

## **Luke 1:26-38 (1984 NIV)**

### ***Christmas: The Season to Renew Trust and Submissiveness***

26 In the sixth month, 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 be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name 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 the house of Jacob 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 upon 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 barren is in her sixth month. 37 For nothing is impossible with God." 38 "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May it be to me as you have said." Then the angel left her.

## **Introduction**

Every Christmas season, the profiteers work hard to create new ideas in order to capture the fancy of the consumers.

On TV news one time, a music producer made a new Christmas album for the season and named it "Jingle Cats". He gathered a group of cats and got them to "meow" differently at different times. What came about was a piece of music that sounded to the tune of the original "Jingle Bells" carol.

For us as Christians, it is not a matter of creating new ideas to add to the original meaning of Christ's birth. It is not as if the original meaning is not good enough anymore.

Indeed, the profiteers of today have often corrupted the original meaning of Christmas when they become obsessed with creating new ideas in order to make the Christmas season a more lucrative time for themselves.

For us as Christians, Christmas is a not so much a time to create something new. Rather, it is a time to renew our commitment to God's original and timeless plan and purpose in the Christmas event—i.e. to save the world in Jesus Christ so that those who are in Christ can worship and glorify the one and only true Creator God.

Today, we turn back the clock and go back to the time when the angel Gabriel spoke to Mary. It is an episode recorded for us in which the birth of Christ is foretold. As we

read and listen again to this dialogue between the angel Gabriel and Mary today, I like for us to ask two questions. The first question is ...

## **I. What is God doing in our text today?**

Our text today tells of a virgin who is to conceive and give birth to the Son of the Most High—i.e. a miracle is to take place in God's way and time. But the focus is not so much on how a virgin can give birth. Rather, it is very much focused on why the Creator God should enter our human realm and begin at the most basic human level—i.e. in the form of a human embryo. This is exactly what God has come to do in Jesus Christ.

In so doing, He is doing something like what He did in Genesis. Then, His Spirit hovered over the watery chaos and He spoke the whole creation into existence.

In our text today, we are told that His Spirit “overshadows” Mary (v. 35). The word “overshadows” carries the same idea as “hovers over” in Hebrew as used in Gen. 1:2. So, the Holy Spirit will overshadow Mary and she will conceive the unborn Jesus Christ, and through Him a new creation redeemed from the Fall of Adam and Eve will come to be.

God indeed is revealing to us that He loves us so much that He is willing to stoop Himself down to our human level in Jesus Christ. And in light of this, the claim that we are so familiar with in John 3:16 is not just some sweet-talk about who God is. Rather, it is a reliable and concrete demonstration of how much a loving God is willing to give of Himself to save sinful humanity.

Thus, the birth of Jesus Christ not only affirms that God is love, but also God is faithful. Luke 1:32-33 reads—“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, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.”

- All the description here about the child to be born has reference to what has been prophesied about the Messiah in the OT.
- Indeed, God will not forget what He has promised through His prophets of old. And our text today tells us that He is about to fulfill what He has promised long ago.
- Yes, the angel Gabriel's words to Mary clearly and loudly affirm that God is not forgetful, but faithful to what He has promised.

So, what is God doing in our text today?

God in our text today is calling us to trust Him as the faithful God who will keep His promise to help sinful humanity get right with Him in Jesus Christ. Yes, we can all trust God to demonstrate His love and faithfulness towards us even in our fallen and broken world today.

I wonder how each of us perceive God today?

- Do you see God as loving and faithful, or do you see Him as lacking in love and faithfulness as you deal with the challenges facing you today?
- Time and circumstance can change our perception of God, but He is untouched by time and circumstance in that He is still loving and faithful towards us regardless of the time and circumstance we are in.
- Thus, let's all learn to trust God to enter our world of discouragement and disappointment, and trust that He will intervene in His time and way to bring about a miracle of healing and joy to redeem the brokenness and gloom that we may be experiencing now.

