

Bite Size Bible Study

Advent – Luke pt 1 #191

By Pastor Lee

Of the two reports of Jesus' birth Luke presents more material than Matthew. Luke's stated purpose was to write an *accurate and ordered account* of the things surrounding Jesus.

He begins, not with Jesus, but with an elderly relative Zachariah and his wife Elizabeth who were childless. Zachariah was an Aaronic priest, meaning he was a descendant of Aaron. Elizabeth was also from the line of Aaron. God saw fit to give them a child in their old age. That child was to become known as John the Baptist, who would be the herald to introduce Jesus.

Joseph (Yosef) and his betrothed wife Mary (Miryam) were living in the town of Nazareth (Natzeref) in the area of Galilee (Galil).

In the sixth month (of Elizabeth's pregnancy), the angel Gavri'el (Gabriel) was sent by God to a city in the Galil called Natzeref, to a virgin engaged to a man named Yosef, of the house of David; the virgin's name was Miryam.

Approaching her, the angel said, "Shalom, favored lady! Adonai is with you!" She was deeply troubled by his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, "Don't be afraid, Miryam, for you have found favor with God. Look! You will become pregnant, you will give birth to a son, and you are to name him Yeshua (Jesus). He will be great, he will be called Son of Ha'Elyon (God Most High). Adonai, God, will give him the throne of his forefather David; and he will rule the House of Ya'akov (Jacob) forever — there will be no end to his Kingdom."

"How can this be," asked Miryam of the angel, "since I am a virgin?"

*The angel answered her,
"The Ruach HaKodesh will come over you,
the power of Ha'Elyon will cover you.
Therefore the holy child born to you
will be called the Son of God.*

We need a little cultural history here to understand some of the more subtle facts. Unmarried girls over the age of 12 were especially watched to protect their honor from being harmed. Shame and Honor are the currency in this culture.

The honor of a girl was very important in order to be betrothed to a good husband. Once betrothed, she would still not be with her husband for up to a year, due to marriage customs in this culture, and still needed the protection from the male members of her birth family. Any number of things could reduce that honor or destroy it completely. In a case where she becomes pregnant it

could result in the annulment of the betrothal, ending in a shameful divorce, or even death by stoning.

Betrothals (*erusin*) in this culture are very different than in our modern times; it is an error to consider these betrothals the same as our engagements. A betrothal was a covenant (*ketubah*) between two families. As in all covenants, two witnesses were required to verify the consent to the betrothal covenant.

So judging from the fact that no one else is mentioned, Mary must have been alone; and no doubt in her safe place – the home. Also we can assume that Gabriel is at least appearing as a man. This "man" has invaded Mary's safe place and if that is not alarming enough, a visit from an angel is no trivial matter. His greeting "Don't be afraid" was probably not much comfort at this point. Her honor is at stake here.

Hundreds of thoughts were probably racing through Mary's mind at that moment. Mary is betrothed; they were in the process of setting up their home. They had not yet consummated their marriage but were considered married, but with no conjugal rights, in that culture.

What was Joseph going to think? What would her father do? Would she be accused of adultery, which could carry the death penalty? How will her community react to her being pregnant too soon? Would Joseph divorce her and if so would she ever be able to have a husband? How would she support herself and the child?

Unimaginable probabilities were mounting.

Gabriel explains that unusual things were already in progress in her relative Elizabeth's life.

"You have a relative, Elisheva, who is an old woman; and everyone says she is barren. But she has conceived a son and is six months pregnant! For with God, nothing is impossible."

Despite all of these possibilities and most unusual circumstances, Mary keeps her cool and only asks, "How can this be"? She must have been a spiritually strong woman because she believed that the angel was from God; and in spite of all the things that could happen to her she is willing to live and trust in God. Her confidence in God must have been so strong that none of the negative probabilities for her future were of consequence to her.

Miryam said, "I am the servant of Adonai; may it happen to me as you have said." Then the angel left her.

All verses from Luke 1:26-38 CJB

Next: Jesus birth through the eyes of Luke.