

The Birth of Jesus Foretold to Mary

Luke 1: 26-38

DIG: How does Gabriel's word to Mary compare with what he said to Zechariah in Luke 1:13-17? How does Miryam, in Luke 1:34 and 38, respond differently than Zechariah did in Luke 1:12 and 18? What truths are emphasized about Jesus here? What expectations would naturally accompany the honor of giving birth to the Messiah? How did Elizabeth's pregnancy encourage Mary?

REFLECT: What do you think it means to doubt and fear the Lord? When was the last time you were fearful but believing? How did He meet you in your fears? In what area of your life do you need to believe that nothing is impossible with God? What keeps you from believing this? What do you learn about faith from Miryam? Who are the women of faith that you consider your role models? Are any of them younger than you? Are any of them teenagers? What other words come to mind when you hear or speak the name Jesus? What moods or emotions bubble up to the surface? What hopes does He stir up in your spirit?

It seems most fitting that the Good News would have its beginning within the Sanctuary, and at the time of sacrifice. Six months had elapsed after the vision of Zachariah in the Temple. The scene now shifts from the Temple in Jerusalem to a town in **Galilee**, from the Forerunner to **the Messiah**, from the common priest to the common family of a young girl named **Mary** who lived in **Nazareth**. **Mary**, of course, is an Anglicized form of **her** actual Hebrew name, **Miryam**. The Greek text reflects that Hebrew name. It was translated from the Hebrew to the Greek, to the Latin **Maria**, and finally to the English **Mary**. The name **she** would have responded to was **Miryam**.

The highlands that form the central portion of Palestine are broken by the wide, rich plain of Jezreel, which severs **Galilee** from the rest of the Land. This was always the great battlefield of Isra'el. It appears shut in between two mountain walls. The mountains of Lower **Galilee** form the north wall, and in the middle of that range set in a slight depression overlooking the vast Jezreel Valley. It seemed to be one of **God's** own sanctuaries. As in an amphitheater, fifteen hilltops rose around it, the highest being about 500 feet. On its lower slope nestled the little town of **Nazareth**, its narrow streets arranged like terraces.⁴⁹

Miryam may be derived from the Hebrew word for *bitter*. Born and raised in **the town of Nazareth**, **she** was the child of an average family. **She** played on the streets, as the other children did, and **she** was subject to parental discipline. **Joseph** knew **her**, even though **he** was older than **she** was, probably around eighteen to twenty. All the houses in **Nazareth** were in the same neighborhood because it was a small town of roughly two hundred people. The biggest event that could occur in **Nazareth** was for a father to take his children to the nearby Greek city of Sepphoris to shop. The people were closely knit in their daily lives, and the women met in the morning at the village well.

The Jews of the first-century Palestine saw marriage as a joining of two families. And because the stakes were so high, they never would have entrusted such an important decision to the whims of teenage emotions. So the parents arranged the marriages of their sons and daughters. While the children were not given the final word in the matter, their personal desires were usually taken into account.⁵⁰ When **Mary** reached **her** thirteenth birthday, usually around the time **she** reached puberty, it was permissible to ask for **her** hand in marriage. The proper form was followed: **Yosef** first asked **his** parents if **he** could marry **her**. **He** was a humble apprentice carpenter in the neighborhood, probably more than a year away from having **his** own shop. Young men were expected to begin adult responsibilities around the age of thirteen, so at **his** age **he** had likely already saved some money for **his** marriage.⁵¹

No doubt **Joseph's** parents discussed the matter of marriage and, in time, paid a formal call on **Miryam's** parents, as was the custom. The entire neighborhood knew in advance what negotiations were going on, and, from draped doorway to draped doorway, the women discussed it as they washed their clothes on the stones in front of their houses. **Mary** was not supposed to know of the matter, but of course **she** did, having made **her** wishes known to **her** mother and father.

The Jewish wedding ceremony was broken into four distinct stages, two of which can still be observed in the modern Jewish wedding. The parents normally engaged in their formal discussion. Once they agreed, **the first stage** called the *shiddukhin*, meaning **the arrangement**, took place. This would normally happen at a very young age, with hopes of joining two families for the common good. If they had some trouble making the proper match, families might enlist the services of a *shadkhan* or *matchmaker*, for the purpose of finding a future mate. When a successful match was made, it was necessary, as was the custom, to talk of a dowry, but **Mary's** family had none. Their economic status was no better, no worse, than **Joseph's**. As long as the man of the house remained in good health they would not starve, and **Yosef** was a healthy young carpenter.

