

II. Advent in Biblical Perspective
Life Portraits from the Nativity
“Joseph and Mary: An Adopted Father and an Appointed Mother”
Matthew 1:18–25; Luke 1:26–38
Dr. Harry L. Reeder III
December 8, 2019 • Morning Sermon

This is God’s Word which is inspired, infallible and inerrant. Luke 1:26–38 says [26] *In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, [27] to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. [28] And he came to her and said, “Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!” [29] But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. [30] And the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. [31] And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. [32] He 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 father David, [33] and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.”*

[34] And Mary said to the angel, “How will this be, since I am a virgin?” [35] And the angel answered 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 called holy—the Son of God. [36] And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. [37] For nothing will be impossible with God.” [38] And Mary said, “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.” And the angel departed from her.

The grass withers, the flower fades, God’s Word abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

We see the theme that comes from the announcement to the shepherds when the angel says ‘I bring you good news of great joy’ and I have been thinking beyond that. I have been a pastor for 40 plus years which comes out to 40 plus Advent series of sermons. How many ways can you preach on Advent? I have been asked to do a book on this but what struck me this year was our live nativity we do here at Briarwood where most of the scenes have to do with the nativity scene out of the 14 we do. Our choir will be doing a performance that piggy backs on the portraits we have been looking at for the Advent season so people will see and hear the nativity. That was my reason for doing the Biblical portraits of those in the nativity so that others would know even more about the ones they would see and hear about during these events.

Joseph and Mary are real people who were living over 2000 years ago. David’s royal city was a real place. The stable, angels, shepherds and wise men were all real. What is it that the Word of God would have you think when you see and hear of those glorious historical events and individuals? I can’t exhaustively deal with it but perhaps in a fresh way I can deal with it. In the last study we looked at the four appearances of the angels to four different people.

Interestingly, God had been silent for 400 years and He breaks silence with the angel Gabriel who speaks to a son of Aaron, a Levite priest, named Zachariah who is married to a daughter of Aaron and her name was Elizabeth. Elizabeth is the fifth woman the Bible records that God intervenes when a woman is beyond child bearing years to give them a child in His purposes of divine revelation and redemption. This breaking of silence is connected to the last book of the Old Testament, Malachi 4 which prophesies that the Messiah is coming and the

forerunner of the Messiah will be the one who comes in the spirit and power of Elijah – that will be John the Baptist. It is amazing to see the intricacy of God’s plan throughout all of the ages.

Then I thought about looking at the nativity scene with couplets. In this study we’ll look at Joseph and Mary and in the next study we’ll look at the wise men and the shepherds. After that we’ll look at two vistas in the nativity – the Word of God and the Spirit of God. On Christmas Eve we’ll look at Immanuel from the nativity. Then we’ll look at Simeon and Anna who have the ministry to the One who was born at the nativity. I hope you will be astonished by their presentation by song and sight and informed by the Word of God with a fresh look at these things. I have been speaking on Mary and Joseph many times in my life but I want to give you things I have never shared before so we’ll start with Mary.

Mary is betrothed to Joseph. This a marriage in the Bible and marriages in the Bible had to do with four things. Perhaps a way to remember these four things is to give them to you in with four words that start with the letter ‘c’. The first is commitment or betrothal, a formal commitment. The second is consent – the consent of the families. The third is a ceremony of rejoicing. Jesus’ very first miracle was at a wedding feast and when we get to heaven we’ll have a wedding ceremony with Jesus which is known as the Wedding Feast of the Lamb. Fourthly, is the consummation of the marriage as the husband would know his wife, but you didn’t have to wait for the consummation on the marriage for it to start but the marriage in the Bible started at the commitment. The only thing you didn’t have was physical or sexual intimacy for that took place after the ceremony.

Some think this is like an engagement but it’s really not because it’s more than an engagement. In the days of the Bible marriages once the commitment was made if you wanted to break up you would have to go through a divorce because at that point it was deemed a marriage. At this point, this is where Mary finds herself with child and then Mary has a visitor, Gabriel, where God breaks silence a second time. Six months after His communication to Elizabeth through Zachariah the angel Gabriel comes to Mary.

Luke who records Mary’s encounter with the angel, is not only a doctor but a historian. Luke is probably writing this after Paul was arrest in Jerusalem and then later transferred for two years to Caesarea by the Sea. Luke has some time on his hands because Paul is in prison. We’re told that Luke goes around and starts interviewing eye witnesses. Now I’m going to speculation. I think Luke interviewed Mary due to the personal comments he makes about her in her heart and soul that he would never have known without her sharing unless the Holy Spirit just decided to reveal it to him. I will point out three of them in this study.

