



### **Luke 1:26-38**

**26 In the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee,**

**27 to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin’s name was Mary.**

**28 The angel went to her and said, “Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.”**

**29 Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be.**

**30 But the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God.**

31 You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus.

32 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,

33 and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end."

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

35 The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on 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.

36 Even Elizabeth your relative 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.

37 For no word from God will ever fail."

38 "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled." Then the angel left her.

**This is the second message in our Angels of Christmas series. Angels play such an important part in the Christmas story. In a very short period of time, angels appear to different people to let them know about their role in the coming of the birth of our Lord. Without heavenly intervention, the story as it unfolds would have been terribly frightening to everyone involved. It was so very important that each person understood their role so that Jesus could be born, the prophecy be fulfilled, and individuals could embrace their roles with joy and passion rather than fear. The angels are the glue that holds everything together. They give meaning and understanding to questions that would otherwise go unanswered.**

**Last week we talked about Zechariah and Elizabeth and how Gabriel had appeared to Zechariah in the temple to tell him that Elizabeth was going to have a child, which in and of itself, must have seemed impossible since Elizabeth was much too old to have a baby. Our story today happens six months into Elizabeth's pregnancy. Zechariah is still mute from his encounter with the angel Gabriel. Since they were related and didn't live too far apart, it is likely that Mary knew of Elizabeth's pregnancy and the story of Zechariah had surely been the subject of gossip and speculation throughout the region.**

**It's about 64 miles from Nazareth (which is in Galilee) to Jerusalem. And it is about 6 more miles beyond that to get to Bethlehem. Jerusalem was a cosmopolitan area, rich in culture and tradition. It was the religious center for all**

of Israel. Very little that happened in Jerusalem went unnoticed throughout entire country. We also read in the first chapter of Luke that, not long after the angel departed from her, Mary traveled to visit Elizabeth in Judah, which is northwest of Jerusalem and a little over 60 miles from Nazareth. We also know that the promise from the angel had come to pass because we read this passage of scripture in Luke 1:39-45:

**39 At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea,**

**40 where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth.**

**41 When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.**

**42 In a loud voice she exclaimed: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear!**

**43 But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?**

**44 As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy.**

**45 Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!"**

So, we know that Mary was pregnant when she traveled to visit Elizabeth and we know that she stayed with Elizabeth for about 3 months. Scholars believe that she stayed at the house of Zechariah until the birth of John before returning

home to Nazareth. When taking into account the customs of the time, Joseph probably accompanied Mary on her visit since woman seldom traveled those kinds of distances alone. He probably did not stay with her in Judah but left and returned home only to come back 3 months later to take her back to Nazareth.

But I don't want to get too far ahead of ourselves. I just want you to understand the distances involved and that it wasn't that unusual to travel those distances, even on foot or by mule. When Joseph and Mary travel from Nazareth to Bethlehem, the trip is going to be a difficult one simply because Mary's baby is due. Any trip can seem long when you are that uncomfortable to begin with.

Back to our story. God sends Gabriel to speak talk to Mary and the first thing he says is "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you." Mary is troubled by the words. Why do you think that is? Don't you get a little nervous when a stranger seems to know more about you than you do? It usually means something very unexpected is about to happen. That something could be good, but it could also be something bad. "You are who are highly favored! The Lord is with you!"

There is nothing about the angel that seems to frighten Mary other than his words. He realizes this and he comes back with the standard angel greeting "Do not be afraid, Mary." In other words, just like with Zechariah, the angel is there to

deliver good news. “You have found favor with God!” God loves you, Mary, and He has big plans for your life.

**31 You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus.**

**32 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,**

**33 and he will reign over Jacob’s descendants forever; his kingdom will never end.”**

Now I want you to put yourself in Mary’s sandals for a minute. Scripture tells us that this messenger from God is an angel, but there is nothing in the scripture that suggests to us that Mary knows that this is an angel speaking with her. Still, she probably suspected that this messenger was sent from God simply because he knew so much about her. What she sees and hears is a stranger that is telling her that

1. She is going to have a baby
2. That she is to name the baby Jesus
3. That the baby will be the son of God

As difficult as it was for Zechariah to grasp the notion that his elderly, barren wife was going to have a baby, think of how this must have sounded to Mary. After all, she’s a virgin. She’s never been with a man and this stranger is telling her that she is going to become pregnant through the intervention of the Holy Spirit. How is she supposed to explain this to those around her, especially her fiancé’?

Mary is more focused on the message than the messenger. We know this because she responds with **“How will this be, since I am a Virgin?”** I think the question is an honest one rather than one filled with doubt. Mary does not share the hesitation that Zechariah had when he faced his angel. This is not a response of disbelief but really more of a technical question. Mary is young and probably somewhat naïve, and you have to remember that everyone is on uncharted ground here because having a baby without two people being involved had never happened to anyone, anywhere at any time. So, her question is a legitimate question.

