

Explore the Bible: December 13

Conceived • Luke 1:26-38

By Ann Maniscalco



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By the time you read this, you may have already heard I'm Dreaming of a White Christmas or Jingle Bell Rock more times than you'd like. Merchants are going all out to gather your holiday money into their pockets, advertising "the perfect gift".

However, the perfect Gift isn't one available at your favorite store or something that the Amazon® delivery truck will drop off, ready to be lovingly wrapped in colorful paper and bright ribbon. No, this Gift was delivered over 2,000 years ago in the form of a soft, cuddly baby boy.

We're getting ahead of the story. Let's look back on a seemingly ordinary day in the life of a young Jewish maiden. Last week, we thought about gender reveal parties. Ultrasounds give parents-to-be a glimpse of their developing baby, allowing the sex to be determined. Then, loved ones share the celebratory news before the birth. Last week, we saw an orchestrated gender reveal event before the baby was even conceived; we'll see a similar occurrence in today's passage.

"In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a

city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary" (Luke 1:26-27 ESV). We don't know Mary's age, but she could have been but a teen. The word, "betrothed" (other translations use "espoused" or "pledged"), signified a time between the marriage vows being taken and the physical consummation of the union, usually about a year.

Just as Gabriel brought a mind-boggling announcement to Zechariah, so he presented Mary with one. In greeting her, he called her "favored one" adding, "the Lord is with you" (v. 28 NIV). We can imagine the apprehensive young woman trying to collect her thoughts during this dramatic and unexpected visit!

The angel sought to calm her, calling her by name and telling her not to be afraid. He announced she had "found favor with God" (v. 30). Notice this term is used in both verses 28 and 30. The word in Greek denotes the concept of "grace." Mary, although a godly young woman, did not earn the honor bestowed on her; it was a gift of God's grace.

This presents us with a picture applicable to each of our lives. The Apostle Paul offers himself as an example in 1 Corinthians 15:10, referring to God's grace to him, a zealous persecutor of the early Christians: "But by the grace of God, I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect." Likewise, we who believe have been thusly graced (Ephesians 2:8-9)!

Gabriel continued, telling Mary she would bear a son, naming Him Jesus. Just as the angel's message to Zechariah contained details of John the Baptist's future life, so the announcement to Mary followed suit. Luke 1:32-33 tells us this holy Child would be great and be called the Son of the Most High. Also, He would be given the throne of David, ruling over the house of Jacob (a term referring to Israel). In addition, His kingdom would be an eternal one. (This was prophesied in

Isaiah 9:6-7, where verse seven denotes that His reign would extend beyond David's domain: "of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end".)

Mary knew the Old Testament foretold that the future Messiah would be David's descendant. Two genealogies are traced in Matthew 1:1-16 and Luke 3:23-37. There are considerable differences in the two. The MacArthur Study Bible (NASB) explains: "The two genealogies are easily reconciled if Luke's is seen as Mary's genealogy, and Matthew's version represents Joseph's." Thus, this covers the lineage through Joseph as Jesus' legal father, and the physical descent through Mary.

Naturally incredulous, Mary asked "How will this be, since I am a virgin?" (Luke 1:34). Gabriel explained the conception would be a spiritual one, saying, "the Holy Spirit will come upon you," resulting in a child who would "be called holy – the Son of God" (v. 35). He reminded her of her relative Elizabeth's miraculous pregnancy, assuring her that "nothing will be impossible with God" (v. 37). Without pondering further or discussing her decision with others, and in total submission as a "servant of the Lord," Mary responded, "Let it be to me according to your word" (v. 38).

Verses 37-38 are incredibly powerful and thought-provoking. We see a reminder of God's omnipotent authority, along with Mary's unquestioning faith that obeys, no matter the cost. May we believe the first, and then follow Mary's example of wholehearted surrender.

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