Has time and circumstance caused you to perceive God as lacking in love and faithfulness today? Take heart! The Christmas story is a good time for us to reflect and renew our trust in God—that He is the ever loving and faithful Creator who “hovers” and “overshadows” over us such that He will redeem our chaos in life and turn it into something beautiful in His time and way.

The second question we want to ask as we look at our text today is this ...

## **II. Why is Mary chosen as God's instrument of His purpose?**

In view of what God is about to do in the foretelling of Christ's birth in our text today, why is Mary chosen as THE person to launch His great plan and purpose of redemption in Jesus Christ; of saving this fallen and sinful world in Jesus Christ?

- For something that has such universal significance, a human figure of high and prominent stature should, humanly speaking, be the chosen instrument. But why an unknown and ordinary commoner like Mary?
- We know very little about her background in the Bible. Perhaps, she is so ordinary that there is hardly any significant detail about her to mention.
- But behind that seemingly insignificance of Mary, God sees something in her that perhaps no other human eyes can see—i.e. she has the faith that readily submits to God.
- That's why Mary is chosen as God's instrument to give birth to the baby Jesus—she has the faith that readily submits to God.

There are at least two qualities in her that support this.

Firstly, she has the quality of receptivity.

- No matter how impossible or embarrassing the proposition may be, Mary is willing and open to listen to what God has to say to her through His angel.
- Fear and uncertainty do not stop her from heeding God's message for her.
- Perhaps deep inside her, she knows that to be described as being “highly favoured” or “having found favour with God” does not mean to be free from trouble.
- In fact, to have found favour with God and become pregnant may mean BIG trouble for her in the conservative Jewish society at that time.

- She may be rejected by Joseph who may then call off their intended marriage.
- She may be disowned by her own family for shaming them who may then cut off all ties with her.
- She may be ridiculed by others for being immoral who may then continue to hurt her with gossips.
- She may be treated with contempt by the Jewish religious leaders who may then sentence her to be stoned.

But in spite of all these big-trouble possibilities, Mary has the faith that submits to what God says to her—she is receptive; she is willing and open to listen no matter how impossible or embarrassing that proposition from God to her through the angel may seem to be.

Christmas is a good time to reflect and renew our receptivity to the Word of God.

- When we read and hear the familiar Christmas passages again at this time of the year; when we sing the familiar Christmas hymns and carols; when we participate in the Christmas sharing and visiting, let all these not merely be a time of doing the same old things again out of religious habit or tradition.
- Instead, let us reflect and renew our receptivity to what God is telling us in and through His Word—be ready to listen; be open to ask, “Lord, what is it that you are saying specifically to me?”

Story is told of a man who immerses himself in all the happenings reported in the newspapers every morning before going to work.

One morning his wife hinted to him, “Honey, you know our neighbor next door would always kiss his wife at the door before he leaves for work. Why don’t you try doing the same?”

Without putting down the newspapers he is preoccupied with, the man replied nonchalantly, “You must be kidding. I don’t even know her name.”

Let us not allow our preoccupations with the things and voices in this world to so distract us that we may read and hear, yet not receive and heed what God has for us to be and to do.

- Let us ask God to grant us a fresh sense of receptivity—eyes to see what He is doing and ears to listen to what He is saying.
- Let us ask God to grant us a fresh sense of expectancy—learn to expect God to meet us in a fresh way as we go about our various activities each day, even now as we prepare for another Christmas season.

Mary has the quality of receptivity. Secondly, she has the quality of willingness to surrender personal control to God.

- She said in v. 38, “I am the Lord’s servant. May it be to me as you have said.”

