

THE BIRTH OF JESUS FORETOLD

Luke 1:26-38

Key Verse: 1:32,33

"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."

Today's passage is the angel's Christmas message to Mary, a beautiful country girl, who was engaged to Joseph. The key point of the message is the birth of Jesus through Mary. Let's see how she responded to the angel's message, and learn her absolute obedience. In his message the angel introduces who Jesus is and the kingdom of God. Let's mainly learn about Jesus and his eternal kingdom.

First, you who are highly favored (26-30).

Look at verse 26. "In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee..." "In the sixth month" refers to Elizabeth, who had been pregnant for six months. Look at verse 27. "...to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary." Mary was a country girl who lived in a small village called Nazareth in Galilee. It was probably a small, clean country village. Perhaps in the daytime, one could hear the sweet song of the oriole chirping among the trees. And at night, from across the hills, one could hear the lonely hoot of the owl. How happy the boys and girls must have been when they met by chance and looked at each other with an air of innocence. Certainly Mary was the happiest one among all the girls, and she could not contain the joy of her beautiful dreams of a sweet home she would have with Joseph. Her sweet dream seemed to last forever.

One day something unusual happened! Look at verse 28. An angel came to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you." Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be (29). Mary really liked Joseph. Mary had made a personal commitment to Joseph. So Mary's heart was filled with Joseph. Mary felt that she was in the same boat with Joseph. She was ready to enjoy the time of the gentle breeze of life as well as the life of the turbulent waves of the sea together with Joseph. She didn't need anyone else's favor, not even an angel's. At the angel's greeting, Mary was startled, not knowing what was interrupting her life of dream. Mary wondered what kind of greeting this might be. She looked very quiet. But to a young girl, the angel's message was thunderous.

The angel was sorry that Mary was afraid. But there was no deviation for the angel in carrying out his mission. Look at verse 30. "But the angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God.'" Mary was abundantly happy with Joseph's favor. Why did the angel bother Mary with another favor? Generally, favor means to get some help from someone else. Secular Christians think that to be favored by God is to receive many human blessings. But the Biblical concept of "favor" is different. The Greek word for favor, "charis," has the same meaning as the word "grace." Here, grace is the beauty of Jesus. The Bible tells us that those who know the beauty of Jesus have something to do for the glory of God. So Paul sees that grace is given to us to do God's mission (Ro 1:5; Php 1:29).

Our God is the holy God. Our God is Almighty God. This great God gives not only his amazing grace to each person through his Son's blood, but also his work to do for his glory. To carry out God's mission is not easy. To be frank, God's mission requires all our hearts, souls, and spirits, even our lives. Sinful men want to be great, and at the same time they want to be very ordinary. God's mission for Abraham was to overcome his desire to be a petty man and grow up to be a source of blessing to all peoples of all nations. God's mission for King David was to fight against all the stronger enemies in the promised land and subdue them. It required King David's life. Once he was almost killed in battle (2Sa 21:15-17). But King David obeyed God's will absolutely to establish a theocratic kingdom in which God's people could live in peace and love. God's mission for John the Baptist was to prepare the way for the Lord. John preached the message of repentance to prepare his people for the coming of the Messiah. It required his life to carry out the mission. But he obeyed God's mission absolutely. Man is happy when he experiences God's grace. Man is happy when he finds the meaning of life in God's mission (Eph 2:10).

What was God's favor for Mary? Look at verse 31. "You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus." God's favor for Mary was to bear the baby Jesus and deliver him before her marriage.

What a difficult mission it was for her! She was a woman pledged to be married to Joseph. At that time, in the Jewish world, engagement was tantamount to marriage. Mary's beautiful dreams were about to be realized. But before marriage, Mary had to conceive and bear the baby Jesus.

According to Genesis, God made woman to be a suitable helper, in other words, the mother of the universe (Ge 2:18). Sorry to say, since Adam's Fall, the woman's desire is cursed (Ge 3:16). Most women are enslaved by the cursed marriage problem. There are many women who did not solve their marriage problems, even after marriage. So for Mary, as for any woman, it must have been difficult to give up her dream of marriage. What is more, to explain her situation to her fiancé Joseph was a question, "to say or not to say?" Her bond of love with Joseph would be broken to pieces. In addition, Mary lived in a rigid, traditional Jewish society. Those who became pregnant before marriage were supposed to be stoned to death. No sooner did God's grace come upon her, than she became the object of scorn and disgrace to the Jewish world. Humanly speaking, it was impossible for Mary to obey God's mission. After he was born the baby Jesus was brought to the temple to be presented to the Lord according to the custom of the law (2:22). Simeon, who was one of those waiting for the Messiah, took the baby Jesus in his arms and said, "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel" (Lk 2:34). He also prophesied about Mary: "And a sword will pierce your own soul too" (2:35). To carry out her mission as the mother of Jesus was so costly and painful.

God's mission to be mother of Jesus was too painful for Mary to bear. But Mary was a godly woman even if she was very young. She decided to obey God's will absolutely. The famous composer Robert Schumann (1810-1856) died young from exhaustion. After his death, a more famous composer, Johannes Brahms (1833-1897) proposed to his widow, Clara Schumann. Clara liked Brahms' musical genius. But she clearly rejected his proposal. She wanted to make her husband's music compositions famous in the world by her instinctive arrangements on the piano. She was happy. But Brahms never married the rest of his life. Clara was victorious and successful in making her husband a world-famous composer. But Clara cannot compare to Mary, because Mary gave her dream of marriage to God in order to obey God's holy mission.

