

International Sunday School Lesson Study Notes

Lesson Text: Luke 1:26-40

Lesson Title: Jesus' Birth Foretold

Introduction

The birth of Jesus Christ is the central point of the history of mankind. Whether Jesus Christ was born the way the Bible says He was born and whether or not He is who He claims to be is still the great divider among men. The story of the birth of Jesus is both biblically and historically accurate. And those who read it and believe it by faith will find salvation, hope, joy, and peace in an otherwise lost, hopeless, and restless world.

The historical events of Jesus' birth are primarily recorded in the gospels of Matthew and Luke. Matthew tells the story of Jesus' birth through the eyes of his Jewish audience and presents Jesus as the legitimate heir to David's throne, the long-awaited Messiah. Luke, the historian (Luke 1: 1-4) and physician (Colossians 4:14), writes primarily to a Gentile audience and tells the story of Jesus' birth through the eyes of people and places. While the Bible doesn't tell us much about Luke, we know he was a Gentile by birth (Colossians 4:10-13) and that the Apostle Paul had a great impact upon his life. As an historian Luke gives us the details we need to believe what God was doing through sending His Son to be our Savior. As a physician Luke writes a prescription for our sin sick souls on every line and page of his gospel.

When you read the gospel of Luke you are reading excellence. There was no hurry up or deleting of details in Luke's account of Jesus' birth. Luke's purpose is clearly stated in his opening words to Theophilus, *"It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus, That thou mightest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed"* (Luke 1:3-4). When the Holy Spirit led Luke to write about Jesus' birth, He drew on Luke's commitment to detail and accuracy. So when you read Luke's account of Jesus' birth you can be "certain of these things."

Gabriel and Mary (Luke 1:26-33)

Verse 26-27

"And in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth, To a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary."

Any serious study of the birth of Jesus requires an accurate understanding of the woman who bore Him. It is sad that more confusion surround the mother of Jesus than Jesus Himself! There are several unbiblical doctrines concerning Mary. First, the doctrine of immaculate conception teaches that Mary was born without a fallen sin nature. In other words, Mary was free from original sin. That is false because the Bible says, "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). Second, the doctrine of perpetual virginity teaches that Mary remained a virgin until her death. Third, the doctrine of bodily assumption teaches that Mary never physically died but was taken directly into heaven in bodily form. These false teachings concerning Mary embraced primarily by the Roman Catholic Church has led to the idea that Mary a co-redeemer and co-mediator alongside her Son, Jesus Christ. That is false.

Luke took great care in presenting Mary accurately and biblically in respect to her role in Jesus' birth. All we need to know about Mary is recorded in the Bible. She is to be modeled in her obedience and commitment to the Lord but should never be prayed too or worshipped.

As Luke begins to tell us about the announcement of Jesus' birth by "the angel Gabriel," he does so from God's side. Luke starts by introducing us to the divine messenger from God, "the angel Gabriel." This is the second time "Gabriel" has appeared in this first chapter (Luke 1:9-19). It had been hundreds of years since any angelic activity had taken place among God's people. But with the foretelling of Jesus' birth, angels are active.

Luke establishes a time line in the story of Jesus' conception and birth. The "sixth month" is a reference to the "sixth month" of Elisabeth's pregnancy. Elisabeth, wife of the priest Zechariah's, is six months pregnant with the forerunner of Jesus, John the Baptist. "Gabriel" is "sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth." Again, Luke uses the words "sent from God" to stress the divine order and intervention of God in the birth of Jesus.

Mary lived in "Nazareth" which was not a prominent or significant place. Archeological evidence suggests that only several hundred people lived in "Nazareth." The reputation of the Nazarene's was not good. Whether they deserved that reputation or not, it may have had something to do with Nathaniel's question

when he heard that Jesus grew up in "Nazareth." He asked, "*Can anything good come out of Nazareth?*" (John 1:46). Philip answered Nathaniel's question, "*Come and see*" (John 1:46).

Twice in verse 27, Luke tells us "Mary" was a "virgin." The word "virgin" is the Greek word "*parthenos*," and means "one who has had no sexual relation." The word is never used of a married woman. At the time of the angel's visit, the virgin Mary was "espoused to a man named Joseph." "Espoused" means "betrothed or engaged" but it was a different type of engagement than what we have in our culture today. "Espousal" was a binding, legal relationship and it was arranged by parents. It was a legal document, parents agreed that their children would marry and it often occurred in the early teenage years. Mary was an "espoused virgin," waiting the celebration of her vows and the consummation of her union with Joseph.

"And the virgins name was Mary" is so exact and to the point. "Mary" means "exalted one," but there is nothing in Mary's life for which she is described by Luke as worthy of anything. When Luke wrote about Zacharias and Elisabeth, he said, "*they were both righteous before God*" (Luke 1:6). But nothing is said about Mary. It makes you want to ask, "Mary who" or "What about Mary."