As time passed, there would come a point when the couple was old enough to confirm their desire to be married. This is known as the *erusin*, or *engagement*. Our modern understanding of engagement does not fully capture its meaning for the people of the New Covenant times. Today, an engaged couple may break off their commitment with no legal ramifications, but a couple in first-century Judea were bound together with a much stronger agreement. To enter into this *erusin* period, the couple would have a public ceremony, under a *huppah*, or *canopy*, and sign a written contract called a *ketubah*. In this document, both parties would stipulate what they were agreeing to bring into this new household. After culminating this beautiful ceremony, the bride would prepare her dowry that **she** would bring into the marriage, while the groom would prepare the future home for the couple, often as a room addition on the father's house (**John 14:1-3**).

When the *ketubah* was signed, the first cup of the ceremony was blessed, thus declaring publicly their sincere intentions. This is a formal one-year betrothal, and much more binding than any other. It was the finality of marriage. Once the marriage contract was negotiated, even though the marriage ceremony had not occurred, the groom-to-be could not rid himself of his betrothed except through divorce. Based upon the requirements for divorce in **Deut 24:1-4**, the couple would be obligated to obtain a *Get* or *Sefer Keritut*, Hebrew for *bill of divorce*, a procedure that is still followed in Orthodox Jewish law to this day. In other words, a couple who entered into the *erusin* stage were, in fact, considered completely married, although they were not living together yet. The *erusin* in Judea, also entitled the couple to lawful sexual relations, even though each of the parties was still living at home with their parents. However, in the country of *Galilee*, the people had renounced that privilege more than five hundred years before, and purity was maintained through the final marriage vows.

Still, if **Joseph** had died between the *erusin* and marriage, **Mary** would have been **his** legal widow. If, in the same period, another man had sex with **her**, **Miryam** would have been punished as an adulteress. The waiting time was spent, according to custom, for the groom to prepare a place for them to live. When the one-year *erusin* came to an end, the *nisuin*, or *marriage*, would take place.

Eventually **the second stage** would come, and it was known as **the fetching of the bride**. At that time the groom's father would sound the *shofar* or *the ram's horn*. He determined when the fetching would occur (see **Jw - The Parable of the Ten Virgins**). Then the groom would fetch, or take his bride, and **she** would literally be carried (the meaning of the Hebrew root *nasa*, from where the word *nisuin* comes) back to his home, the place of the ceremony.

Then came **the third stage**, which was **the marriage ceremony**, and only a few were invited. This was preceded by a ritual immersion for cleansing. Once again, under the *huppah* or *canopy*, the couple would affirm their intention to enter the blessings of full marriage. This was done as the second cup of wine was blessed with the beautiful *sheva b'rakhot*, or *seven blessings*.

After this part of the *nisuin* ceremony, the family and guests would be invited to **the fourth stage, or the marriage feast**. They would celebrate their marriage with a joyous feast that would last for as long as seven days. Many others not invited to the ceremony were invited to the feast. After the marriage feast the newlyweds would live together at the place prepared by the groom.⁵²

The similarity to the Jewish wedding ceremony is crucial to understanding the relationship of **Jesus Christ** to His bride, the Church (see my commentary on **Revelation Fg - Blessed Are Those who are Invited to the Wedding Feast of the Lamb**). Several times in both the TaNaKh and the New Covenant, parallels are drawn between marriage and the relationship between the believer and **God**. The love stories in both **Hosea** and **the Song of Solomon** point to that fact. Interestingly enough, both **Jesus** and Rabbi Sha'ul refer to marital terms such as the *shiddukhin* in **Second Corinthians 11:2** and **Ephesians 1:3-6**, *erusin* in **John 14:1-4**, and *nisuin* in **Second Thessalonians 4:13-18**. To be sure, the details of the ceremony picture many exciting truths about how **the LORD** views followers of **Yeshua, the Groom** sent from **the Father**.

