

Joy to the World: Trusting the Father's Leadership (Lk. 1-2)

I. LIVING IN GOD'S FAVOR

- A. Mary's life is a model of how to steward God's favor and respond to His leadership. Her story reveals how He leads His people—in using them and helping them to mature in love and humility. What does a life look like to live as one highly favored by God? Mary had a most remarkable prophetic history for her life, yet her life circumstances were different from what we might expect.
- B. Through it all, Mary grew in love and humility by choosing to trust God's leadership again and again in the face of unexpected hardships and delayed promises. The Lord creates the optimum environment for each to grow in love and humility since that is what we bring to the age to come.
²⁸And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose...²⁹to be conformed to the image of His Son... (Rom 8:28-29)
- C. Some of God's promises for our life are released only *partially* in this age, and in *fullness* in the age to come. They are often fulfilled in a *way* and at a *time* that differs greatly from what we expect.
- D. Gabriel declared that God's favor was on Mary (1:26) and that her Son would be great and reign as a king forever (1:33). Gabriel gave her one simple exhortation: to "rejoice." This was to have a long-term application beyond her initial response of exuberant joy. Embracing a lifestyle of "rejoicing" is essential for all who seek to grow in the first and great commandment to love God with all our heart (Mt. 22:37). Mary committed to trust and obey God's leadership (1:38).
***²⁶...the angel Gabriel was sent...to Nazareth...²⁸[he] said to her, "Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women...³¹you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son...³²He will be great...³³He will reign over the house of Jacob forever...
³⁵The Holy Spirit will come upon you...[He] who is to be born will be called the Son of God..."
³⁸Mary said, "Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word." (Lk. 1:26-38)***
- E. After Gabriel's visit, Mary traveled about 100 miles to a city near Jerusalem to spend three months with Elizabeth (Lk. 1:36-57). She was visibly pregnant when she returned home to Nazareth. Joseph set into motion divorce proceedings which implied that both sets of parents were involved along with the rabbi counseling them. The miracle of conceiving by the Spirit resulted in shame for Mary.
- F. The Lord visited Joseph with four prophetic dreams (Mt. 1-2). First, Joseph was shown that Mary conceived by the Spirit (1:18-25). Why didn't the Lord tell Joseph about Mary's pregnancy earlier? Next, he was shown to flee to Egypt (2:13-15), to return to Israel (2:19-21), and Nazareth (2:22-23).
¹⁹Joseph...[planned] to put her away secretly. ²⁰But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel...appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph...that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit...²¹call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins." (Mt. 1:19-21)
- G. Towards the end of Mary's pregnancy, she had to make a difficult journey to Bethlehem because of a census (Lk. 2:1-7) where she gave birth in a dirty stable. I would have thought that, since God's favor was on her to give birth to the King, she would have been in a more comfortable place.

II. A SERIES OF SUPERNATURAL EVENTS SURROUNDED JESUS' BIRTH (MT. 2; LK. 2)

- A. Shepherds told her of seeing angels who confirmed that Jesus was the Messiah to bring world peace (Lk. 2:8-20). Later, she received prophecies from Simeon and Anna (Lk. 2:22-38), and then wise men from the East were directed by a star to the house where Jesus was in Bethlehem (Mt. 2:1-12).
*⁹An angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them...
¹⁰Then the angel said to them, "...I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people.
¹¹For there is born to you this day in the city of David [Bethlehem] a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."
¹²And this will be the sign to you: you will find a Babe...in a manger."
¹³And suddenly there was...a multitude of the heavenly host...saying: ¹⁴"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace..."
¹⁶They came with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger..."
¹⁹Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart. (Lk. 2:8-19)*
- B. Afterwards, an angel visited Joseph in a second dream, warning him to flee with his family to Egypt (Mt. 2:13-15). Mary had to flee to a foreign country because the government sought to kill her Son. It was clear that God would supernaturally protect Mary and her family—so why the future trouble?
- C. In a third prophetic dream Joseph was shown when he was to return to Israel (Mt. 2:19-21). Joseph received a fourth dream showing him not to go to Judea, so they returned to Nazareth (Mt. 2:22-23).

III. THE CHALLENGES AND DIFFICULTIES IN MARY'S LIFE

- A. Mary knew the trauma of losing her husband and being a widow with 7-8 children (Mt. 13:55-56).
- B. Jesus fasted for 40 days and returned anointed by the Spirit and revealing that He was the Messiah (Lk. 4:16-21). Many were enraged and sought to throw Him off a cliff to kill Him (Lk. 4:29).
- C. Some of His closest friends and family members considered Him as mentally unstable because of the things He was saying (Mk. 3:21). Jesus' four brothers did not believe Him (Jn. 7:5).
- D. The top religious leaders in the nation sent out the word that Jesus was a demonized, dangerous cult leader who was deceiving the people (Jn. 7:47; 8:48). They stirred up the old rumors that they had heard from the Nazarene elders about Jesus being born as result of Mary's fornication (Jn. 8:41). Eventually the leaders of the nation murdered Him after the multitude cried for Him to be crucified.
- E. After 3½ years of ministry there appeared to be little fruit with only 120 people in the Upper Room after His resurrection (Acts 1:15). After the day of Pentecost, Mary is not in the story in the book of Acts. Mary's local church in Ephesus drifted spiritually and lost their first love for Jesus (Rev. 2:4).
- F. Jesus endured accusations from others that His ministry was in vain—accomplishing nothing. Jesus acknowledged that men concluded that He had spent His strength in vain because He did not achieve anything notable from their point of view (Isa. 49:4). He declared that His choices to trust God's promises and to invest His life in obeying Him were glorious in God's eyes (Isa. 49:5).
*⁴"I [Jesus] said, 'I have labored in vain, I have spent My strength for nothing...yet surely My just reward is with the Lord...'"
⁵For I shall be glorious in the eyes of the Lord.'" (Isa. 49:4-5)*