctor", he is called the "beloved physician" in Colossians 4: v. 14.

Luke also wrote the book of Acts (Acts 1: v.3) which means that he was responsible for writing about one quarter of the New Testament as far as the volume of words is concerned.

He was likely a companion of Paul during some of His missionary work.

Luke was the only Gospel writer who did not have a first-hand experience of the life and ministry of Jesus.

He obtained his information from people who had been eye witnesses of the life of Jesus.

Luke tells us in Chapter 1: v. 1-4 why he wrote his account of the life of Jesus.

1. He had met up with all the people involved in the life of Jesus. He claims to have a perfect understanding of all the events of the life of Jesus. He no doubt has spoken at length to all the important people, including Mary, the earthly Mother of Jesus.
2. He wanted to write an orderly account of the events of the life of Jesus.
3. He wanted his contact "Theophilus" to have an assurance of all the facts about Jesus.

Finally, Luke wrote his Gospel using lots of real life stories, many of which had the theme of "Joy".

He wrote his Gospel for the whole world with a heart for the poor, the lost and people with broken hearts.

Luke wrote a lot about women and home life and being a doctor he paid close attention to detail.

This is perhaps the reason why he gives the most detailed account of the first Christmas.

In our Christmas series we will concentrate on what Luke records concerning Mary and the birth of Jesus.

There are three main things which happen in the passage that I read.

The first is the announcement by Angel Gabriel to Mary.

The second is Mary's questions to the Angel, and thirdly there is confirmation about this event through Mary's relative Elizabeth.

Before we get into our text we need to understand that there were two important babies highlighted at the beginning of Luke.

The first announcement was about a baby who was going to be born to an old couple who could not have children.

In Luke Chapter 1: v. 5-25 we have an account by Luke concerning the announcement of a baby to be born to a relative of Mary called Elizabeth.

The baby to be born to Elizabeth who was barren was very important and connected to the birth of Jesus.

This baby to be born was going to introduce Jesus to the nation.

Zacharias, the Father of this baby had been praying all of his life for a son, but nothing had happened.

However, God was now about to produce a miracle.

In the providence of God Zacharias was chosen to burn incense in the temple that year. This was a ministry that only came once in a life time.

During his time in the temple and Angel of the Lord appeared to him and announced that his prayers were about to be answered and his wife Elizabeth was going to have a son.

He was told to call the name of the son John. Zacharias was also informed about the importance of his son.

His son would be filled with the Holy Spirit in the womb and would grow up to be "Great" in the sight of God.

He would make people ready to receive Jesus.

Unfortunately, Zacharias couldn't quite believe this announcement from the Angel.

He wanted some sort of confirmation.

The Angel said O.K. if you want confirmation, I will give it to you.

You are not going to be able to speak until your son is born.

When Zacharias left the temple he couldn't tell people about this exciting news because he did not have the faith to believe God's word through the Angel.

Luke wants us to see that there were two important babies being conceived, both of them miracles in their own way.

Both of the babies were connected and both of the babies were part of God's plan to rescue the world from the punishment of sin.

With this introduction in mind we now come to our text.

1. The Angel Gabriel's announcement to Mary – v. 26-33.

First of all, we are introduced to Mary and told that she was a "virgin". This means that she had had no sexual intercourse with another man.

We are also told that Mary was engaged to a man named Joseph who was a descendant of the Jewish King David.

We find the family tree of Joseph in Matthew Chapter 1: v. 1-16 which confirms his ancestor to be King David.

The Angel Gabriel said some important things to Mary.

- a) Mary was highly favoured - The Greek word that is used here literally means that God's "Grace" had been poured upon her. There was nothing special about Mary, she was a young teenager, but God had chosen to pour special "Grace" into her life. Mary fulfilled all the necessary requirements, she came from the line of David too, but she was still a sinner in the sight of God, needing His "Grace" to be poured into her life.

It is interesting to note that this Greek word is also used in Ephesians 1: v.6.

⁶ to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved.

This means that we can't put Mary on any higher status or platform than any other believer.

Sadly, the Roman Catholic Church teach that Mary has a higher status than any other believer.

(Quote their teaching)

The Roman Catholic Church do many good things but they do not teach the truth about Mary or the way of Salvation.

The Bible teaches that the way of Salvation is always by Grace, we don't deserve it and it is always by Faith in the work of Jesus on the cross and our good works do not contribute in any way to our Salvation.

Ephesians 2: v. 8-10. (New Living Translation)

⁸ God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. ⁹ Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it. ¹⁰ For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.

The first thing we learn from the Angel is that Mary was chosen by God for an important task, and it was all because of God's "Grace" towards her.

It is the same for us too. God has chosen us to serve Him, if we know and love Jesus as our own personal saviour.

Our ministry and task in this world is important too.

Don't be discouraged today, the task that God has chosen for you is no less important in His plans and purposes for you.

However, there is something for us to consider here.

There is a price to pay for those whom God chooses for special tasks.

