

Intro

This is a session taking a look at Mary, the Mother of Jesus, and the circumstances leading up to the birth of Jesus. For Roman Catholics, this story is highly important as they have a reverence for Mary that is not shared by people who aren't Catholics. But are we missing something if we give this story a miss? Yes, because the Bible tells us in 2 Timothy 3.16 that all Scripture is useful! So this is a look through Luke 1 to see where we can learn and grow in our faith.

Luke 1.26-38

In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favoured! The Lord is with you."

Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favour with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end."

"How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"

The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month. For nothing is impossible with God."

"I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May it be to me as you have said." Then the angel left her.

Being Ready For God

Are you ready for God to move in your life? OK, so none of us are 'ready' – but is your heart and life in a place where God will be more able to use you? It helps.

1 John 3.21-22

Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God and receive from him anything we ask, because we obey his commands and do what pleases him.

So what does 1 John say? If our hearts don't condemn us, we can have confidence before God. What does it mean for our heart to condemn us? Well 1 John tells us that too – not obeying God's commands and not doing what pleases him. If our hearts and our spirits are not right before God and if we are actively sinning, then God won't communicate with us

like he does if we are right with him. We know that because the Bible says if we come close to God, he'll come close to us (James 4.8).

We also know that Mary was a virgin, pledged to be married. So she was obedient to God's Word and doing what was right. She was pure and God was able to use her. Remember that being pure, being right before God is nothing to be ashamed of. Would you rather wear clean or dirty clothes?

But please listen, if you've had sex before marriage, this is not a message against you!

Disobeying God brings its own punishment, not always as we deserve, thank God. But there is a way back. This is called 'repentance' – this word is a heart condition where you are truly sorry for what you've done, say sorry to God and ask him to renew you afresh by his Spirit. 1 John 1.9 – *'If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.'* You exchange dirty clothes for fresh new ones!! So we need to be in a place where our hearts are as right before God as they can be – obeying God's Word and living in a Godly way. This is where Mary obviously was. We see from verse 38 that Mary was very clear of her position – she was a servant of the Lord. So are we. We need to see ourselves in light of who God is, not in light of who others are around. This is good because it's encouraging, but it's also humbling.

Expecting God to move and speak in our lives

What was Mary doing before the Angel visited her? Who was she? Have you ever thought about that? You see, Mary was right before God, but she was just an ordinary person visited by a message from an extraordinary God. Something uniquely amazing and miraculous happened to Mary (she gave birth to Jesus). But God has a unique plan for your life too, that is also miraculous. It won't be on the same scale, but God will do things through you.

We read in verse 26 that God himself sent the top angel, Gabriel, to bring the message to Mary. When the angel arrived he called Mary, 'highly favoured'. Indeed she was. She had a special mission. But you too are highly favoured by God, if you have accepted Jesus in your life. You, too, have a special mission. We have the basic orders for our mission in Matthew 28.19. But God will speak to you, use you in a unique way, as he did for Mary.

And listen: 'The Lord is with you.' Take time out to let that truth filter into your mind and your spirit. The Lord is with you. What a message, what an encouragement, what a truth for us all!

Having doubts and being worried

Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favour with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end."

"How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"

How would you react if an angel came and visited you with a message from God? What about if God told you that you were to give birth to the Saviour of mankind? It may be a little worrying. Mary was a bit concerned, understandably. But hear this, it is OK to doubt and to have questions. However, Mary's questions to the angel were different to those we find with Zechariah, also in Luke 1..

Zechariah asked the angel, "How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years."

The angel answered, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to tell you this good news. And now you will be silent and not able to speak until the day this happens, because you did not believe my words, which will come true at their proper time."

The difference was that Zechariah doubted and did not believe the words from God (via the angel). Mary doubted how things would happen but believed the words that came from God. There is a subtle difference here. We must make sure that we align ourselves to believe what God has said. Yes, there will be questions about how, when, where. God's Word testifies that it is true and faithful – 1 Kings 8.56 says, 'Not one word has failed of all the good promises he gave through his servant Moses.'

Mary in the natural met with the angel who brought the supernatural. And Mary believed and accepted what God had said.. Like Jesus says to us today – "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible." (Matthew 19.26)

"I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May it be to me as you have said." Then the angel left her.

Mary verbalized her faith in words out loud. It shows the importance of the mouth, the tongue. To hear and speak, to preach, accept the Word of God is powerful. It builds faith, it does incredible things beyond anything we can ask or even imagine. This happened for Mary – and in many different ways, it will happen for you too. Let's be like the disciples of Jesus – *"Then the disciples believed the Scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken."* (John 2.22)

God brings answers

The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month. For nothing is impossible with God."

