

Coming Home - part 2 – A Controversial Story.

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BIG IDEA – Jesus' mom had to carry more than just the savior.

scripture focus - Luke 1:26-35 NLT “In the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy, **God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a village in Galilee, to a virgin named Mary. She was engaged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of King David. Gabriel appeared to her and said, “Greetings, favored woman! The Lord is with you!”**

God decided to become a human in such a known and controversial way. He wasn't trying to keep it a secret! Both Mary and Joseph could be considered common, ordinary, unknown people from a regular town. Last week, we talked about Advent and how it means “the coming,” specifically the coming of Christ. We know why Jesus had to become human...to save humanity. We also know this was foretold thousands of years ago. Joseph and Mary were forced to come home to their ancestral beginning in Bethlehem, and Mary did so while also carrying more than a child... she carried a heavy story covered in controversy.

Virginal conception? There are a lot of stories about “virgin births” that have floated around, most of them coming solely from the 19th century and a newfound hunger for postmodern explanations of Biblical miracles. **One of the more recent stories debunked was called “son of a gun,” which came out of the civil war in 1874. Apparently, a medical journal The American Medical Weekly printed the story as a joke on 7 November 1874.**

Mary's virgin birth story is as controversial today as it was when she experienced it back in 3 B.C.!

The idea of Jesus coming to the earth through a young woman was predicted by Isaiah 7:14, 700 years before Christ was born.

Mary was told before Joseph knows what was happening.

The news must have been devastating! Joseph had to quickly make a decision. A decision based on the only facts he had at the time, “We are engaged to be married and Mary is pregnant!”

How can something so holy, so pure, so honest be delivered in such a nontraditional, controversial way. **Why did God do it this way?**

Did you ever think about it?

Why didn't Jesus just appear out of nowhere or just showed up as a fully grown man? No history, no mystery, just get to work saving the world!

Jesus could have shown up similar to a [theophany](#), appearing as a man.

We cannot redeem ourselves; we cannot fix ourselves, nor rid ourselves of sin our brokenness.

God's justice, His perfection, demands payment for all disobedience, all sin, all choices that lead to death. That payment could only come from a perfect sacrifice, a perfect human being.

This was the only way it could happen! Christ had to be born as fully human and fully God. And this could only come about through a virginal conception!

Let's focus on the reality of what that looked like for this couple, this husband and wife coming home to their ancient beginnings and carrying a truckload of controversy with them.

Before they came to Bethlehem, they had to come home to the fact that they had a really big secret to keep from family and friends in the very tight community of Nazareth.

In the order that Mary & Joseph's story unfolds, let's look at it with the eyes of the reality and wonder of those moments.

Read Luke 1:26-35 NLT <https://bible.com/bible/116/luk.1.26-35.NLT>

"In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a village in Galilee, to a virgin named Mary. She was engaged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of King David. Gabriel appeared to her and said, "Greetings, favored woman! The Lord is with you!"

Confused and disturbed, Mary tried to think what the angel could mean.

"Don't be afraid, Mary," the angel told her, "for you have found favor with God! **You will conceive and give birth** to a son, and you will name him Jesus.

He will be very great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David. And he will reign over Israel forever; his Kingdom will never end!" Mary asked the angel, "But how can this happen? I am a virgin." The angel replied, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you,

and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the baby to be born will be holy, and he will be called the Son of God.”

Mary's Story

Some observations about Mary's most unusual visit with the most extraordinary news.