Verse 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."

The angel's greeting, "Hail, thou that art highly favoured..." conveyed the idea of granting grace or means that Mary was "full of grace." The Roman Catholic Church took this to mean that Mary possessed grace that she could bestow on others. Interpreted correctly, the words mean Mary was the recipient of grace. She was "highly favoured" because of the undeserved, unmerited favor of God.

"The Lord is with thee" are words of affirmation and encouragement to Mary that the Lord will be with her in all that is about to take place in her life. It is only by God's presence and power that Mary will be able to conceive and give birth to Jesus.

"Blessed art thou among women" again stresses the reality that Mary was not the one giving the blessing, she was the recipient of the blessing. She is not "blessed ABOVE women," but rather "blessed among women." As other women would

look at Mary and what the Lord did through her in bringing Jesus into the world they would recognize that Mary was the most happiest among women.

Verse 29

"And when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be."

Mary's response reveals her humility and honesty before God. She was "troubled" or "disturbed" by what the angel had said. Certainly she never expected to see an angel and receive special favors from heaven. There was nothing unique about her that such things should happen. All of this was a troubling surprise to her. She "cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be." She is asking herself, "What does the angel mean when he says I am 'highly favoured and blessed' among women?"

Mary responds this way because Mary knows she is a sinner and undeserving of God's grace. She responds in the same way all sinners should respond when God tells us He has a plan and purpose for us. We should all be humbled and amazed instead of thinking it's about time God took notice of us!

Verse 30

"And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God."

The message of angels in the Old Testament was often associated with judgment, so it is only natural that Mary would be afraid. Gabriel's message to Mary was "Fear not." His message was good news about how God would use her in sending His Son to be the Savior of the world. Again, Gabriel said, "...for thou hast found favour with God." The Holy Spirit wanted Luke and the readers of his gospel to know that what was happening here was all about God's "favour" and grace. Mary has no merit of her own upon which to base what is happening. The same is true of you. Anything in your life that is a result of divine intervention is purely by God's grace.

Verse 31

"And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS."

Luke now tells us what must be considered the high point of their conversation. Gabriel now explains why Mary could be considered "highly favoured of God." The news that Mary would "conceive" would be wonderful if this were nothing more than a natural conception by natural means. Every Hebrew woman longed to be able to bear children, especially "a son" which would guarantee a family legacy.

As part of the announcement, Mary was commanded to name the "son" she would "conceive" and "bring forth, JESUS." "Jesus" is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew name "*Yeshua*" ("Joshua," in English." The name means, "Yaweh saves" (Matthew 1:21).

Verse 32

"He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David:"

Gabriel had told Zacharias that his son, John the Baptist would be "great" (Luke 1:15). Now, his message to Mary alludes to his announcement to Zacharias about the greatness of John the Baptist. However, when Gabriel said, "He shall be great," he distinguishes Jesus from John by declaring Jesus to be "the Son of the Highest." While the expression "Son of the Highest" was sometimes used in the sense of "special man of God (Psalm 82:6; Matthew 5:9; Luke 6:35), the Scriptures make clear that Gabriel said this about Jesus in a literal sense.

"Son of the Highest" means Jesus would have power, prominence, and authority. Mary's "Son" is the "Son" of Elohim. None could be greater! Mary's "Son" would also become the King of Israel, not in an illegitimate political fashion, but legitimately as "the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David." Jesus would lay legitimate claim to David's throne as a true descendant of David (2 Samuel 7:16) and the tribe of Judah (Genesis 49:10).

Verse 33

"And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end."

Gabriel informed Mary that her sons story would not end until he "reigned over the house of Jacob for ever." God is going to give the kingdom to His "Son" and it will be "his kingdom" and "of his kingdom there shall be no end." That's unheard of in Mary's day and unheard of in our day. Every man's kingdom eventually comes to an end, except "his kingdom." There will be an actual earthly Kingdom and in that

Kingdom the Lord Jesus Christ who is the seed of David will reign as the rightful heir to the throne over the nation Israel and over the whole world.

The Lord chose David to become king of Israel, but even this great man failed and his kingdom came to an "end." The Lord promised David that his dynasty would endure, eventually under the rule of a worthy king whose kingdom would exist forever (2 Samuel 7:13-16). Gabriel told Mary, "Your Son will be that king!"

Mary and Gabriel (Luke 1:34-38)

Verse 34

"Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?"