- This is a courageous statement because she makes a deliberate decision to release personal control and surrender to what God wants to do in and through her in spite of the seemingly impossible and embarrassing proposition.
- Mary sees herself as the Lord's servant. And in those days, a servant obeys the will of the Master even if it may seem the worst thing possible.
- For her, the worst thing possible is to become pregnant before she is actually married to Joseph. Imagine the ridicule, the contempt, and the gossips that will be stirred up.
- Humanly speaking, what the angel has told Mary is no good news at all. That is why her response in v. 38 is a courageous statement—it takes courage on her part both to accept the news and to obey what she has been told to do. It is as if in spite of all the odds against her, she is willing to say, "Lord, let your will be done in my life. I release personal control and surrender to do your will."

Mary may not completely understand how all things fit together, but she knows well that her responsibility is to obey whole-heartedly, not to understand completely.

- She is to surrender control to God—even her own body does not belong to her anymore. As the Lord's servant, she offers her total self to God—body, mind, and spirit.
- How can a virgin like her conceive since there is no In Vitro Fertilisation (IVF) at that time?
- But she is not to understand how, but to surrender control to God and trust Him to do even the humanly impossible.
- All she gets is only a word of reassurance from the angel—i.e. the news that the barren womb of her cousin Elizabeth is now fully heavy with child.
- Indeed, when God takes control of a situation, He can make the humanly impossible become Him-possible (possible in Him); He can turn our human barrenness into His fullness.

And so we learn one lesson for ourselves from Mary today.

- Surrendering control to God often requires us to be prepared to pay a price. Even the Apostle Paul in the NT speaks of becoming a fool for Christ as he surrenders his life for the gospel ministry (2 Cor. 11:16-33).
- Yes, it is not easy to pay the price of looking like a fool before others. But there will be times when God is calling us to put aside our pride, let Him take charge and control, and see Him accomplishing something significant out of our seemingly human insignificance.

Also, when we submit to God and allow Him to take over control, the worst thing can turn out to be the best thing.

- The worst thing to happen to Mary is to become an unmarried mother.
- But as she surrenders control to God, it turns out to be the best thing ever—she becomes the instrument to bear and bring forth God's redemptive blessing to our fallen world in the Person of Jesus Christ.

What is the worst thing to happen to us at this time?

- Is it not getting promoted?
- Is it not getting that big contract?
- Is it not getting into the school of our choice?
- Is it not being in the best of health?

Which areas of life are we having problem surrendering control to God?

- Maybe we reason that it is foolish to let go certain things and end up looking lesser or lacking before others.
- But this may be the very action we need to take—i.e. to let go and see God turning the worst thing into the best thing for us.

Christmas is a good time to reflect and renew our readiness to submit to God and let Him take control.

- God does not impose His will on us; He does not coerce us to do His will, good and perfect it may be.
- Rather, God desires a willing and ready heart to hear His calling and then submit to do His will.
- Sometimes we say, “I do not know for sure God’s will for my life.” And this is often a case of us lying to ourselves because it really implies we still want to rule our own life; we still want “my will, not God’s will, be done”.
- I believe we need to learn to say something courageously like Mary, “Lord, I am ready to let you take control. May it be to me as you have said.”
- When we have this kind of readiness to obey, I believe other things will fall into their proper places in due time.
- Yes, God does not impose His will on us and coerce us to do it. Rather, He calls us to do His will, and when we are ready to surrender and obey, He in His grace will enable us to do it for His glory.

## Conclusion

As we busy ourselves with many activities this Christmas season, let it not be just a time of celebration, but also a time of reflection and renewal of our trust in God and submissiveness to Him.

- Renew our trust in God as the loving and faithful God regardless of our present situation.
- Renew our submissiveness to God by both hearing and heeding His will.
  - Ask for a fresh sense of receptivity to Him as we hear, read, and study His Word.
  - Ask for a fresh readiness to surrender certain things (even our own will) so that we can let God take charge and control over our lives.

Indeed, trusting and submitting to God are spiritual disciplines. We cannot take for granted that these are easy to do in our own strength. And to keep on trusting and

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submitting to God our lives, we need to renew and recharge these disciplines from time to time, even today.

Let us seek the Lord today to journey with us as we learn to trust and submit to Him more and more on this long road of obedience in Him and for Him. Amen!