- **Gabriel greets Mary with a blessing**, “Greetings to you, you are (charitoó: endowed with grace).” God (eulogéó) speaks well of you!
- His greeting reminds me of when Jesus personally complimented Gideon, “The Lord is with you, mighty warrior.” Judges 6:12 NIV
- **Mary, rightly so, was (diatarassó) intensely agitated and (dialogizomai) debating within herself, trying to figure out (potapos: from what country?) where in the world this greeting was coming from.** Then, Gabriel tells her fear not.
- Gabriel tells her that **God has found (charis) grace, kindness, and favor with her.**
- He continues, immediately telling this young teen of what she **will** be and **will** do. She **will** (sullambanó) be taken hold of, conceive in your (gastér) womb, and she **will** (tiktó) give birth to a son, and name him Joshua (Yehoshua"/Jehoshua, which means "Yahweh saves")/Jesus in Greek.
- **Gabriel gives Mary a quick historical and theological perspective**, “The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David. And he will reign over (the house of Jacob) Israel forever; his Kingdom will never end!”
- Mary comes back to the (dialogizomai) trying to figure all this out moment and asks, “How is this possible, because **I have not known a man.**” **Mary politely asks how it is possible, using the proper euphemism for marital relations.** I mean it's nice to think that Mary knows how to be respectful when talking to a giant angelic messenger.
- The angel tells her **how** it will happen, but he does not tell her **when** this will happen. **The Holy Spirit will (eperchomai) come upon you and the (dunamis), miraculous power of the (hupsistos) **Most High will (episkiazó) overshadow, cast shade on you.** [the moment is a picture of God coming down as a cloud, His presence physically being with his people].**
- **Small but powerful detail, here is the why! All of this will happen to you and through you for this reason: “So this (gennaó) begotten, descendant, the baby to be born will be (hagios) set apart, different and not of this world, holy, and he will be called the (huios), of the same nature as his father, Son of God.”** These words echo the ancient scenes of Eden, God's promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and of the prophecies told to generations of God's people who waited for this moment.

- This is given to a young woman who carry far more than just the savior of the world. She would carry the highs and the lows, the struggles and joys of raising God's only son. This is why Mary is called blessed!
- How did Mary respond to all this? How did this young teenager take in the news that she would partner with God to conceive, give birth and raise Jesus. She would also watch him die on a criminal's cross. We know what was ahead, but she did not! What did she say to Gabriel in response? "Mary responded, "I am the Lord's servant. May everything you have said about me come true." And then the angel left her." Luke 1:38 NLT <https://bible.com/bible/116/luk.1.38.NLT>

Joseph's Story

Some observations about Joseph's very different experience. He must have received the news from Mary herself. But when? After she returned from staying with Elizabeth for three months? Was she already showing?

Matthew 1:18-23 NIV <https://bible.com/bible/111/mat.1.18-23.NIV>

"This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, **she was found to be pregnant** through the Holy Spirit. **Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.** But after he had considered this, **an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.** She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" (which means "God with us")."

- **Matthew covers Joseph's perspective. All we are told is, "before the marriage took place."**
- **The only clue Matthew gives us about Joseph knowing his betrothed was pregnant is found in this one word, "she was (heuriskó) discovered, to find out to be pregnant.** The likelihood is that Joseph didn't find out until **after** Mary had returned from Elizabeth's house, when she would have been **3 months** pregnant. Did Mary tell him? **Was just observant, even though Mary would hardly be showing at 3 months. Jesus was the size of a plum!**
- **Mary, with no shame, because she was the only one that knew the truth, must have told Joseph the story.**
- **Joseph (enthumeomai) reflected on, he passionately pondered about what he should do. What a decision to have to make! It had the potential**

to be the explosive destruction of all that he had built as a reputation for his life and family name. If this got out it would be the end of his legacy. **But that's not where Joseph pondered. He thought of Mary! Why Mary? Whatever the cause, she did this not him!**

- Matthew records this wonderful man's intentions. They were thoughts of grace and kindness to his betrothed – **he did not want to** (deigmatizó) **to expose, make a spectacle of her to public disgrace.**
- Why did he consider the need to divorce her quietly? **Because Joseph was faithful to the law. Joseph wanted to do the right thing, for the right reason.**
- **Doing the right thing for the right reason does not guarantee that people will understand.** The chances of someone finding out were high, **and Mary would then still be pregnant and have to raise the child as a single mother. The stakes in this story were very high.**
- This is when Joseph had a dream. Dreams are for the old and visions for the young!
- The angel, possibly Gabriel, called him by his ancestral name, Joseph son of David. Cool huh? **The angel tells Joseph not to be afraid. Afraid of what? Taking Mary to be his wife.** She has done nothing wrong and has done everything right!
- **The angel tells Joseph the what and the why right away, “what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.” And, this child, will “save his people from their sins.” Not salvation from Roman rulers, but from their sin. Joseph was given the real reason the Messiah would be born.**

Joseph obeyed.