Notice that Luke is not writing this Gospel just for Jewish people but for people like me and you. One is that very few people knew about Nazareth. Luke points out specifically that Gabriel was sent from God to a city named Nazareth in Galilee. Jewish people would likely know this but most others would not. Luke gives a very specific time of six months and he tells us that Mary is a virgin who is betrothed. There has been no ceremony and no consummation. There has been commitment and consent. Mary is betrothed to a man named Joseph whose name is found in the line of the patriarchs and he is specifically of the house of David. In Luke’s research he also includes Mary’s genealogy (Luke 3) which shows she is of the house of David and the tribe of Judah as well.

Mary receives the greeting from the angel. It is very formal greeting for us but it would not have been for an angel for this is the way angels talk. The angel says to Mary in Luke 1:28, [28] *And he came to her and said, “Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!”* You’re heart ought to be leaping for joy right now because you could not be saved unless God is with

you – Immanuel. And God couldn't have been with you until He first was with Mary. How do you know the Lord is with you? He has graced you – O favored one.

The next time you think of Mary, think of this young likely teenage girl, that when the angel speaks her heart is troubled. She was not troubled by the angel's presence but by the angel's message, his proclamation. When the angel showed up to Gabriel, the angel's presence overwhelmed him but not so with Mary. The next verse tells us what she was troubled by. Luke 1:29 says [29] *But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be.* So the angel now expounds the greeting. God not only wants her to believe He is with her but that she has found favor with God. Luke 1:30 says [30] *And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.* God sovereignly has chosen to show Mary grace and He wants her to know that. It not that she earns or merits favor but God has favored her. God has chosen to grace you in your life.

Then she is told to call His name Jesus which means He will save His people and Joseph will be told the same name to be given to the Child as well, yet Mary is given more information about who Jesus will be. You can't get a higher term to speak of God than the phrase 'Son of the most High' which we see in Luke 1:32. That was a term of exaltation and adoration. Notice it is not Mary being exalted but Mary is being favored, to bear the One who is to be exalted. The Lord will give to Him the throne of his father David. Through the sovereignly graced mother and Joseph, the sovereignly adopted father will come forth the Messiah and He will be in the line of David and the scepter of Judah, in fulfillment of the Scripture. He will also reign over the house of Jacob forever. Unlike David His Kingdom will have no end for this King has no end. He shall reign forever and ever.

Mary's fear is dismissed by her faith in the truth of what God has promised but now she is perplexed. She says 'How will this be since I am a virgin?' She might be thinking of a little humor here thinking the angel has the right promise but maybe the wrong person since she was virgin. She knows you can't have a child and still be a virgin. The angel answers her in Luke 1:35–37 which says [35] *And the angel answered 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 called holy—the Son of God. [36] And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. [37] For nothing will be impossible with God."*

Mary is told how it will be done and given encouragement. One preacher said that Mary could have been thinking 'Elizabeth is with child that is too late, I'm a teenager that's too early.' But God says that nothing is impossible with Him. The barren will bear witness through the fulfillment of the prophecy of the one coming in the spirit of Elijah. Mary will be overshadowed by the Holy Spirit who conceives the One most High within her. So her troubled heart is dismissed by faith. Her perplexity is answered by God's Word.

Why did God send Gabriel to tell Zachariah and Elizabeth that they were going to have a child? Even though they are old like others God is going to do the impossible and it was a real birth and real conception. Although God is doing a lot of things here, God is doing a miraculous birth that will be an encouragement to Elizabeth's cousin Mary. Do you know that God can multi-task? This miracle is fulfilling Malachi 4, it's fulfilling a request for a child from a barren couple but God is also showing Elizabeth's cousin through her birth of John the Baptist in her age past being barren that God can accomplish the conception of a virgin and the birth from a virgin. So Mary's perplexity is also dismissed by the power of God.

Thirdly, Mary surrenders as we see what God's Word says in Luke 1:38; [38] *And Mary said, "Behold, **I am the servant of the Lord**; let it be to me according to your word."* And the angel departed from her. She also has a husband to whom she is betrothed. So now let's look at Joseph.

Matthew 1:18–25 says [18] *Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. [19] And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. [20] But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. [21] She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."*[22] *All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:*

[23] *"Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel"* (which means, *God with us*). [24] *When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, [25] but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.*

So Joseph kept her a virgin until after she gave birth in which she we no longer be a virgin. She will even have other children with Joseph. Joseph will do exactly what God's Word says. Here is the third communication of God breaking silence. Again, Joseph is told 'don't fear' but it's due to the demand of the message and not the presence of the angel. 'Do not fear to take Mary as your wife.' He has already entered into the husband/wife relationship with commitment and consent so now he is being told to keep her. He is told to give the baby the same name as Mary was – Yahshua – God will save – for He will save His people from their sins. He is also told He will be the Son most High – Immanuel – now God is with us and the Scriptures are now fulfilled.