This is the context for the birth of **Jesus**. We are told that **Mary** was **pledged to be married**, meaning that the couple had entered into the second stage of the ceremony. Throughout the engagement, **Miryam**, of course, lived with **her** parents and accepted the daily chores set out for **her**. **In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee (Luke 1:26), to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of King David.**

Mary had not yet had sexual contact with a man, for **Luke** calls **her** a **virgin**, using a Greek term that allows for no subtle nuance of meaning. **The virgin's name was Miryam** and **she** was probably about thirteen years old (**Luke 1:27**). Two times here **she** is called a **virgin**. It should be remembered that **Luke** was a doctor, and he gives the most detailed account of the **virgin** birth.

At a time about midway between engagement and formal marriage, **Mary** was alone one day and was visited by **the angel Gabriel**, who **went to her** and said: **Greetings, you who are highly favored! Miryam** is described as receiving grace, not as endowed with the power

to give grace. **She** had not been chosen for this task because **she** possessed a particular holiness of life that deserved this privilege. The words of **Gabriel** suggest no special worthiness on **Mary's** part.⁵³ **The Lord is with you (Luke 1:28)**. With those words, **Miryam** lost **her** reputation and **her** dreams. There was the very real possibility that **she** would have been ostracized from the Jewish community for the rest of **her** life. At least initially, **she** lost the trust of **her** husband-to-be. And what of **her** parents? Did they believe **her** preposterous story of miraculous nonsexual pregnancy? It is unlikely **her** family fell for such an outrageous tale. **Mary's** decision to embrace **God's** purposes unleashed an avalanche of difficulties and drew **her** into a disorienting mix of breathtaking privilege and unspeakable pain.⁵⁴ We are reminded that a life of significance is most often preceded by a heart eager to surrender to the will of **ADONAI** regardless of the cost.

*The Gospel writers attribute to **her** none of the special titles credited to **her** by the Roman Catholic Church. The worship of **Mary** is not called for by the simple greeting given by the angel recorded here. The "Ave Maria," which is the daily prayer of millions and has no biblical basis. As much as we admire and honor **the virgin Mary**, we should not pray to **her** or worship **her** in any way. To do so is merely idolatry in another form. The mother of our **Lord** deserves all honor, but **the Son** deserves our worship.⁵⁵*

Miryam was thoroughly confused by **his** words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be (Luke 1:29). Why would **she**, a little country girl, be blessed beyond all women? Did it mean **she** was about to die? Was **she** to be taken, perhaps, to a far-off place, never again to see **her** mother and **her** father . . . and **Joseph**?

Mary said nothing. **She** probably tried to look away, not only because of **her** terror but because it was considered bad manners in Judea for one to stare directly into the eyes of another, but **her** eyes were magnetized on **Gabriel**. **She** almost certainly stared, lowered **her** eyes, and stared again.

Gabriel's announcement was the same as it was to **Zechariah**. **His** voice softened: **Do not be afraid, Mary, he said, for you have found favor with God**. As with John the Baptist, the naming was done by an **angel**. **You will conceive and give birth to a Son, and you are to give Him the name Jesus**, which is also an Anglicized form of **His** actual name. The name **He** would have responded to was **Yeshua**. The Hebrew name **Yeshua** was translated into Greek as **Ieious**, then to Latin, and then to English as **Jesus**. **His** actual name was, **Yeshua**, a name that means *to save, salvation* or *Savior* (Luke 1:30-31). As **Joseph** would be told, the child was to have the name **salvation** because **He** would **save His people from their sins** (Matthew 1:21b). **He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High** (Genesis 14:18-20). Even though groups like *the Jesus Seminar* discount the virgin birth, it is still

one of the fundamental beliefs of Judaism and Christianity. In fact, to deny the deity of **Christ** is one of the easiest ways to recognize a cult.