Just as Mary was chosen by God to bring up Jesus with all the challenges that involved, so too are we to count the cost of serving Jesus.

If you want to be a real disciple of Jesus, then there is a price to pay.

The cost is your life. No longer can you do what you want to do, but you must surrender to the purpose of God in your life and follow His choice in your life.

If you stood up at the OIC retreat to be willing to be a disciple of Jesus, then this is the most important part of the course.

You must be willing to give up the rest of your life to follow Jesus.

I am only here today because I surrendered my life 100% to the purposes of God about 33 years ago.

It does not mean that our lives will be perfect but it does mean that can use a life that is wholly given to Him.

(Romans 12: v. 1-2)

b) Mary was told that she was going to have a special Son

The Angel told Mary some important facts about her first child.

Firstly, He was going to be a boy. There was no scanning in those days. You could not identify the sex of a baby until it was born.

Secondly the baby had to be called Jesus.

Names were important in Jewish families and they usually indicated the character of a person.

The names Jesus in the Hebrew means " Salvation" and "God is Salvation"

It was important that the baby was called Jesus because the purpose of His coming was to bring Salvation from God.

Matthew 1: v. 21 (N.K.J.)

²¹ And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins."

The whole purpose of Christmas is to celebrate a Saviour born into this world who would save people from their sins.

For many people every year this purpose and real meaning of Christmas has been removed from their hearts and minds and eyes.

What most people see and experience is a commercial festival of gift giving and fun and food and pretty lights.

They miss the most important purpose of Christmas.

I hope that you don't miss the purpose of Christmas this year?

It is a celebration about the birth of Jesus who came to save His people from their sins.

Fortunately for us God opened up this Salvation for the Gentiles too. That means we can benefit from the birth of Jesus too, whether we are Japanese, German, American, English, from Korea or any other country.

- c) The Angel told Mary something about this baby.
The baby was going to be the “Son of the Highest”
This is a name used for the “True God”
Turn with me to Genesis chapter 14: v. 18-22.

¹⁸ Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; he *was* the priest of God Most High. ¹⁹ And he blessed him and said: “Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; ²⁰ And blessed be God Most High, Who has delivered your enemies into your hand.” And he gave him a tithe of all. ²¹ Now the king of Sodom said to Abram, “Give me the persons, and take the goods for yourself.” ²² But Abram said to the king of Sodom, “I have raised my hand to the LORD, God Most High, the Possessor of heaven and earth,

In this passage Melchizedek, king of Salem identifies the one true God as the **“God Most High”**
This title became a popular title for the Israelite nation.

Other nations followed other gods, but the Israelite nation followed the one true God, the “God Most High”

Today we need to identify our God as the God of the Bible or the God of the Israelite nation, if you want to be 100% correct.

He is the God who reveals Himself through the Bible, and was about to reveal Himself in the person of Jesus, soon to be born into the womb of Mary.

- d) Fourthly and finally the Angel identifies the baby as a King, with an everlasting kingdom. – v. 32-33.

God had made promises to His people through the prophet Isaiah about the government of the promised Messiah.

Isaiah Chapter 9: v.6-7. (N.K.J.)

⁶ For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. ⁷ Of the increase of *His* government and peace *There will be* no end, Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, To order it and establish it with judgment and justice From that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.

The Angel was confirming these promises and identifying the baby that Mary would soon have as this promised King, whose kingdom would be everlasting.

I have no doubt that Mary had a great knowledge of the God of the Old Testament and knew exactly what the Angel was talking about.

When God speaks to our hearts through His word, we are in no doubt about what He is saying. God communicates truth from His word and it was the knowledge of God’s word that convinced Mary of the awesomeness of what the Angel was telling her.

When God speaks to our hearts through His word, we must listen and act upon what He tells us. God is the God of the impossible.

2. Mary’s response to the words of the Angel – v. 34-38.

The first thing that Mary said was not a cry of unbelief, but a question of how this miracle could happen because she was a “Virgin”. She had not had sexual intercourse with a man.

Unlike Zacharias, Mary had faith that God would do what He had promised.

Since Jesus existed in eternity past before Mary was born, He could not be conceived in the womb in a normal way.

The Angel explained that the Holy Spirit of God would come upon her and Son of God would be planted in her womb.

In other words, it was going to be a miracle birth, not the normal way through the seed of a man, but supernaturally through the power of God.

The “Virgin Birth” is a key issues in understanding Christianity. Therefore, we must spend some time explaining the reason.

The Bible is very clear that everybody born into this world through the seed of a man is born with a sinful nature.

This is the punishment given by God when Adam and Eve disobeyed God’s word in the “Garden of Eden” We can read about that in Genesis Chapter 3.

Romans 5: v. 12 – 17 in the N.L.T.