“When Joseph woke up, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded and took Mary as his wife. But he did not have sexual relations with her until her son was born. And Joseph named him Jesus.”

Matthew 1:24-25 NLT <https://bible.com/bible/116/mat.1.24-25.NL>

The Christmas Story is full of real-life situations, real human dilemmas, tough choices and extreme public peer pressures. This couple, **before ever starting their family together, before even knowing they would have to leave their hometown, Nazareth,** and would soon have to Come Home to Bethlehem where it all started hundreds of years before. **But they would be coming home with a whole lot more social and emotional baggage than they anticipated.**

And if that weren't enough to deal with... next week we'll discover what it's like to travel with a pregnant woman, just days away from giving birth!

NOTES

Scriptures

Isaiah 7:13-14 NLT <https://bible.com/bible/116/isa.7.13-14.NLT>

“Then Isaiah said, “Listen well, you royal family of David! Isn’t it enough to exhaust human patience? Must you exhaust the patience of my God as well? All right then, the Lord himself will give you the sign. Look! **The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel (which means ‘God is with us’).**”

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Questions

Q: Have you heard there a “many” virgin birth stories in history?

Q: Do you believe that to be true?

Q: What do you think about God choosing this way to rescue us?

Q: What do you learn about the Christmas story from Mary’s perspective?

Q: What sticks out the most about Mary’s interaction with Gabriel?

Q: How about from Joseph’s perspective?

Q: What do think about Joseph's dream and his response?

Q: Have you come from a controversial story?

Q: What has God done in you to overcome things in your family's past?

Diving Deeper into God's Word

Strong's Concordance

Isaiah 7:14 Hebrew

almah: a young woman, a virgin

Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers

Matthew 1:18

Was espoused to Joseph.—Betrothal, among the Jews, was a formal ceremony, the usual symbolic act being, from patriarchal times, the gift of a ring and other jewels (Genesis 24:53). The interval between betrothal and marriage was of uncertain length, but among the Jews of our Lord's time was commonly for a whole year in the case of maidens. During that time the bride-elect remained in her own home, and did not see the bridegroom till he came to fetch her to his own house. All communications in the meantime were conducted through "the friend of the bridegroom" (John 3:29).

Matthew 1:20

In a dream.—From the Jewish point of view, **dreams were the received channels of divine communications to the aged**, open visions in the state of ecstasy to the young (Joel 2:28). This, at least, falls in with what has been inferred as to Joseph's age.

Gill's Commentary of the Entire Bible

Matthew 1:18

When Mary is said to be found with child, the meaning is, it appeared by evident signs, it was observed by Joseph particularly, who might know not only that she was with child, but with child of the Holy Ghost; by conversation with her, who might relate to him what passed between the Angel and her, **Luke 1:28 though it looks as if as yet he did not know this, or at least was not fully satisfied about it; since he had a mind to have put her away, before he was assured of the truth of it, by the appearance of an angel to him.** Now Mary's being with child, and its being known, were facts, at the time when she was espoused to Joseph.

And such a distinction between a married woman and a betrothed virgin, which was Mary's case, may be observed in Deuteronomy 22:22 moreover, her being found or appearing to be with child, was "before they came together"; which it is likely, as Dr. Lightfoot (z) observes, was about three months from her conception, when she was returned from her cousin Elizabeth. It is probable that as soon as she was espoused to Joseph, or quickly after, she went and paid her visit to Elizabeth, with whom she stayed about three months, and then returned home, Luke 1:56. Upon her return home, she appears to be with child, with which she had gone three months, a proper time for the discovery of such a matter, Genesis 38:24 and which is assigned by the Jewish doctors for this purpose. In the Misna (a) such a case as this is put, "If two men should espouse two women, and at the time of their entrance into the bride chamber, the one should be taken for the other--they separate them for three months, because they may prove with child;" that is, as Bartenora observes upon it, "they separate them that they may not return to their husbands; and that if they should be with child, they may distinguish between a legitimate and an illegitimate offspring; and that the children which they may bring forth may not be ascribed to the wrong persons." **Now Mary being gone three months from the time of her espousals to Joseph, and he and she not being yet come together, it was a clear case, that the child she was gone three months with, was none of his;** hence it follows.

