

THE GOSPEL PROJECT – CHRONOLOGICAL

The RESCUE begins

GOD THE SON

Mary Praises the Covenant-Keeping God

It was a dark time for the nation of Israel. The people had heard no prophetic Word from God for 400 years, not since Malachi had promised the coming of Elijah. God's people had long-expected a Messiah to be born. The ancient historians Josephus, Tacitus, and Suetonius all record that there was a general expectancy in the East that the time for the Messiah to appear was near. The spiritual leaders were shackled by tradition and, in some instances, corruption. But no matter how dark the day, there are always those who are obedient and devoted to the LORD God Jehovah!

One of those people was Mary – a teenage girl from the tribe of Judah – who was an unlikely candidate by the world's standards to be used by God Most High for anything special. Why did God choose Mary above all other Jewish girls living at that time? God knew that Mary possessed a heart that would respond to Him. One can only wonder how many opportunities that we miss because God's knows our hearts are not ready to respond positively to His call. It is wise to remember that God is seeking servant hearts in order to unfold His continuing plan. Mary's story begins with a visit from an archangel named Gabriel.

Gabriel appeared twice to Daniel in the Old Testament and twice in the New Testament to make birth announcements. The birth announcement Gabriel made to Zacharias, a priest, as he was serving in the temple concerned the prophesied 'forerunner' of the Messiah. **Malachi 4:5 (ESV)** ⁵ *“Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes.* Because Zacharias and his wife were both old, Zacharias was hesitant to accept Gabriel's words that his aged wife Elizabeth would bear a child. His attitude evidenced a lack of faith. **Hebrews 11:6 (ESV)** ⁶ *And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.* Since Zacharias did not please God in his response to God's messenger, he was unable to speak until after the birth of his promised son.

The second announcement was given to Mary. Mary's response to God's messenger, unlike that of Zacharias, was one of humility, honesty and faith. From scripture we learn that following our Lord is not always easy, but difficulties do not cancel out our joy in the Lord. In faith, Mary submitted to God's difficult plan for her life.

Read Luke 1:26-34 (ESV) ²⁶ *In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from 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. And the virgin's name was Mary.* ²⁸ *And he came to her and said, “Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!”* ²⁹ *But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be.* ³⁰ *And 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 bear a son, and you shall call his name 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 father David,* ³³ *and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.”*

This passage is commonly called the Annunciation. *In the sixth month* connects the annunciation to Mary to Gabriel’s previous announcement to Zacharias. Mary might have been as young as 14 when Gabriel appeared. She was pure in body and heart but that does not mean Mary was sinless only the Son whom she would bear would be sinless.

The scripture tells us that Mary was “troubled” by the angel’s words. In other words, she was puzzled. She did not understand at the time how God Himself was including her in the plan He was unfolding. I doubt that this young girl understood that God Most High was planning to provide a way to redeem us from sin. Her son would be the one to say, “*Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me.*” **John 14:1**

Gabriel addressed Mary as, *O favored one, the Lord is with you!* The expression *favored one* translates full of grace. Some interpret this to mean that Mary was so highly favored that she could dispense grace to others. It is not Mary’s grace or our own grace that saves us. It is God’s grace alone that saves us. **Ephesians 2:8 (ESV)** ⁸ *For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God.* Mary was human just like us – full of flaws and frailties. Nevertheless Mary’s heart longed to magnify God! She was a humble soul. I believe to be favored by God is the desire of every Christian and yet we often don’t understand the significance of God’s favor in our lives. We see from Mary’s life that God’s favor meant that Mary would suffer many things.

The words of Gabriel to Mary were not intended as a prayer or chant to be used throughout the ages. In **Luke 11**, the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray and Jesus provided a model prayer often called the Lord’s Prayer. However, God does want prayers by rote – or petitions from the mind and not the heart. A prayer by a tax collector in **Luke 18:13** ... ‘*God, have mercy on me, a sinner.*’ was recorded as a prayer that pleased God.