¹² When Adam sinned, sin entered the world. Adam’s sin brought death, so death spread to everyone, for everyone sinned. ¹³ Yes, people sinned even before the law was given. But it was not counted as sin because there was not yet any law to break. ¹⁴ Still, everyone died—from the time of Adam to the time of Moses—even those who did not disobey an explicit commandment of God, as Adam did. Now Adam is a symbol, a representation of Christ, who was yet to come. ¹⁵ But there is a great difference between Adam’s sin and God’s gracious gift. For the sin of this one man, Adam, brought death to many. But even greater is God’s wonderful grace and his gift of forgiveness to many through this other man, Jesus Christ. ¹⁶ And the result of God’s gracious gift is very different from the result of that one man’s sin. For Adam’s sin led to condemnation, but God’s free gift leads to our being made right with God, even though we are guilty of many sins. ¹⁷ For the sin of this one man, Adam, caused death to rule over many. But even greater is God’s wonderful grace and his gift of righteousness, for all who receive it will live in triumph over sin and death through this one man, Jesus Christ.

It is through Adam that we receive our sinful nature.

It is through Jesus Christ that we receive a “New” nature.

Therefore Jesus Christ had to be 100% and pure and perfect otherwise if He was born in the same way as all of us, He would have a sinful nature too.

However the Bible clearly tells us that Jesus was sinless and 100% perfect in every way.

Hebrews 4: v. 15 in the N.K.J.

¹⁵ For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all *points* tempted as *we are*, yet without sin.

1 Peter 1: v.21-22.

²¹ who through Him believe in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God. ²² Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart,

So you see if Jesus did not come in a supernatural way through a virgin birth, then we could have NO Salvation at all.

However, Jesus did come through the “Virgin” Mary and it happened just as Mary had communicated it to Luke who communicates it to us here today.

To become a Christian, you really need to believe this important doctrine about the birth of Jesus.

The final response of Mary to the Angel is contained in v. 38.

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.

In other words, Mary said, Yes I believe what you said, I am God’s servant and willing for the cost of this special task.

God knew Mary’s heart and He knew He could trust her with this important task.

She would suffer shame first and not be understood by many people.

Yes even Mary had to suffer for the sake of Jesus.

There is a truth here that we need to apply to our lives continuously.

There is always a “Cost” in following Jesus.

It is "Always" worth it because the rewards on this earth are only temporary and always tainted with sin. However, the rewards that God gives are eternal and fully satisfy the soul.

Q. Will you choose to follow Jesus today?

3. Mary's confirmation of her experience through visiting her relative Elizabeth – v. 39-45.

We are told that after this amazing encounter with the Angel Gabriel Mary quickly departed and went to visit her relative Elizabeth.

Remember she was an older lady who could not get pregnant, but God had produced a miracle and she was expecting a child.

As soon as an announcement was made that Mary had arrived to visit Elizabeth her own baby leaped in her womb and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.

Elizabeth spoke out in a loud voice and said "Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb."

It is very clear that the words of Elizabeth were guided and directed by the Holy Spirit.

We are told that she was filled with the Holy Spirit before she spoke these words.

The words of Elizabeth were clear confirmation to Mary that the experience that she had just been through with Angel Gabriel was clearly a God incident and she could now have full assurance in her heart that she was soon to be carrying the Lord Jesus, the Jewish Messiah in her womb.

In v. 45 Elizabeth confirmed to Mary that the thing that she believed from the Angel would be fulfilled.

It was a real experience from God.

Why did Luke tell us about this meeting of Mary with Elizabeth?

Well, Luke was a very sound and stable person. He was a doctor and paid great attention to detail. Also the purpose of writing his gospel was to give assurance to people about the facts of the life death and resurrection of Jesus.

He must have spoken to Elizabeth and Mary about this incident.

I expect that this incident made an impact upon both of their lives.

They were both going to bring very important babies into this world who would have specific work to do for God.

Elizabeth's baby would be John the Baptist who would prepare the way for Jesus and Mary's baby would be the Jewish Messiah Jesus Christ.

What is significant to me is that God who knows our frail minds and emotions often gives confirmation about important encounters with Himself.

People often say to me, "How will I know that God has spoken to me?"

I often say that God usually speaks through His word and you will have a deep conviction in your heart.

However, I go on to say that usually God gives confirmation through your circumstances as you pray and trust His voice to your heart.

Real Story

I remember in April 1992 as I flew out of the old Osaka International Airport that the Holy Spirit said to me, "I am getting you out before the earthquake"

At the time I was a little cautious about sharing this thing that came to me.

I was due to return to Japan in 1993 but God definitely blocked the way.

It wasn't until Jan 1995 when I had a dream that there was some disaster in Kobe that I discovered that the Holy Spirit did in fact speak to my heart.

I had to wait nearly 3 years for confirmation, but if I had only believed it was God's voice to my heart I would not have gone through the anguish of wondering why God had prevented our return to Japan.

Usually we don't have to wait that long before God confirms something to us, but if God is keeping you waiting, please be patient.

Remember God's word is forever settled in Heaven and God is the God of the impossible and He can do for you what He has purposed in Heaven.

No more and no less, trust HIM today.