

Mary was just a teenager when God would change the world thru her. She was engaged to a man named Joseph--back in those days it was customary to arrange marriages at an early age, often by the Hebrew SHADCHAM, a professional Matchmaker. But ideally by both families who admired & respected each other so arranged the engagement at a very young age.

Joseph was a hard worker & a skilled craftsman, working in wood & stone. Mary loved to read & study the bible. She especially loved the Psalms of David & had memorized many portions, weaving them together in a beautiful tapestry of praise songs to God. It was difficult living an honest & moral life in a wicked city like **Nazareth**. The town was so scandalous, it became a byword in all Israel, *'can anything good come out of Nazareth'*.

But Joseph & Mary were different, they were faithful to God, to their parents & to each other. Then it happened, a day like no other day, the angel Gabriel, a messenger of God, came to Mary, greeted her, telling her, *she was favored by God*. This was a shock to Mary, she was startled & stunned becoming speechless. She was astonished at what was happening to her. Gabriel reassured her *not to be frightened that she was chosen by God to conceive and bear in her womb a son & his name is to be called Jesus; That He will be great & 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 have no end.*

These words flooded Mary's mind w/ a sense of awe & overwhelming because she knew all about the prophecies of Messiah coming & reigning. She cherished them, loved them, had committed many to memory such as those of **Isaiah 9:6,7**

'For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And the government shall rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. There shall be no end to the increase Of His government or of peace, On the throne of David & over his kingdom, to establish it & to uphold it w/ justice & righteousness from then on & forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this.

Maybe she thought of Samuel when he writes of the prophet Nathan telling David *'When your days are complete & you lie down w/ your fathers, I will raise up your descendant after you, who will come forth from you & I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name & I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be a father to him & he will be a son to Me.....2Sam 7:12*

Gabriel is telling Mary that she is to be the recipient of these glorious & marvelous ancient promises. Mary is overjoyed but as she contemplates these extraordinary words, her heart is in a quandary. She is asking herself **but wait** how can this be true for me? Maybe the angel has the wrong girl, I've never been w/ a man. At this point Mary speaks up saying *'how can this be I'm a virgin & have never been intimate w/ a man'*. Deep in her contemplative mind she realizes **if it be true & it is me**, then it has to happen in a miraculous way.

And at the same time, Gabriel says to Mary *'The Holy Spirit will come upon you & the power of the most high will overshadow you & for that reason the Holy offspring shall be called the Son of God'*. Grk *Parthenogenesis* will take place w/in Mary's womb. Gk Parthenos—virgin; Genesis—creation.

Life from a virgin. Growth & development of an embryo w/o fertilization. The Bible will always teach about science but science will never teach the bible what it does not already declare—Creation cannot teach the Creator. God does the big miracle in Mary, **afterwards**, in time, science discovers that God has left His fingerprints on the smaller miracles. Science now tell us Parthenogenesis, exists in lower forms of life, certain rock lizards & the Brah-miny blind snake, some bees & other lower life forms.

As Mary senses the gravity of what is happening to her, she is humbled by its magnitude, telling Gabriel that she is the Lord's maid servant & will do all that the Lord asks of her.

She quickly goes to her relative Elizabeth whom Gabriel had said was also pregnant in her old age w/ a child

Months earlier the angel visited Zecharias a priest, who was serving in the temple. His wife Elizabeth was barren. Both were righteous people walking w/ God, blameless & both were old, in their golden years---Zacharias was on duty in temple burning incense, when suddenly an angel appeared beside the altar of incense & said *'Your prayers have been heard, Elizabeth shall bear a son, John will be his name, you will have great joy & gladness, many will rejoice at his birth, he will be great before the Lord. He must not touch wine or any strong drink; he will be filled w/ HS even from his birth. He will turn the sons of Israel to the Lord their God & He will be the forerunner to the Messiah, he will prepare the people for the coming of the LORD. John will come in the spirit & power of Elijah to turn hearts of the fathers to children & the disobedient to righteousness.'*---

Zacharias being astonished, thinking **How? We've tried for many years now we're old!** The angel said I'm Gabriel & I stand in the presence of the LORD, I was sent to bring good news to you & Elizabeth but because you did not believe me, you will not speak until all these things comes to pass.

Zechariah went home, Elizabeth conceived & six months later. So the story continues....Mary goes to her Cousin Elizabeth's home & greets her & when she hears the voice of Mary, her baby leaped in her womb & Elizabeth was filled w/ the HS.