ADONAI's covenant with **David** promised three eternal things. First, it promised an eternal throne. **The Lord, God Himself, will give Him the throne of His forefather David.** This was promised for **the Messiah** to King **David** in **Second Samuel 7:12-13**. Secondly, it promised an eternal house, **and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever.** And thirdly, it promised an eternal **kingdom, His Kingdom will never end (Luke 1:32-33).** **God** made those same three promises to **David: Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before Me; your throne will be established forever (Second Samuel 7:16).** Here is the fulfillment of the second of the two requirements in the TaNaKh: divine appointment. When **Gabriel** said: **The Lord, God Himself, will give Him the throne of His forefather David, Jesus** received divine appointment. **He** is the only **One** who fulfilled both conditions of the TaNaKh (see **Ai - The Genealogies of Joseph and Mary**). Since **He**, by virtue of His resurrection, now lives forever, **He** can have no ancestors.⁵⁶

Jesus will reign on **David's throne** forever and ever. This prophecy is fulfilled in **Peter's** sermon in **Acts** on the day of Shavu'ot. **He** quoted **Psalm 16** when he said: **Therefore, my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will live in hope, because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay (Acts 2:26-27).** **Peter** goes on to explain that even though **David** wrote that **Psalm**, he was not referring to himself because **David's** tomb is still with us today. This was a prophecy by **David** about his greater **Son, the Messiah**, who would be resurrected to sit on the right hand of **God the Father's throne** in heaven forever and ever (**Acts 2:34**).

Seemingly, **Gabriel's** words did not calm **Mary**. **Her** mind was swirling. Vaguely, she understood that she was to be the mother of **the King of kings**, but who might this be and how could it occur when she was not even married? The emphasis here is on **her virginity**. "How will this be," **Miryam** asked the angel, "since I am a virgin," or literally, *since I do not know a man (Luke 1:34)?* Many Roman Catholic scholars have argued that the phrase expresses a vow of **virginity**, saying something to the effect of, "I have resolved not to know a man." But it is impossible to see how the verse can have this meaning. No Jewish girl in her right mind would ever take a vow of perpetual **virginity** during her betrothed period.⁵⁷ To have no children was a disgrace. There are no grounds for the doctrine of perpetual **virginity** in this verse. **Mary** simply meant that she was not yet married to **Yosef her betrothed**. **Miryam** did not doubt as **Zechariah** had, she merely wanted to know how the miracle would be accomplished.

Mary's question was a good one. So it was **Gabriel's** turn to be specific. He knew **the Trinity** would accomplish this miracle. So standing tall, he answered: **The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High God will overshadow you**, as the Shechinah glory had rested on the Tabernacle in the wilderness. The overshadowing of **the Holy Spirit** meant that **Jesus** was born without a sin nature, thus fulfilling the prophecies in the TaNaKh (**Genesis 3:25; Isaiah 7:14**). The overshadowing of **the Ruach HaKodesh** would bypass the sin nature of both **Joseph** and **Mary**. The union of a man and a woman can only produce a child with a sin nature. The miracle was not of **Meshiach's** birth, because **He** was born like any other baby. The miracle was the conception. There will be two results: **He will be holy and He will be God. So the holy One to be born will be called the Son of God (Luke 1:35)**. It was during the betrothal period, between the vows and the home-taking, that **Jesus** was conceived by **the Holy Spirit** in **Mary's** womb.

Because of what is said here, a common misconception has arisen. There is a teaching that the necessity of **the virgin birth** was that this was the only possible way of keeping **Yeshua** from inheriting a sin-nature. The implication is that the sin-nature is only transmitted through the male. Since **the Lord** did not have a human father, **He** was sinless. But actually, the Bible doesn't teach that. In fact, the Scriptures sometimes emphasize that the female side of it more than the male side. For example, in **Psalm 51:5** David said: **Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me**. If **God** wanted to, **He** could have produced a sinless **Son** from a sinful male seed and sinful female egg. But **ADONAI** chose to have **the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit** be the means of conception. As a result, **Yeshua** would be **holy**, that is, sinless, and **He** would also be **the Son of God**, that is, deity.⁵⁸

She probably understood the words, but they must have only added to **her** confusion. What the **angel** was saying, **she** reasoned, was something that the Jews had been waiting for centuries; a **Messiah**, a **Savior**, **God** come to earth as **He** had promised long ago. But this miracle would happen through **her**! It was hard to get **her** mind around it.