The King James Version translates **Luke 1:28 (KJV)** ²⁸ *And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women.* When you compare this with other translations you will notice that *blessed art thou among women* is missing from many other versions since those words are not found in many Greek manuscripts. However, the words are found in the words Elizabeth spoke to Mary in **Luke 1:42 (ESV)** ⁴² *and she exclaimed with a loud cry, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!*

There is a tendency among Protestants to play down the role of Mary. We need to understand that Mary was highly favored and blessed among women, but she was not blessed above women. McGee comments, “She is not lifted above women; she lifted up womanhood... It is so easy to say that a woman brought sin into the world, but remember, it was a woman, and not a man, who brought the Savior into the world.” What a privilege Mary

experienced as being the recipient used to fulfill **Isaiah 7:14 (ESV)** ¹⁴ *Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.*

Read Luke 1:34-38 (ESV) ³⁴ *And Mary said to the angel, “How will this be, since I am a virgin?”* ³⁵ *And the angel answered 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 called holy—the Son of God.”* ³⁶ *And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren.* ³⁷ *For nothing will be impossible with God.”* ³⁸ *And Mary said, “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.” And the angel departed from her.*

What Mary was told by the angel was much harder to believe than what Zacharias had been told. Hebrew history had several examples of infertile couples who miraculously conceived upon the promise of God – the most famous is Abraham and Sarah in their late 90s. However, the conception that Mary was promised would be without a man. The other miraculous births in Scripture still involved a natural course of human reproduction - but what Gabriel was telling Mary was completely different!

Mary could not comprehend what was about to happen. None of us can absolutely comprehend the power of God. She asked, *“How will this be, since I am a virgin?”* Mary was not like Zacharias in her questioning. Hers was simply a desire to understand. I love Gabriel’s reply, *The Holy Spirit will come upon you.* In the beginning, our world came into being under the power of the Spirit of God. Unbelievers have said it is impossible to accept the Bible teaching of the virgin birth because it involves a biological miracle. What it really involves is the omnipotent power of God. The reverent believer can accept this without hesitation. A virgin conception! Unbelievable by human standards and yet, Mary believed *For nothing will be impossible with God.*

I must mention that this passage does not indicate sexual relations between God and Mary occurred. This idea is found in pagan religions. Pagan deities were pictured as engaging in sexual practices. In the virgin birth, God worked in a hidden way beyond our ability to understand.

The Lord gave Mary support. When our lives change direction, God provides people to share in that change. In Mary's case, it was Elizabeth. Elizabeth, an older relative, who had been unable to conceive, was going to have a child in her old age. From a human standpoint, Mary must have been in a daze after her conversation with Gabriel. Imagine the comfort that she must have felt when she went to Elizabeth’s house.

Next, Mary magnifies God for His goodness and mercy.

Read Luke 1:46-50 (ESV) ⁴⁶ *And Mary said, “My soul magnifies the Lord,* ⁴⁷ *and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,* ⁴⁸ *for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed;* ⁴⁹ *for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name.* ⁵⁰ *And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.*

For 400 years, the songs of hope had been silent. The birth of Mary's Son would bring new songs to earth! Mary's song is modeled on the Song of Hannah. Hannah's words are found beginning in *1 Samuel 2:1 (ESV)*¹ ... "*My heart exults in the LORD; my horn is exalted in the LORD. My mouth derides my enemies, because I rejoice in your salvation.* Like Mary, Hannah, was a godly woman who miraculously bore a son through the intervention of God. Hannah's son, Samuel, anointed David as king in Israel; Mary's Son would be the final and permanent Davidic King.

The Magnificat is the traditional name given to Mary's words of praise for God her Savior! Magnificat is a Latin word meaning to 'magnify.' Mary's soul was dwelling on God's greatness as she magnified God. When Mary came to Elizabeth she could have wasted time fretting over what others would think and even worrying about her own future. Instead Mary took the opportunity to magnify the Lord. What do you magnify when your life takes an unexpected direction? Do you magnify your problems or do you magnify your Lord?

When Mary said, *from now on all generations will call me blessed*, she was not acting proud. She was recognizing and accepting the gift God had given her. Pride is refusing to accept God's gifts or taking credit for what God has done; humility is accepting the gifts and using them to praise and serve God. Don't deny, belittle, or ignore your gifts. Thank God for them and use them to His glory.

God needed only one Mary for the mother of His Son. However, God has a purpose for each of His children. When the time comes for God to change the direction of our lives, will we like Mary be able to say, *I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.* And then go forth with singing His praises!

Mary trusts God to keep His promises to His people.

Read Luke 1:51-55 (ESV)⁵¹ *He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts;*⁵² *he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate;*⁵³ *he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty.*⁵⁴ *He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy,*⁵⁵ *as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever."*

From Mary's magnification of the Lord, we realize that Mary is not just a young girl caught up in childish things. Even in her youth, Mary recognized the covenant-keeping God – the God who would keep His promise to Abraham forever.

However, at this point in her journey, Mary most likely expected her Messiah Son to usher in a physical kingdom. It would not be until 33 years later that she would fully understand the full message of Gabriel which literally meant that when she kissed her baby boy she had kissed the face of God!