

LUKE AND THE MISSION OF JESUS
(2) JESUS SON OF MARY

Luke 1:26-55

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SCRIPTURE

²⁶In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, ²⁷to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." ²⁹But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. ³²He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. ³³He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." ³⁴Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" ³⁵The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. ³⁶And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. ³⁷For nothing will be impossible with God." ³⁸Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her (Luke 1:26-38 NRSV).

³⁹In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, ⁴⁰where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit ⁴²and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. ⁴³And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? ⁴⁴For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. ⁴⁵And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord." ⁴⁶And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, ⁴⁷and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, ⁴⁸for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; ⁴⁹for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. ⁵⁰His mercy is for those who fear

him from generation to generation. ⁵¹ He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. ⁵² He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; ⁵³ he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. ⁵⁴ He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, ⁵⁵ according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever” (Luke 1:39-55 NRSV).

MESSAGE

In ancient Palestine the place of women was low. Every morning an orthodox Jewish male would pray, “I thank you God for not making me a Gentile or a slave or a woman.” In contrast, Luke gives a special place to women in his Gospel. The birth of Jesus is told from Mary's point of view. It is in Luke that we read of Elizabeth and Anna. It is Luke who gives us vivid pictures of the sisters of Lazarus, Martha and Mary, as well as Mary Magdalene.

Luke mentions Mary, the mother of Jesus, more often than any other book of the New Testament. Although he does not use the actual phrase, “son of Mary,” as Mark does (Mk 6:3), Luke wants to make it clear that Jesus is, in fact, the son of Mary.¹ This has great significance for who Jesus is and the scope of his mission.

1. THE FACT THAT JESUS IS THE SON OF MARY UNDERSCORES HIS HUMANITY.

The fact that Jesus is the son of Mary underscores his humanity.

Starting around the middle of the first century there was a spinoff from Christianity called Docetism. Docetists believe that Jesus is the son of God but do not believe he was a real, flesh and blood human being. They say he looked human in order to better communicate with us but his humanity was an illusion. The word docetism comes from a Greek term meaning “to seem.” Docetists believe that Jesus only seemed to be a man and only seemed to experience suffering.

Docetism was strongly opposed by an early church leader by the name of Ignatius. Docetism was especially a problem in Asia Minor where Ignatius served. In contrast to the Docetists Ignatius said: “Jesus Christ was of the race of David, the son of Mary, who

¹ It is interesting to note that the Quran uses “son of Mary” twenty-three times.

was truly born and ate and drank, was truly persecuted under Pontius Pilate.”²

Luke wants us to appreciate the authentic human nature of Jesus. Jesus was an infant and grew into manhood. His growth had an eyewitness in Mary.

It is one of the wonderful privileges of parenthood to be able to watch our children grow. It is an exciting time to see the changes. There may be some drawbacks, such as, buying new shoes all the time because they keep growing out of the old ones. But overall, it's delightful to see our children grow. Some parents use a pencil mark on a bedroom wall or a special tape measure to indicate the growth of their children. And then for many children, a milestone is reached on the day when they are taller than one or both parents. They won't forget that and they certainly won't let you forget that. It's exciting to see them grow.

Now Mary, the mother of Jesus, would not have been any different. She saw Jesus as an infant. She saw the changes. Try to picture his tiny little hands and tiny little feet. I wonder how often Mary stuck out one of her fingers and Jesus wrapped his hand around her finger in love and affection. Mary saw those teensy hands and feet grow into the hands and feet of a man. Then one day outside the walls of Jerusalem, Mary saw those same hands and feet pierced by iron spikes. Still later, she saw them grow cold and lifeless. Jesus, the son of Mary, lived a real human life and he died a real human death.

But it was a death for us. The Bible says:

God shows his amazing love in this, that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us (Rom 5:8).

Jesus did not remain in that tomb. By the power of God, he was raised from the dead, and is alive even today! The life of Jesus, son of Mary, shows us that God loves us and is concerned with every aspect of our lives and not just the part we simplistically call our “spiritual” sides. We are to live our entire human lives in the presence of God.

2. THE FACT THAT JESUS IS THE SON OF MARY HELPS US UNDERSTAND THE MEANING OF FAITH.

The fact that Jesus is the son of Mary also helps us understand the meaning of faith.

²Ferguson, S. B., & Packer, J. I. (2000). In *New Dictionary of Theology* (electronic ed., p. 201). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

We see this more clearly when we notice the differences between how Mary and Zechariah responded to Gabriel. Gabriel was the heavenly messenger who told Mary she was to give birth to Jesus. He also appeared to Mary's cousins, Elizabeth and Zechariah, and centuries earlier to Daniel. By tradition he is referred to as an archangel (a chief of angels) but Scripture never gives him that title. Gabriel means "Champion of God" and he describes himself as one who stands in the presence of God. Recent Hollywood movies have depicted Gabriel as a jealous and vengeful being who hates humanity. Nothing could be further from the truth. He is what the Book of Hebrews calls "a ministering spirit" who helps those who trust in Jesus Christ.

Zechariah encountered Gabriel while serving in the Temple. Fear had come upon him but the angel sought to alleviate Zechariah's fear by stating, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard" (Lk 1:13). Which prayer? The prayer for the Messiah? Or the prayer for Elizabeth and Zechariah to have a son? And the answer was "Yes." The angel predicted that Elizabeth would bear a son whose name would be John and John would prepare the way for the coming of the Messiah! In the providence and mercy of God the two prayers had been given the same answer.