Second, Jesus is great because he is the Son of God.

In verses 31-33, the angel continues to speak his message to Mary so that she may know who Jesus is and that absolute obedience could come from her soul. In his message, the angel introduces first, who Jesus is, for Mary needed this knowledge of Jesus in order to carry out God's grace and mission. Look at verse 32a. "He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High." Kings and nations rise and wane. They are like grass and flowers (Isa 40:6-8). But Jesus is the one and only Son of Almighty God. Jesus is the Son of the Ruler of history, and his kingdom is forever. Our God is the only living God and he rules world history according to his time schedule. Our God is Spirit and he is immortal. Therefore, Jesus is great because he is the Son of God.

General Montgomery (1887-1976), at the end of his book, mentioned the world's greatest leaders from the point of view of world history. They were Mohammed, Buddha and Jesus. He included Jesus as one of the greatest because of Jesus' power and authority in his words. Throughout history, many have said many things about the greatness of Jesus as a philanthropist, a poet, a teacher, a general, a man of deep humanity, a man of sorrows, a man of God's heart, and so on. These days, in view of psychophysiology, many see Jesus as a poor carpenter. Nonetheless, there is no one in the world as great as Jesus. The greatness of Jesus does not rest on his human qualities, but on the fact that he is the Son of the Most High God.

Through one man Adam's disobedience to the holy command of God (Ge 2:17), sin came into the world (Ge 3:7). Sin has its wage. It is death (Ro 6:23a). Mohammed, Buddha, Julius Caesar and Napoleon Bonaparte were nothing but Adam's descendants, and they all died in Adam (1Co 15:22). Their misery was that they died in great fear and uncertainty after hard toiling. But Jesus is not just a descendant of Adam; he is the Son of God. Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. 1 Corinthians 15:22 says, "For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive." Though Jesus is the Son of the Most High God, he came to this world. He humbled himself and was born in a manger. In this way, Jesus humbled himself in order to save men from their sins. Moreover, Jesus emptied himself and became as nothing. Jesus cared for all kinds of needy people as their friend and shepherd. Jesus taught God's flock the word of God and planted the hope of the kingdom of God in their hearts. Finally, he gave his precious life on the cross as a ransom sacrifice for men's sins in obedience to God's will. Jesus is truly great because he saves men from their sins. Jesus is truly great because he is the Son of God.

Third, Jesus is the eternal King (32b).

Look at verse 32b. "The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David..." God promised David that from his root the Messiah would come (2Sa 7:12). David was the shadow of Jesus, the King of love and peace. Kings of the world live for a brief time and die. But Jesus became the eternal King. Our eternal King Jesus destroyed the power of sin and death. Thus he became our eternal king. Our eternal King gives eternal salvation from sin, eternal life and the kingdom of God to those who believe in him.

Fourth, his kingdom is forever (31-33).

Finally, Gabriel talks to Mary about the kingdom of God. Look at verse 33. "...and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end." The prophet Daniel wrote in his apocalyptic prophecy concerning the eternal kingdom of Jesus our Lord (Da 2:35;44-45). The kings and kingdoms of the world are temporal, for they are like pieces of wood, clay, bronze, iron, and so on. There is nothing eternal in this world. This universal truth has been the agony of kings in history who wanted to keep their kingdoms forever. The kingdoms of the world all crumble like iron eaten by rust. Only the kingdom of Jesus is forever.

England grew as such a glorious kingdom with so many colonies that the people renamed this nation, "The United Kingdom." But now, English people do not know whether they should call their country the United Kingdom or England. Only the kingdom of Jesus is forever. The kingdom of God is our final destination. When we have faith in the kingdom of God, we can have the peace of God in our hearts and live as holy pilgrims.

Fifth, "I am the Lord's servant" (34-38).

What was Mary's response? After being convinced, Mary's soul inclined to hear the angel's message. But Mary had a scientific question. Look at verse 34. "'How will this be,' Mary asked the angel, 'since I am a virgin?'" Mary was not negative. Her question shows a positive response. The angel taught her in verse 35: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you." When the angel expounded that Mary's pregnancy was not an accident, but was precisely the work of the Holy Spirit, Mary accepted the angel's message. The angel continued: "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. For nothing is impossible with God" (36,37). The angel convinced Mary that nothing is impossible with God.

Mary realized that her destiny was absolutely in the hand of God. She also realized that even if she had rejected God's plan, God would carry it out anyway. She could have been very rebellious and rejected the angel's message, but Mary decided to obey. Look at verse 38. "'I am the Lord's servant,' Mary answered. 'May it be to me as you have said.' Then the angel left her." When Mary said this, she was not speaking from her emotions, or with blind resignation to fate; she said this on the basis of God's promise.

In order to send Jesus into the world, God had to choose a woman to be his mother. Of all women, God chose Mary—a woman pledged to be married. Why? Was it because she looked so beautiful, like the picture of Mona Lisa? No. God chose her simply because she loved God and was happy to obey God's word absolutely. An obedient woman may be the symbol of a mother. So Mary was the most proper person to be the mother of Jesus. One woman's obedience to God is truly great. May God bless American women to be as obedient as Mary.

We learn, in this passage, how precious one woman of obedience is. Most of all we learn that Jesus is the eternal King and his kingdom is forever. We can be holy pilgrims when we have faith in Jesus and his eternal kingdom. Let's read verses 32-33. "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.