Let's first note that it is something truly incredible to have a baby. It is a gift from God. We live in a world where mankind has appointed itself to be god over life and death. But the Lord God alone is the giver of life. We know that because Genesis 1.30 talks about, *"everything that has the breath of life in it"* and Genesis 2.7 testifies that, *"the LORD God*

formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being." The same word that is used for 'breath' is used to describe the Holy Spirit. Mankind sets itself as giver and taker of life at great risk and cost. Let's learn something about how God worked in Mary's life. The angel Gabriel spoke and said, 'the Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.'

Verse 35 (Amplified Bible) – Then the angel said to her, The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you [like a shining cloud]; and so the holy (pure, sinless) Thing (Offspring) which shall be born of you will be called the Son of God.

The Holy Spirit works in us to shape us and change us to make us more like Jesus. (John 14.16 – the Spirit is described as the helper and the Spirit of truth, John 16.13-14 tells us that – *But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you.*)

But we know from the Bible that there are separate experiences of the Holy Spirit, when the Spirit does specific and often miraculous things in and through us. This happened to Mary. The seed was planted into her womb that would grow to become Jesus, the Son of God, fully man and fully God.

We also know that the power of God would overshadow Mary. So it is with you and I. This is the place we find that God is so much more powerful than us, that we are small compared to his greatness. This is the place where selfishness and self has to bow in the face of Almighty God. This is the place where we see ourselves as we truly are. We are overshadowed, God is glorified, just as the Bible says it should be.

Birthing A Vision

How long is a pregnancy? 9 months – in case you didn't know. This is the time in the womb that the baby is shaped, developed and is grown miraculously, an amazing gift from God. Limbs are formed, the vital organs are created, the personality and DNA from the parents runs through the baby's body. It is a place of growth, of development, of change for both the baby and the mother / family. A woman has to go through this time, the pregnancy, before the baby can be birthed.

There is a very Scriptural principle at work here. When God works in a situation, he brings a time of birthing to a vision, before the vision is actually 'born' and made a reality. This is a time of growth, development and the outworking of a vision, a dream, a Word that God has put in us but is working to fulfil. This is an encouragement to you. If something that God has promised and spoken has not yet happened, believe, it will happen. This happened with Mary, this happened elsewhere in the Bible too. Let's take a look..

Abraham – Romans 4.20-21 says this, "Without weakening in his faith, Abraham faced the fact that his body was as good as dead – since he was about a hundred years old – and that Sarah's womb was also dead. Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding

the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised."

Again we see that in the natural, things seemed impossible. But with God, the natural means less than his power at work in the supernatural. With God, all things are possible. We also see that Abraham had to wait for God's promise to be fulfilled of him to be the Father of many nations. Yet he didn't waver, but was strengthened in God, being totally persuaded that God had the power to do what he had promised. Though Abraham waited, struggled, and messed up, God delivered and was faithful. (Genesis 21.2)

Paul – On the road to Damascus, Jesus himself met with Paul and changed Paul's world. In Acts 9.15, God spoke to Ananias about Paul, *"Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel."* Yet this did not happen straight away. God went to work on Paul.

We read from Galatians 1:15-18, "But when God, who set me apart from birth and called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not consult any man, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was, but I went immediately into Arabia and later returned to Damascus. Then after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Peter and stayed with him fifteen days."

So Paul spent at least 3 years in training and development before God released him.

The same is true for you. God will support, train, encourage and then release you – continuing to be with you wherever you go and whatever you do.

BONUS BIT – Who Is Jesus?

And listen! You will become pregnant and will give birth to a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus.

He will be great (eminent) and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give to Him the throne of His forefather David,

And He will reign over the house of Jacob throughout the ages; and of His reign there will be no end.

And Mary said to the angel, How can this be, since I have no [intimacy with any man as a] husband?

Then the angel said to her, The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you [like a shining cloud]; and so the holy (pure, sinless) Thing (Offspring) which shall be born of you will be called the Son of God.

Jesus was born naturally, yet conceived supernaturally. He grew in the flesh naturally, yet was God at the same time. He is great, above all names, the son of the Most High God, he sits on the throne of David, reigns over Israel (the House of Jacob) throughout the ages, there will be no end to his reign. Jesus empowers his people to shine with his light. He is sinless and pure. One day his people will be too.

Be encouraged today!!