In response to everything Mary heard, she responds to Gabriel with a question. "How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?" Mary, knowing how children are conceived and born is somewhat confused. She asked her question, "How shall this be..." and then she qualified her question by saying, "Seeing I know not a man?" Her use of the word "know" is a reference to sexual relations (Genesis 4:1; 19:8; Judges 21:12; Matthew 1:25). The present tense of the word describes Mary's condition at this time as a "virgin," which clearly includes the past.

Mary believed conception would happen as the angel had said, but she knew her marriage with Joseph was still in the future. So, "how" could she conceive? "How" could all of this happen?

Verse 35-37

"And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God. And, behold, thy cousin Elisabeth, she hath also conceived a son in her old age: and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren. For with God nothing shall be impossible."

Gabriel provided Mary with a straightforward answer. He declared that God Himself through the third person of the Trinity, the "Holy Ghost," would miraculously form a human body for Jesus Christ to indwell. God formed the first man, Adam from the dust of the ground and breathed into him the breath of life (Genesis 2:7). God formed the first woman, Eve, from the side of Adam (Genesis 2:21-22). All other humans being came through the process of reproduction from

Adam and Eve, except for Jesus. He was formed within Mary by the "overshadowing" or "enveloping" presence of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is very active in Luke's account of Christ's birth. He is mentioned in connection with the birth of Christ, or the conception of Christ six times; three times in chapter 1 and three times in chapter 2 of Luke's gospel. The Holy Spirit was the original agent of creation as recorded in Genesis 1:2. Once again He is involved in creative work. This time however, His creative work is not in the world but in the womb of a virgin.

This child, this "holy thing" was free from the contamination of Adam's original sin. To be called "holy thing" is significant. New born babies may be cute and cuddly but they are not "holy." They are conceived in sin and born in sin. Only God's redeeming grace can make them holy. Since Jesus was not born of Joseph's seed He was *"holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens"* (Hebrews 7:26). He was as Gabriel declared Him to be, "the Son of God."

While Mary did not ask for a sign of confirmation, the angel nonetheless provided something that must have helped encourage her in the face of all that way happening. Gabriel said, "And, behold, thy cousin Elisabeth, she hath also conceived a son in her old age..." God had given Zacharias and Elisabeth a miraculous pregnancy as well. This must have shocked Mary because Gabriel next gave her a principle to encourage her faith. He said, "For with God nothing shall be impossible."

If Mary's faith regarding God miraculously placing the Son of God in her womb supernaturally, or in believing the miraculous conception of John in Elisabeth's body by natural means, here was a principle designed to help her realize that God could do anything He chose to do. God gave a similar word to Abraham when He announced the birth of Isaac (Genesis 18:14).

Verse 38

"And Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word. And the angel departed from her."

Mary responded to Gabriel's words without hesitation. She was obviously a spiritually sensitive young woman. She didn't argue or rationalize Gabriel's conclusion that with God nothing was impossible. She quickly submitted to the divine will of God and referred to herself as "the handmaid of the Lord." The term

"handmaid" describes a particular kind of servitude in Mary's day. It speaks of a person who has voluntarily sold herself into slavery, usually to pay a debt or to avoid destitution. She used the word "handmaid" to express her complete submission to the will of God. What she is saying is, "I willingly commit myself to the unconditional service of the Lord." With Mary's statement of commitment, "the angel departed from her" and Mary's communication with Gabriel ended.

Mary and Elisabeth (Luke 1:39-40)

Verse 39-40

"And Mary arose in those days, and went into the hill country with haste, into a city of Juda; And entered into the house of Zacharias, and saluted Elisabeth."

Luke's primary concern in these verses is to tell us that Mary went to be with Elisabeth, no doubt to talk about what the Lord was doing in their lives. If anyone could understand her situation, Elisabeth could. The trip from Nazareth in Galilee to the "hill country of Juda" was a rather lengthy trip for Mary to travel alone. Perhaps she joined a caravan of travelers, maybe relatives or acquaintances as she made the journey. Under God's protection, she reached her destination and entered the house of Zacharias and Elisabeth. As Mary entered the house, she "saluted" or "greeted" Elisabeth.

Conclusion

Gabriel's visit with Mary concerning her role in the birth of Jesus is remarkable and encouraging. God broke through the silence of centuries and chose a humble virgin in a less than notable place to announce God's plan. Mary reacted in ways similar to how anyone would react when God intervenes in our world. She was stunned, surprised, humble, full of questions, but never once did she say, "No way, this is impossible." Nor did she object to God's plan.

All of us can learn from Mary. Like Mary, we are sinners with no claims on God's grace. And yet, God in His grace can use us to do His will. If we are to admire Mary for any reason, let it be for her remarkable example of faith and submission to the Lord. Let us pray that whenever and for whatever reason God may step into our life and speak to us, that we too would respond as did Mary, "...be it unto me according to thy word."

Amen.