Joseph now comes to receive this. It's interesting that he is the second man to receive a message from the angel in these opening months. Zachariah we are told his old but we assume in light of his early death that Joseph was older. I hear the echo of Acts 2 here for when Peter preaches from Joel 2 he tells the people the last days are upon us because your young men and women shall prophesy and your older men shall dream dreams. These contours of what is being recorded in these Gospels are consistent and work in harmony with what yet is going to be preached. Here a message has already come to one of his in-laws for they married into the same family with Elizabeth and Mary being cousins.

Both Mary and Joseph received a birth announcement from the angel and there was a birth announcement of John the Baptist who will follow Him, the Redeemer, the Messiah. What about his name sake, Joseph? Joseph is one of the patriarchs. Joseph in the Old Testament was a dreamer. He had a dream that his family would be taken into a country and bow before him which was fulfilled when he became vice president of Egypt. But when he shared that dream it caused anger and hatred in the lives of his brothers and ridicule from his father and mother. Yet the dream was fulfilled and he bore the ridicule.

The dream Joseph had about Jesus will be fulfilled and he will have to bear ridicule. Not only does he dream as his forbearer for he is from the line of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob just as his namesake Joseph had them as his forbearers but his dream like Joseph's is fulfilled, even though it will cost him to believe that. He like Mary will become a spectacle but he believed and did not fear and the dream was fulfilled.

Joseph was not only a dreamer but a traveler, a sojourner for he would lead the people into Egypt 400 plus years earlier and this Joseph will lead the Redeemer of God's people into Egypt. Then he will bring Him out and He will save His people from their sins thus fulfilling the prophecy 'out of Egypt I have called my son' from Hosea 11:1. It is not the original fulfillment of God's people in the Exodus but now the ultimate fulfillment with another Joseph that will bring them out. That Joseph led them in but this Joseph will lead Him in and then bring Him out to a place called Nazareth and ultimately to the cross.

Wasn't there someone else who was told to take a wife in a dream? His name was Adam. A sleep came upon him and a rib was taken from him. He was awakened for a wife. Now Joseph goes to bed thinking the next day he will be wifeless and family-less and while he is asleep he is informed to keep his wife as his wife and he will have a Son. Not only will he have a family but that Son will be the hand of God, the Son of God who will bring forth the family of God, even as he receives the promise in his sleep.

I have two takeaways. The first one is as Christians we are the recipients of God's grace in salvation who are also transformed by God's grace to be active followers of Christ. Joseph receives the blessings and promise of God in his sleep and the point of growing in Christ is not taking a 24 hour nap. Get in the Word, preaching, prayer, worship, fellowship but never think those activities are meriting God's grace or that God is incapable of getting His grace to you. He gives to His beloved even in their sleep and Joseph becomes a prime example for he goes to bed with one set of plans and arises with a new life. He was fearless, faithful and put his trust in the Lord and obeyed him.

The second takeaway is Joseph and Mary first reveal that we do not qualify for the grace of God in Christ, but then reveal that the grace of God in Christ qualifies us to trust and obey. They are not given to us for adoration. Yes we can admire them but not adoration and they are not here for mediation. We have one Mediator between God and man and it's the Man Christ Jesus. They are here as a model for us. They reveal the grace of God in Christ. Mary is a graced one. Joseph receives from the Lord even in the passivity of sleep. Now when that grace comes it transforms you so that you follow Him. When they awakened, it wasn't that they trusted and obeyed and received grace but they received grace and the evidence was their trust and obedience.

Mary said 'be it done to me I am Your servant.' Joseph arose and did as the Lord called him to do. He named his Son Jesus and kept his wife a virgin so here they did what God called them to do, even though it would cost them. Can you imagine the ridicule each of them received? But they had no fear because they were filled up with faith. They were no longer perplexed because they were guided by God's Word. Therefore the appointed mother and adopted father trusted and obeyed.

As the hymn says;
*Trust and obey, for there's no other way
To be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.*

Are you saved today? If you are it's because God has graced you. If you are, then say to Him, 'Behold, here I am, Your servant.' Fear dismissed by faith. Perplexity is dismissed by God's Word. I trust You and I follow You. If you don't know Him I ask you to follow Him today. Mary and Joseph cry out to you, not for you to lift them up to a pedestal of adoration but to see the admiration of God's grace that takes us and changes us – fearless trust intentionally obeying.

Immanuel – God with us to be one of us, to save us. Trust and obey. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Take a few moments in silent prayer. If you would like to pray with someone please call us here at Briarwood at (205) 776-5200. Thank you Father for the time we could be together in Your Word and learn from Your Word. Right now bring your heart and your focus where Mary and Joseph's fears were banished in Immanuel – God with us. I pray this in Jesus' Name, Amen.

POWER POINT

Joseph and Mary

LIFE TAKEAWAYS

As Christians, we are the recipients of God's grace in salvation who are also transformed by God's grace to be active followers of Christ.

“He gives to His Beloved even as they sleep”

Joseph and Mary first reveal that we do not qualify for the Grace of God in Christ, but then reveal that the Grace of God in Christ qualifies us to trust and obey.

“Hail Favored One”