

Christmas
Luke 1:5-38
“The Setting, The Son, and The Servant”

Introduction

“Therefore, The LORD Himself will give you a sign: See, the virgin will conceive, have a Son, and name Him Immanuel.” **Isaiah 7:14**

The “Christmas Story”. We’ve all heard it so many times before, but it never loses its wonder. God became flesh and made His dwelling among men. He chose to appear in the lowliest of forms in the lowliest of places. The child of poor working class parents in a part of the country that no one wished to live. It is a remarkable testimony to the fact that God did indeed **“so love the world” (John 3:16)**, not just the most religious, or the upper class persons of the world, but the world in its entirety. There was and is no one who is too “low” for Christ to reach. And He proved that by where He chose to make His birth announcement. Nazareth was not on the list of the ten most desirable vacation destinations for the well to do. It was a little nothing-of-a-village with very little to offer in the way of reputation. In fact, there was a saying in those days that was well known throughout the region:

“Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” **John 1:46**

In the *Gospel of Luke*, everything begins as it should. First, we are taken to the city of Jerusalem. The city of The Kings, and then, more specifically, we are taken inside the Temple itself and introduced to a priest named Zechariah, who is burning incense upon the altar that was placed just outside of The Holy of Holies. This is exactly where one might expect the Messiah to first appear. But rather than the herald of the promised Son of David, we are told of a “forerunner”. One who will come and make ready the way of The LORD. For you see, this is exactly what The Law of Moses was meant to do. To remind the people that they were in need of so much more.

I find it fascinating that Zechariah, a priest no less, demonstrated how little faith he had. I mean let’s examine the text for a moment. He was standing next to the most holy place of his faith. He was praying for himself and on behalf of the people. We know what he was praying for himself, for the angel reveals it to us. Zechariah was standing before the throne of God, as a spiritual leader of God’s chosen people, and he was praying for a child. Fair enough, for even though he and his wife were getting on in years, nothing is impossible with God. After all, Abraham and Sarah were older than he when Isaac was born! So Zechariah prayed. So far so good.

Then the Angel Gabriel appeared standing to the right of the altar of incense. He told the old priest that his prayers had been heard, and that he indeed would be given a son. Upon hearing the news, this priest, this spiritual leader of the people, didn’t believe it would really happen. He asked for a sign. As if an angel standing right in front of him wasn’t enough! Is it any wonder that God decided in that moment to take away his ability to speak? After all, he was supposed to be a leader of the faith. How could he instruct those in Israel in the ways of faith when his was so weak? After burning the incense, it would have been Zechariah’s responsibility to go out of the Temple and speak to those who were gathered there. He would have led them in the designated Psalms and given them a word of encouragement. But God wouldn’t allow him to go and speak to the people. When they saw he had been struck dumb, they realized that he had seen a vision, and they all went home.

Sad isn’t it? But before we come down too hard on old Zechariah. How many times do we do exactly the same thing? How many times have we prayed, not really expecting an answer from The LORD? Just going through the motions. That is what Zechariah was doing, and we often do that as well. We need to always pray in faith, expecting to get an answer from The LORD.

“Now if any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God — Who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly — and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith without doubting. For the doubter is like the surging sea, driven and tossed by the wind. That person should not expect to receive anything from The LORD, being double-minded and unstable in all his ways.” **James 1:5-8**

But here is the good news. When we are faithless, God remains faithful (**2 Timothy 2:13**). God keeps His covenants, no matter what. A perfect example of this truth can be found in the meaning of the names of Zechariah and his wife Elizabeth. Zechariah (pronounced *dzakh-ar-ee'-as*) means “*The LORD remembers*”, and Elizabeth (*el-ee-sab'-et*) means “*God’s covenant*”. For you see God chose a priest and his wife to deliver the forerunner of His promised Messiah, and there in their names we see these words:

The LORD remembers His Covenant.

God is faithful even when our faith is weak! The promised Messiah would indeed come. But He would not come to Jerusalem, where He was most expected. In fact, He would come to the very place where no-one would expect to find him. Let us take a fresh look at this wondrous story, and see for ourselves, The Setting, The Son, and The Servant.

The Setting

“In the sixth month (of Elizabeth’s pregnancy) the Angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man named Joseph, of the house of David.” **Luke 1:26**

We now leave the royal city of Jerusalem and make way for a small village in the northeastern part of Israel, Nazareth. The change in scenery is a drastic one. Just as Isaiah had prophesied some 700 years prior:

“Nevertheless, the gloom of the distressed land will not be like that of the former times when He humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali. But in the future He will bring honor to the way of the sea, to the land east of the Jordan, and to Galilee of the nations. The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; a light has dawned on those living in the land of darkness.” **Isaiah 9:1-2**

Just as The LORD had said, He sent His Son to be a light in the darkest of places. He would establish His headquarters in Galilee, the land of Zebulun and Naphtali. The very place that had been so ravaged by the Assyrians in Isaiah’s day. Those who had been banished for their sins were to receive hope. A Savior was coming to restore what had been lost. Everyone else had given up on this part of the world, except God. The light was coming into the darkness. And everyone knows that light shines the brightest in the darkest place. The Lord Remembered His Covenant! Have you ever felt like you came from the “wrong side of the tracks”, as it were? Well congratulations, those are the very places that Christ longs to bring His light!

