

Born of a Virgin

Luke 1:26-38, 2:1-7

Mary had the enormous blessing of carrying, birthing, and raising the Lord Jesus Christ. Despite the idolatry and superstition that has followed her, we take our direction from Scripture to understand the virgin and the virgin birth.

Summary of the Text

In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy God sends the angel Gabriel to Nazareth in Galilee, to Mary, a virgin betrothed to Joseph of the house of David (vv. 26-27). The angel says she is highly favored, the Lord is with her, and she is blessed among women (v. 28). Mary is troubled by this and wonders what it means, but he says not to fear for she has found grace with God (vv. 29-30). She will conceive and birth a Son named Jesus who will be called the Son of the Highest and receive the throne of His father David (vv. 31-32). He'll rule over the house of Jacob forever and His kingdom will have no end (v. 33). Mary takes this new to be imminent and therefore wonders how it can be true since she has not known a man sexually (v. 34). The angel explains that the Holy Spirit will come upon her and the holy child will be called the Son of God (v. 35). Her relative Elizabeth has also conceived in her old age, a barren woman now six months pregnant; nothing is impossible with God (vv. 36-37). Mary's response reveals her faith and humility: "Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word" (v. 38). While Quirinius was governor of the Roman province of Judea, Caesar Augustus called for a census, so everyone has to go to their city to be registered (vv. 1-3). Joseph and Mary go up from Nazareth to Judea, to Bethlehem the city of David (vv. 4-5; cf. 1 Sam. 17:12). She gives birth there to her firstborn Son, wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger because there was no space in the inn or room (vv. 6-7).

Conceived by the Holy Spirit

The origin and destination of Gabriel shows the divine intervention necessary to accomplish the virgin birth. He is sent by God to Nazareth, from heaven to a little village in northern Israel. Twice in verse 27 Mary is described as a virgin (*parthenos*) which can also mean "young woman", but her words put it beyond doubt: "How can this be, since I do not know a man?" (v. 34; cf. Gen. 4:1). The miraculous nature of Jesus' conception is compared by Gabriel to Elizabeth's conception in her old age (v. 36). The virgin birth is a primary doctrine of the Christian faith because of the divine nature and holiness of the God-man. Unlike the Levitical priests, Jesus did not need to atone for Himself; He could therefore offer Himself as a holy sacrifice: "who does not need daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the people's, for this He did once for all when He offered up Himself" (Heb. 7:27). First century Israelites understood the biological nature of conception so Mary's question could be anyone's: "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" (v. 35). This would sound absurd to many people in Israel, including the Sadducees who dominated the Sanhedrin, the ruling council. They denied the existence of angels and would believe none of this. Mary trusts in God and knows she needs a divine savior— Jesus, meaning "Yahweh Saves"—and one who became like us from womb to tomb.

Blessed Among Women

Gabriel announces Mary has been given grace by God and is blessed among women (vv. 28, 30). Elizabeth will also call her blessed and Mary realizes that all generations will do the same (vv. 42, 45, 48). Scripture is full of blessed women: Eve, Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, Leah, Zipporah, Hannah, Bathsheba, Abigail, Ruth, Deborah, Jael, Mary Magdalene, Lydia, Priscilla, Anna, and many more. Mary is blessed among them for

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the privilege of bearing and raising Christ with the faith God gave her to do it. It's hard for many Christians to even hear Mary's name without thinking of the idolatrous prayer, "Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee...." It comes from verse 28 with the additional word "Mary" added in the thirteenth century. There would be no problem greeting Mary this way when you see her, but since Scripture forbids necromancy (Lev. 20:6), praying to any departed saint is a sin. No one in Scripture asks God to get a message to the deceased, who apparently are occupied with greater things. We commit the departed into God's hands and are thereby comforted. We reject the false doctrine that Mary is a co-redemptrix with Christ or any kind of mediator (2 Tim. 2:5). The Roman Catholic doctrines of her immaculate conception (1854) and assumption into heaven (1950) are not found in Scripture and contradicted by Mary's own confession that she needs a savior (Lk. 2:47). Mary's initial virginity obviously protects the identity of Jesus as conceived by the Holy Spirit and Mary's faithfulness to God while betrothed. Virginity within marriage is not faithful at all but a covenant-breaking withholding. Paul commands husbands and wives to render "due benevolence" (KJV), not depriving one another of sexual love except for times of fasting and prayer (1 Cor. 7:3, 5). Matthew's gospel says Joseph did not know Mary until after she gave birth to Jesus (Matt. 1:25), obviously implying that he did post-birth. As every married Israelite woman would want, Mary went on to have more children, at least four boys and two girls (Matt. 13:55-56). An unscriptural view of sex drives the gymnastics of scriptural interpretation to get Mary to be a perpetual virgin. She was not blessed because she was born sinless, didn't die, or never slept with Joseph, but because of her glorious, Scripture-filled faith (Lk. 1:46-55). She believed the word of God from Gabriel and magnified the Lord. Grace came to Mary through faith in God just as it comes to us. When a woman in a crowd yelled to Jesus, "'Blessed is the womb that bore You, and the breasts which nursed You!'", He replied, "More than that, blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it!" (Lk. 11:27-28). Mary agrees.

Fear Not

Mary transforms in this profound announcement. She is troubled by Gabriel's command to rejoice, that God is with her and she is blessed (vv. 28-29). She must be told not to fear (v. 30). Her question about how this will happen is a good one and shows her willingness to hear and obey even when the answer seems to generate many more questions than it satisfies. The fact that the Holy Spirit would come upon her did not mean everything would be fine as in simple, safe, and comfortable. You can hear the command of Gabriel not to fear echoing throughout her life. Joseph planned to divorce her quietly and had every right to do so as far as he knew (Matt. 1:19; cf. Deut. 22:23-24). *Fear not, Mary.* She would deal with slanders of fornication and dishonesty, as would her Son (Jn. 8:41). *Fear not, Mary.* She gave birth when they were out of town in Bethlehem, getting registered for taxes of all things, and had nowhere better to put the swaddled Son of God almighty than an animal feeding trough. *Fear not, Mary.* She would receive the wise men, run to Egypt for her life, and find out that all those boys were slaughtered because of hers. *Fear not, Mary.* Simeon tells her that Jesus would cause the fall and rising of many in Israel and a sword would pierce through her soul also (2:34-35). *Fear not, Mary.* Mary stands as an example to all Christian women to trust God and not give in to fear (cf. 1 Pet. 3:6). She shows the entire Church how to submit to the word of God: "Be it unto me according to your word."