

Foretold: The Birth of Jesus

November 12, 2017

Luke 1:26-38

26 In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, 27 to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. 28 And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." 29 But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. 30 The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. 31 And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him 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 ancestor David. 33 He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." 34 Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" 35 The angel said to 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 holy; he will be called Son of God. 36 And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. 37 For nothing will be impossible with God." 38 Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

As we journey through the Bible it takes us from the Old Testament to the New Testament. The first scene, or the first action, in the New Testament is in Luke. The Gospel of Luke begins with the announcement of the birth of John the Baptist. The first scene in Matthew is the birth narrative. The first scene in John is the testimony of John the Baptist. Mark begins with the baptism of Jesus. So the actual journey through the Bible begins with the announcement from Gabriel first to Zechariah in the Holy Place then to Mary. While this is happening the world does not know about it; life goes on as usual.

Today our Journey through the Bible takes place 6 months after the angel Gabriel's encounter with Zachariah. Now the angel Gabriel is located in Nazareth where he has an encounter with Mary a betrothed virgin. Betrothed is more than being engaged it is more like being married but not yet living together. The first thing the angel does is offer words of comfort. Stop and think about that for a moment. Let's face it, angelic encounters could scare you to death. These are really good words to be heard. "Do not be afraid, you have found favor with God." This is most definitely something to be thankful for.

The angel delivers to Mary the news "you will conceive a son" and issues a command "you are to name him Jesus." Then the angel delivers some very, very big news "he will be great, he will be called the Son of the Most High, God will give him king David's throne, he will reign over Israel forever, and his kingdom will never end." Congratulations go to Mary who has found favor with God and will have this very important child. But Mary is confused by all of this, as a matter of fact, she is shocked. She says "wait a minute angel, hold your horses, this is physically impossible for me because I am a virgin" By this point the angel Gabriel is experienced with human doubt and responds with something to the effect of "Mary, Mary, Mary, your child is going to be conceived by the Holy Spirit. When I said 'he will be called the Son of the Most High' by that I mean your son will be called The Son of God" (the dialogue is paraphrased in a contemporary fashion).

This is shocking information to Mary but it is made possible because nothing is impossible with God. And it all happens because of the love of God. Our response might be "I am losing my mind, psychotic, or hallucinating." Mary's response is obedience; a faithful servant

of the Lord. This is a big event, a very big event, but right now it is unknown to world. Only few select people know that this is going on, people chosen by God, for the greatest honor.

Let's talk about honor. Who do we honor? Today we honor the veterans. Today is a special double honor because the baby dedication service is a child of two active duty parents. This dedication service has been delayed due to their active duty status. It was planned back in January 2016 - that's 22 months ago. We honor our military heroes on special holidays. Sometimes we honor our political leaders. We honor famous people of history. In the Bible there are many heroes that deserve honor such as Paul, Abraham, Noah, Moses, and David to name a few. Zachariah and Elizabeth have one of the highest honors, they have a special child that is a forerunner to the Messiah. As for Mary - talk about honor - if I were to make a list of the highest honor possible and organize that list with the most honorable at the top of the list, Mary would be at the very top. Mary has the highest honor ever. She has a special, unique situation that is God's special plan and purpose.

The reason for this action is that God offers a solution to a problem of humanity. On the world stage there is always a battle between good and evil. God's plan is one of divine intervention. It is God's desire to come to us out of love. In order to bring the word of God to humans, to offer salvation to the world, God needs someone special - Mary has a very special divine purpose. In order to reach out to everyone, God's strategy is different from the past. In the past there was the law and messengers (prophets) and consequences of disobedience. God is the powerful creator of the heavens and the earth. God could punish humanity but God has a new plan that is totally different. God's plan is to offer salvation to everyone. It is for our benefit and it is an act kindness and love.

The best way I can think of to describe this is that it is truly magnificent. It is time to rejoice. How do you show thanks? Mary was chosen by God - you are also chosen by God. You are God's children, for that we are forever grateful, always thankful. Let us express our thanks through faithful practice of worship, praise, and stewardship.