The Son

“Now listen: You will conceive 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, and The LORD God will give Him the throne of His father David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end.” **Luke 1:31-33**

Gabriels prophecy of the coming Messiah is in six parts. The first three are fulfilled by Christ's first appearing, the last three will be fulfilled when He returns to claim His rightful place upon David's throne. Jesus, The promised Son of God, came to be born of virgin, who was living in Nazareth. Over three hundred prophecies with regard to this promised Child can be found within the pages of *The Old Testament*, and Christ fulfilled every one! He is the virgin born, sinless Son of Almighty God. Come to save the world. He is the Shekinah Glory of God in human form (**Hebrews 1:3**).

He is the Light of The World (**John 8:12**) sent to the darkest place. He is “The Way, The Truth and The Life”, and no one comes to the Father, but by Him (**John 14:6**). And He is The Resurrection and The Life (**John 11:25**). He is The Good Shepherd (**John 10:11-14**). He is The True Vine (**John 15:1-5**). He is The Bread of Life (**John 6:34-48**). He is The Gate (**John 10:7**). His Name is Jesus (Yeshua in the Hebrew), and it means “*The Salvation of The LORD*”. You cannot make it to heaven without Him.

The Servant

Have you ever wondered what kind of person that The LORD uses? Her name was Mary (Miriam in Hebrew), and the name literally means “Their rebellion”. How fitting is it that The LORD Jesus came to be born in someone who's very name represents the reason that He came in the first place? He came to save us, while we were in our rebellion against God. We deserved God's wrath, but we received grace instead. What wonderful words of comfort and joy did the Angel speak to Mary:

“Greetings favored one! The LORD is with you.”

Luke 1:28

The word translated “favored” is *Charitoo* (pronounced *khar-ee-to'-o*) in the Greek and simply means *one who has received grace*. The Catholics go too far in their exaltation of Mary, but sometimes I believe that we Protestants do not go far enough. She was a great woman of faith. While she most certainly wasn't divine, she was faithful. And God chose her above everyone else to be the Mother of His One and Only Son. But just what kind of person was she?

Mary was a humble servant of God. She might have been from King David's bloodline, but she certainly wasn't living in royalty. In fact, she lived in poverty. We know this, because when Jesus was born, she and Joseph sacrificed two turtle doves at His circumcision. This was an offering that God had allowed to be made from the poorest of people, as a substitute for a lamb. No, Mary wasn't rich in worldly possessions, but she was rich in faith.

Unlike Zechariah the priest, Mary didn't question for a moment the truth of Gabriel's proclamation. She simply didn't understand how these things would happen. She was, after all, unmarried and a virgin. So how could she have a child? Gabriel patiently explained to her that she would conceive a “holy thing” by the power of The Holy Sprit. After all, NOTHING was impossible with God. This statement would have served as a reminder of the story of Abraham, when God promised he and Sarah a child in their old age. When Sarah had doubted, God asked the question:

“Is anything impossible for The LORD?”

Genesis 18:14

It is a question that Gabriel answers when he speaks to Mary. God would do exactly as He said He would. Mary believed it, but she also knew that few others would.

This is where we see the kind of person that The LORD can use. Mary's response to the angel is the key to seeing God do great things in each of us.

"I am The LORD'S servant," said Mary. "May it be done to me according to your word." **Luke 1:38**

The word that Mary uses here to describe herself means "slave". She told the angel, "I am The LORD'S slave, let Him do to me whatever He will." Now that, my friends, is submission. Mary knew full well what God was asking of her. He was asking her to be willing to give up her reputation. He was asking her to lose many of her friends, who would never believe the story of "a virgin birth" and "the Son of God". After all, Zachariah hadn't believed the angel, when he saw him firsthand! Who would simply accept Mary's story just because she said so? Precious few indeed. God wanted to know if Mary would be willing to lose everything, in order to gain Christ. It is the same thing that He asks of each of us today. Is having Jesus worth everything to you? Listen to the words of The Apostle Paul:

"But everything that was a gain to me, I have considered to be a loss because of Christ. More than that, I also consider everything to be a loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my LORD. Because of Him I have suffered the loss of all things and consider them to be as dung, so that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own from The Law, but one that is through faith in Christ — the righteousness from God based on faith. My goal is to know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, assuming that I will somehow reach the resurrection from among the dead." **Philippians 3:7-11**

Mary's response to the angel may have been simpler in wording, but in essence it says exactly what Paul is saying. "I am willing to give up everything in order to have... JESUS." And that, my friends, is exactly what being a Christian is all about. That is the kind of spirit that God will use to perform mighty miracles, a spirit that is completely yielded over to the power of His will, for His glory. No, Mary wasn't rich in possessions, but she was rich in faith, and God used her to bring His greatest gift of salvation into the world. We could learn a lot from a young teenage girl named Mary, whose very name signifies the rebellion from whence we need a Deliverer. To Him we say:

"Let it be done to me as You have said."

And let all of God's servants say... **TRUTH!!!**