The angel’s response is almost cryptic in a way. It was not unusual for the Holy Spirit to work in the lives of men and women, but this was a highly unusual prophecy with regards to the Holy Spirit. But the angel stamps the answer with the seal of God by saying to her **“For no word from God will ever fail.”** It is a statement of fact. God said it and that is how it’s going to be. The message is signed, sealed and delivered. **“For no word from God will ever fail.”**

Mary could have responded by saying that she didn’t understand. She could have turned her technical question into an argument of disbelief. She could have laughed the whole thing off and dismissed the angel. But remember how the angel started this whole conversation. **“Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.”** God chooses His vessels well. He knew exactly how Mary would respond because He knew Mary. Mary was already favored by God. She had already established a relationship with her Heavenly Father. It comes as no surprise when she responds back to the angel **“I am the Lord’s servant. May your**

**word to me be fulfilled.”** In other words, Mary knows that it is God speaking into her and what He is asking of her. She is going to step into the promise that God holds for her. She may not completely understand what is about to happen, but she trusts that God knows what is best for her and she accepts His purpose for her, because she lives to serve her God.

We hear word like this on television shows. “I serve at the pleasure of the mayor.” “I serve at the pleasure of the president.” This means that these people give themselves over in trust to those that they work for. As Christians, we are called to serve at the pleasure of God. We are His vessels. We are His hands and feet. We must be willingly give our lives over to Him so that He can use us to fulfill His will here on earth.

What is the lesson that we can learn from Mary’s interaction with the angel Gabriel? Is it relevant to our lives? Of course the Christmas story is relevant. The birth of Christ is relevant. The fulfillment of God’s promise is relevant. But how is this dialogue between Mary and the angel relevant other than it serves as a place holder in the Christmas story?

I asked you to step into Mary’s sandals a little earlier. Let’s face it, what God was asking of Mary seems to us to be so impossible. I told you last week that it is so much easier to believe in the miracle when you are on the other side of the miracle, and, in this case, that is so very true. We know and believe that God sent His son to be born of a virgin and to die for the sins of all mankind. We know this because we are on the other side of that miracle. I want you to see and understand that Mary believes in the miracle before it happens and while it happens. **“I am the Lord’s servant,” Mary answered. “May your word to me be**



**fulfilled.”** I trust in your word. I trust in your prophecy. I am prepared to step into that prophecy because you are my God and I am your servant.

Can we, as believers, arrive at that same point in our faith where we totally trust that God has us in the palm of His hand, that we bend totally to His will and trust that His way is not just the best way, but that it is the only way. Do we trust God when He speaks into our lives? Do we believe the message from Gabriel that says **“For no word from God will ever fail.”**

There will come a point in every Christian’s life that God will ask us to do something that we believe is impossible. But that’s the point. **WE** believe it to be impossible.

**God will ask us to forgive someone for something that we believe is unforgiveable.**

**God will ask us to step into a situation that seems to us to be unresolveable.**

**God will ask us to give when we think we have nothing to give.**

**God will ask us to take another step forward when there appears to be no path to step onto.**

**God will ask us to light a candle in the darkness when we have neither a candle nor a match.**

**God will ask us to embrace a neighbor that has done nothing but antagonize us.**

**God will ask us to love without expecting to be loved, give when there is nothing to gain, speak when we cannot find the words, listen when we are so distracted that we cannot hear our own thoughts and lead others to him in spite of the confusion in our own lives.**

**What we believe to be impossible has nothing to do with God's expectations. God does not play by our rules. What seems impossible for us is never impossible for God. Oh, the wonderful things that God can do through us if we will only let Him. If we will only open our minds and hearts to the understanding that there is nothing that is too great for our God.**

**It is our own disbelief, lack of trust and the limits we place on our own lives that keep us from living life to the fullest. We make our own excuses to convince ourselves that the messengers that God puts in our lives just don't understand our situation. We are too old, like Elizabeth. We are too afraid, like Zechariah. We are too slow of speech, like Moses. We are too young, like Jeremiah. We've lost our strength, like Samson. We are too short, like Zacchaeus. We are too sinful, like David. We are too dirty to have our feet washed. We are too small to face Goliath. We are too depressed, like Elijah. We have a million and one reasons why we cannot do the impossible. We don't have time. We don't have the resources. We don't have the necessary experience. We don't have the credentials. We just don't see any way to make it happen.**

And none of that matters, because what we do have is the Creator of the Universe standing by our side, lifting us up, giving us strength, providing us with insight and giving us the vision to look past all the obstacles. We have a God that shows us the vision and then illuminates the path. We have a God who sends us messengers to speak into us, to teach us, to direct us, to give us hope. Messengers that bring messages of promise and how that promise will be fulfilled.

Instead of giving our God excuses for why we can't do things, we need to approach our perceived obstacles with the words of Mary. We need to burn those words into our hearts. When we face the impossible that God has laid out before us we need to answer back with **"I am the Lord's servant. May your word to me be fulfilled."** Let God's messengers speak into us. Hear what God has to say. Know that the words are His.

There is a single solution to every difficult situation we face. We need to turn our face toward heaven and cry out in acceptance to our creator:

**"I am the Lord's servant. May your word to me be fulfilled."**

**AMEN**

Next week we will be talking about how God sends an Angel of Assurance to a poor carpenter who is struggling to figure out God's plan in his life and the hard choices he has to make for himself, his fiancé' and the role he is to play in the Christmas Story. I pray that you will join us again as we continue discussing The Angels of Christmas.