But Zechariah did not believe the angel and so asked for proof. Since God's message requires a response of faith, and since Zechariah, of all people, should have believed without question, the angel's reply is not overly severe:

"And now you will be silent and not able to speak until the day this happens, because you did not believe my words, which will come true at their proper time" (Lk1:20 NIV).

The promise of God will come to fulfillment in spite of human unbelief, but Zechariah must nevertheless bear the sign of his doubt.

Zechariah spoke up when he should have been silent. The lesson in this is that there are times when we need to keep quiet. Albert Einstein was once asked for the secret of success. In typical physicist fashioned he answered with a formula: "A=X+Y+Z." "A" he said, "represents success in life. X represents hard work and Y represents play." "What does the Z represent?" asked his interviewer. "That," he said, "is keeping your mouth shut."

Zechariah was presented with good news from God and he would not accept it. Mary, on the other hand, received the good news and she trusted that God would fulfill his promises. She did ask a question but it was not like Zechariah's question. She did not say, "How shall I know this?" God had told her it will be. She said, "How can this be,

since I am a virgin?" (1:34). And the angel answered her question and told her how it would be. The Holy Spirit will do this thing (1:35).

“And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God" (Lk 1:36,37).

To which Mary replied:

“Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word” (Lk 1:38).

Later Elizabeth would say of Mary:

“Blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord” (Lk 1:45).

Faith is not an opinion about God. It is not a membership in a religious organization. It is not the practice of ceremony and ritual. Faith is believing the Word of God. It is saying with Mary, “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your Word.”

3. THE FACT THAT JESUS IS THE SON OF MARY MEANS WE CAN CHANGE THE WORLD.

The fact that Jesus is the son of Mary means we can change the world.

After the angel Gabriel told Mary that she was to give birth to the Savior, and after this was confirmed by a visit with her cousin Elizabeth, Mary responded in a prayer of praise. This prayer is called the “Song of Mary.” The traditional name is “Magnificat” meaning “magnifies” and is from the Latin translation of the passage. It is the traditional reading for afternoon prayer.

Mary says, “My soul magnifies the Lord.” This is the purpose of the human soul. The purpose of the soul is to magnify God. A magnifying glass makes things look bigger. We cannot literally make God bigger but we can have a bigger appreciation for who God is. We can glorify God. We can praise him for who he is and what he has done.

If you examine this passage carefully it also speaks of the social impact of faith. Indeed, faith is nothing short of a revolution. But this revolution is not fought with bullets and

bombs but with the love of Jesus Christ.

Mary says, “he has scattered those who are proud” – Serving Christ means we put an end to selfishness.

She says, “He has brought down the powerful from their thrones but has lifted up the lowly.” – Serving Christ means putting an end to prejudice.

Muretus was a wandering scholar of the Middle Ages and had little money. In an Italian town he took ill and was taken to a hospital for the poor and homeless. The doctors were discussing his case in Latin, never dreaming he could understand. They suggested that since he was such a worthless wanderer they might use him for medical experiments. He looked up and answered them in their own learned tongue, "Call no man worthless for whom Christ died!"

The love of Christ compels us to see every human being as someone who is of inestimable worth.

Mary says, “He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty.” – Serving Christ means putting away greed. The real value of life does not consist in the accumulation of material possessions. Scripture tells us that the love of money is the root of all evil (1 Tim 6:10). So, let us accumulate that which is eternally good, namely, faith, hope and especially love.

The key word for this prayer of praise is “service.” Mary was willing to be God’s faithful servant. Her service changed the world. Are we willing to be God’s faithful servants?

CONCLUSION

Long before Dan Brown wrote his controversial novel, *The Da Vinci Code*, there was a book published in Great Britain (1985)³ that purported to tell the true story of Jesus' family. Among other things, the author claimed that Mary, the mother of Jesus, was not a poor Jewish girl from a small town. Rather, she was a wealthy woman, used to rubbing elbows with the high and mighty.

As you can imagine, the book made quite a splash on both sides of the Atlantic. The news media had a field day. But the author said more. He said that the Apostles were not poor fishermen, but were aristocrats. He said the first Bishop of Rome was a member of the

³ There have been several similar such publications and various legends going back generations.

British Royal family, which then led to the main argument of his book. The author said that Jesus was of English descent. His grandmother was from Cornwall. And then, on top of everything else, the author said he was a descendent of Jesus. Think about what that means. He was saying he was part of the family tree of Jesus! Furthermore, he was not the first nor the last to make such a claim.

How did people respond to this book? Most people recognized it for the nonsense that it was, but a number of people thought it might be true. But let me tell you something else that may seem unbelievable, only, in this case, it is true. You can be part of the family of Jesus. The Bible tells us:

To all who receive Jesus, who believe in his name, he gives the authority to become children of God (Jn 1:11,12).

Through faith in Jesus, the son of Mary, we become the children of God; we become part of the family of Jesus. We can appreciate the full humanity and full divinity of Jesus. We can trust that God can and will fulfill his promises. We can serve Christ in such a way as to change our world for the better.