Gabriel could sense that **Mary** needed more assurance, so he said: **Even Elizabeth your relative, the one who was called "the barren," is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. For with God, nothing is impossible (Luke 1:36-37)**. **ADONAI** responded to Sarah in a similar manner when she laughed after hearing that she would bear a son in her old age. **The LORD** said to Abraham: **Is anything too hard for God (see my commentary on Genesis Et - I Will Surely Return This Time Next Year and Sarah Your Wife Will Have a Son)?**

There is nothing impossible with Ha'Shamayim when He has determined to do something, but He is not obligated to do the impossible when we ask Him. If He did anything we asked of Him then we become gods and He becomes our servant. Some things we might ask of Him are outside of His plan for our lives. Yes, nothing is impossible with God, but there is a great deal that is impossible with us.

Her eyes must have lowered to the dirt floor. She got it. But she also understood that Gabriel had told her about her old relative Elizabeth, who she had not seen in a long time. Her pregnancy would be an earthly seal of assurance to the angel's heavenly words. She, a young virgin, was to be blessed by the Holy Spirit and she would bear a male child who would be God. It was hard for her to believe that the Lord had chosen her, of all women! But she had been taught to accept and obey the will of Elohim from childhood. Therefore, she humbly submitted to God's plan. It was an honor too wonderful to describe, but as is often the case, obedience to ADONAI requires great sacrifice.

Common sense suggests that Miryam must have anticipated all these difficulties the moment the angel told her she would conceive a child. Her joy and amazement at learning that she would be the mother of the Redeemer might therefore have been tempered significantly at the horror of the scandal that awaited her. Still, knowing the cost and weighing it against the immense privilege of becoming the mother of the Meshiach, Miryam surrendered herself unconditionally.

In the simple faith of a child Mary presented herself to ADOANI. She was remarkably prepared for the job ahead of her. One wonders how she became so steeped in God's Word, so bold in her faith, a girl who never owned or even held a copy of the Scriptures in her hands. Somehow Miryam didn't let that stand in her way. Unaware of what was coming, she had been prepared for this daunting assignment since she was a little child soaking up the truth about ADONAI from what she heard in the Temple and from the lips of her parents and other faithful Israelites. She didn't know it at the time, but she was arming herself for the battle of a lifetime.⁵⁹

Obediently, Mary said: **I am the servant of ADONAI.** The word **servant**, or *doule*, can be translated *bond-slave*. The term refers to someone who voluntarily sells himself or herself into slavery. **May it happen to me as you have said (Luke 1:38a CJB).** She was His *bondslave* to do with as He saw fit, whatever came her way. Even death. Unfaithfulness during the formal betrothal period was punishable by stoning. She was not ignorant of that fact, and knew full well what her pregnancy would look like. Although she had remained totally and completely chaste, the world was bound to think otherwise. She could hardly have had a more godly response to the announcement of Yeshua's birth. It demonstrated that she

was a young woman of mature faith and one who worshiped the true and living **God**. **Her** great joy over **the Lord's** plan for **her** would soon be very evident.⁶⁰

As quickly as **he** had come, **the angel** vanished from **her** sight (**Luke 1:38b**). **Her** first impulse must have been to run and find **her** mother. **She** must *tell* someone! **She** must ask for *counsel!* **Mary** must convince **her** mother that **she** was not *inventing* this story! **She** vacillated from excitement to anguish. But the more **she** thought of it, **she** decided not to tell **her** mother. If the **angel** had wanted **her** mother to know, **he** probably would have come when **her** mother was at home, so that both of them could hear this message together (no one ever talks about **Miryam's** parents. What would it have been like to have **Jesus** as your grandson?). But **Gabriel** had deliberately chosen a time when **she** was alone. Therefore, **Mary** must have concluded that it was **the LORD's** desire that **she** keep the secret. Anyway, if anyone else knew the secret they would tell **her** mother, and thus **she** would know who **God** had selected and, therefore, to know of **her** honor.

Surely, **Miryam** must have concluded that **Joseph** would know. **He** was **her** intended husband. The **angel** would just *have* to tell **Yosef**. If **he** didn't know, what would **he** think when **she** began to show. **He** would *know* the baby was not **his**. Oh yes, **she** was quite sure the **angel** would tell **Joseph!**⁶¹