Elizabeth declared, blessed are you Mary & blessed is the child in your womb. I am humbled that mother of my Lord comes to see me. When I heard your greeting, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. 'Blessed are you Mary for believing what Lord spoke to you.

As the women are together Mary spontaneously begins to recite glorious psalms of praise to God, telling of His mercy & how highly He thinks of someone as lowly as she ***my soul exalts the Lord & my spirit rejoices in God my Savior for He has regarded the low estate of His maidservant'***.

Also how God deals w/ all people in mercy, scattering the proud & exalting the humble & remembering His promise to his people. For three months Mary the younger & Elizabeth the Elder, two mother in love w/ the Lord & each other encourage one another in the work that God is doing thru their lives to impact the world. Then Elizabeth gave birth to a son and called him John.

As Mary departs for home to be reunited w/ Joseph she has two things on her mind. First, she must tell him she is pregnant. Second how it happened....by the HS.

Joseph hears her words, is troubled, hurt & heartbroken, feeling betrayed & yet his compassion for Mary is so great he in no way wants to shame or humiliate her.

There is a way out of the dilemma, a way to deflect attention away from the situation. The worst to happen according to the Mosaic law requires death by stoning. The least humiliating is to put her away privately, let her relocate in some far away town so the small town gossip mongers of Nazareth not destroy her life. Joseph may be thinking, if people ever did find out they can blame me, I can handle the bullies & I'll do whatever it takes to protect Mary's reputation, in spite of what appears her making a big mistake.

The problem is, Joseph doesn't yet realize Mary has made no mistake, she's telling the truth, people can think what they want to think, *people will be people* but this child is a work of God. Now it happened the night before Joseph was about to divorce her privately that an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream saying don't be afraid to take Mary as your wife for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit...*she will bear a son and you shall call his name Jesus for He will save His people from their sins*. Joseph feels ashamed that he had doubted Mary when she told him the same story the angel was telling him. Afterward he arose from the dream and took Mary as wife.

Now it came about as Mary was getting close to giving birth a big problem arose **threatening** God's divine plan. Joseph & Mary lived in Nazareth & according to prophecy, Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem 95 miles away. Yet God's providence always prevails.

God directed a corrupt pagan emperor, Caesar Augustus, to proclaim a decree, motivated by personal gain & selfish ambition, forcing a census to every head of households to register in their family home of origin for tax purposes; for Joseph & Mary that would be Bethlehem 95 miles away on rugged roads when close to giving birth.

Upon making the arduous journey the only place they found to lodge was where the animals were sheltered. And It was in this place that Mary gave birth & wrapping her son Jesus in torn pieces of cloth laid him in a stone feeding trough or manger. This royal child born not in a royal palace w/ royal guards but a dirty grotto attached to an Inn spending the night where they keep animals. **Why?**

If Jesus was born in a palace, most of us couldn't get into a palace or past the guards & if we did we'd likely get escorted out. But in a cave attached to an Inn. Well, an Inn **Motel 6, Budget Inn**, receives all who come, even you & me. But if a person is so lowly they can't even get into the Inn, anyone can sleep w/ the animals. So God sends His son to the lowest of low places to identify w/ those who feel they don't belong. To the lost & lonely, the misfits & hurting. God is saying I care & I see & I hurt because you hurt. The proud & self-righteous wouldn't be caught dead sleeping in a place where they keep animals & the self-important don't have time for a savior who would stoop that low.

And that's because there are those who don't know the value of a soul, how valuable a life is. God gave up his dignity & humbled Himself to identify w/ our lowly & sinful humanity. He lays down His honor to show us the way to life more abundant—lose life to gain life.

God is a giver not a taker. He gives the greatest gift, His son Jesus Christ that we might have God's life & eternal life. *For God So loved the world that he gave His only begotten son that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life...A richer more abundant life.* There is a lot of gift giving around Christmas time. Gifts that you give & gifts that you receive. But what gifts did you get last year that you still treasure or even remember?

What if you picked out a special gift, spent all you had, your time, money, effort--wrapped it w/ all your love & care & tenderness & there it sat unopened year after year & the one you gave it to ignored the gift & in so doing ignored you the giver of the gift....

The babe in Bethlehem, God's only begotten son grew to be the man Jesus Christ *savior of the world* who died on the cross for your sins and mine—the greatest gift has been given---God gave his son won't you unwrap that gift this Christmas and give your heart & life to Him? In return He forgives your sins & writes your name in the Lambs book of life & has a home for you in heaven.