Internet Links

[The Other Virgin Births in Antiquity](#) – by Bart Ehrman
virginal conception

“There have been people who have claimed that virgin births were common in the ancient world. You find that claim widely today still among those who call themselves “mythicists” — those who think Jesus didn’t exist but was just a myth.”

[Son of a gun](#) – November 1874: Claim that a woman became pregnant from being struck by a bullet that had passed through the scrotum of a Civil War soldier.

[Why wasn't Jesus born with original sin?](#) by Matt Slick

Some Bible commentators, with whom I agree, hold the position that the sin nature is passed down through the father. Support for this position is found in the fact that **sin entered the world through Adam, not Eve**. Remember, Eve was the one who sinned first. However, sin did not enter the world through her. It entered through Adam.

[6 Things You Didn't Know About Joseph in the Bible](#) – by Leslie White

Joseph’s hometown was Nazareth in Galilee. Isaiah prophesied that the Messiah would come from Nazareth about 600 years before the village existed. In the 8th century, before Christ’s birth, Isaiah prophesied that **“a shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse, and a branch from his roots will bear fruit” (Isaiah 11:1). The word “branch” in Hebrew is netzer, the same root word from which the name “Nazareth” comes.** Some historians have suggested that Nazareth was named as “the town of the branch,” meaning “the place where the Branch of David lives.” In the New Testament, **Matthew connects Nazareth with the prophecy in Isaiah 11:1: “And came and resided in a city called Nazareth, that what was spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled, ‘He shall be called a Nazarene’” (Matthew 2:23).**

[Who was Mary of Nazareth?](#)

Mary was a Jewish peasant girl in a small village called Nazareth. Soon after puberty she became pregnant and married a young man called Joseph.

[Mary has help from an older cousin – Elizabeth](#) – Dave Gable

So now Mary has company in her miraculous pregnancy, although there are huge contrasts. Elizabeth and Mary (Edwards, 51):

- old rather than young,
- respected religious (priestly!)
- family rather than ordinary provincials,
- probably comfortably well-off rather than blue-collar working class, improbable but humanly possible pregnancy rather than humanly impossible,
- reputation-restoring pregnancy rather than a reputation-destroying one;
- everyone rejoicing at Elizabeth’s pregnancy and shaking their heads at Mary’s.

[7 Biblical Facts About the Angel Gabriel](#) – by Lesli White

- Gabriel isn’t Called an Archangel in the Bible

- Gabriel Only Speaks to Three Biblical Characters
- Gabriel First Appears in Daniel's Vision
- Gabriel May Not Have Had Wings
- Gabriel's Name Means "God is Great"
- Gabriel is One of Two Named Good Angels in the Bible
- Gabriel's Appearance is Rather Terrifying

[Walking With Mary to Ein Kerem, Elizabeth's Home](#) – by Denise Bossert

Eighty miles. That is the distance between Nazareth and Ein Kerem (also spelled Ein Karem), where Elizabeth and Zechariah lived. Yes, Mary made that 80 mile journey alone [she would not have been alone, but travelled with a caravan], on her own two feet, with the Messiah taking on flesh within her. **She journeyed through Galilee, Samaria, the Jordan River Valley, and finally through the hills of Judea.**

[How Many Times An Angel Of The Lord Appeared To Joseph.](#)

An angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph. **The first** was to let him know Mary was still a virgin and she had not cheated on him. **The second** to warn him to take the family and flee to Egypt because Herod wanted to kill Jesus. **The third time** was to let him know it was safe to bring Jesus back to Israel because Herod had died.