

Mission Impossible

26 Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by 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. The virgin's name [was] Mary. 28 And having come in, the angel said to her, "Rejoice, highly favored [one,] the Lord [is] with you; blessed [are] you among women!" 29 But when she saw [him,] she was troubled at his saying, and considered what manner of greeting this was. 30 Then 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 bring forth a Son, and shall call His name JESUS. 32 "He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give 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." 34 Then Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I do not know a man?" 35 And the angel answered and said to her, "[The] Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God. 36 "Now indeed, Elizabeth your relative has also conceived a son in her old age; and this is now the sixth month for her who was called barren. 37 "For with God nothing will be impossible." 38 Then Mary said, "Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her (Luke 1:26-38, NKJV)

[Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit (Matt 1:18, NKJV)]

Context

Who, What, Where, When, and Why?

Who: Mary was a virgin living in the city of Nazareth in the district of Galilee. She was betrothed to a man named Joseph who happened to be a descendant of King David. She was apparently a descendant of David as well and a cousin to Elizabeth, the wife of Zechariah. This would indicate her family heritage also embraced the priestly tribe of Levi. As Joseph's betrothed she was regarded as his wife by Jewish law and custom although he did not have a husband's rights until after the marriage.

What: she was approached by the Angel Gabriel sent by God to tell her she would be the mother of the Messiah, God's own son. Gabriel briefly explained she would become pregnant by the power the Holy Spirit even though she was a virgin.

Where: This happened in the town of Nazareth. It is an area north of Judea in the hilly country of Galilee. It is the home town of Joseph and the place Jesus would grow up.

When: This apparently took place in the six month of Elizabeth's pregnancy. Although it is difficult to conclude the exact time of Jesus birth, there is good evidence he was born sometime in the fall of 3 or 2 BC. Therefore, this would've taken place around what we would call January 3 or 2 BC.

Why: this happened as a fulfillment of prophecy. The coming Messiah had been foretold for centuries and now Gabriel had arrived to announce the event. Also, it was necessary that Mary be told what was going to happen. She needed to understand what was

taking place and why. It is recorded for our edification. We have the infallible word of God telling us Jesus was born of a virgin named Mary.

Content

What was the original author concerned with and what did he want his original audience to understand? Furthermore, how would the original audience interpret it?

Luke, the original author, wanted to tell others (specifically Theophilus) about the coming of Jesus the Christ. He intended to make it clear Jesus' conception and birth did not come about in the usual way. More importantly, Luke intended his original audience be informed of Jesus miraculous birth by the power of the Holy Spirit. Luke is telling his audience that Jesus is the actual son of God. In reality, he has very little to say about Mary.

The original audience would have had a variety of reactions. Those who were familiar with the many pagan legends concerning a virgin birth would, possibly, shrug and say "so what?" On the other hand, any Jew who read this account would immediately think of Isaiah's prophecy concerning the virgin or maiden who would give birth. They would not necessarily consider this a fulfillment of that prophecy but a *filling up* of the prophecy. In other words, they would see this as an indication Jesus was from God and was the one to bring about God's desired end for his people. In any case, it would require faith provided by the Holy Spirit to believe this account and to understand its importance.

Clearly this was a confusing situation for Mary. Her discombobulation began with Gabriel's greeting. After all, why would an angel come to her in the first place? Gabriel (who never bothered to introduce himself to Mary) describes her as highly favored and blessed among women. Then he had to tell her "do not be afraid."

It immediately gets worse after the inauspicious beginning. Mary is told she's going to have a baby even though she's a virgin. Then she told the pregnancy would be brought about power of the Holy Spirit. This would be a lot to take in for a young woman. It came out of the blue. There is no indication she was warned about this in any way.

Consideration

What are the principles found here and how do they apply to the modern world?

No one will ever again experience what Mary did some 2000 years ago. This was a one-time event. However, there are things we can learn from Mary's experience we can put into practice in our lives.

Sometimes God's word is confusing. We should not expect a visit from an angel as Mary did but as we read the Bible there will be times we do not understand what it says to us. We might wonder how in the world it can be true. How in the world can we actually accept and live out the Bible?

As we consider God's word, it might seem impossible for us to fully embrace and live what we read. For instance, extending forgiveness may seem impossible in some situations. Nevertheless, the Bible is very clear; if we hope to enjoy the forgiveness of God we must forgive others.

Hence, there are times we must simply accept God's word and obey it. It may seem as if we are "going through the motions." The reality is we will be blessed with the renewing of our mind as we die to ourselves and pray to the Lord "behold your servant. Let it be to me according to your word."

Study Questions

- 1. Was the idea of a virgin birth unheard of in the first century?*
- 2. What supports has God provided when we face a difficult task?*
- 3. What is the first step in doing God's will?*

If you would like input on your answers to the study questions you may message me through myFaithBase.com or email me at mfb@davidericwilliams.com