



First Baptist Church Selmer

SONGS OF THE SEASON • THE JOURNEY • LUKE 1:26-38; MATTHEW 1:18-20 •
12/17/2023

MAIN POINT

God is always good. We can learn to trust Him with our fears and act in obedience to His plans for our lives.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

In the Christmas story, we see God's use of the unexpected. In everything from the young virgin mother, to the birthplace in a stable, to revelations via dreams and angelic choirs, no detail about Jesus' entrance into the world was expected, and many aspects were downright ironic ways to celebrate the Messiah's birth. To get today's discussion started, ask group members to discuss the following questions:

What's your favorite "unexpected" detail in the Christmas story?

What's one unexpected way God has worked in your life lately?

It is beyond comprehension how God works through situations in our lives. Things that make sense to us, may not be what is best in terms of eternity. Acceptance of God's will is difficult at times even in the lives of mature believers. One thing remains, however, God is always good and that simple truth provides each of us with hope and comfort we must hold on to through the most difficult and challenging times.

Has there been a time in your life that seemed impossible to make it through only for your faith to grow more than it ever has before?

We will look today at the journey of Mary and Joseph to bring Jesus into the world. From a place of fearful disbelief to a loving acceptance of God's plans, their journey is to be an

example of faith for each of us today.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ LUKE 1:26-31.

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.'" (ESV)

Jesus' birth came about in a unique way, starting with the fact that Mary, His mother, was a virgin and conceived Jesus through the work of the Holy Spirit.

In addition to being a virgin, what else made Mary an unlikely candidate to carry the Son of God based on the culture of her day?

Mary was betrothed to Joseph, which made them legally husband and wife even though the marriage wasn't finalized.

What possible legal and social consequences Mary and Joseph might have faced as a result of her being pregnant out of wedlock?

Much is said of Mary and her initial shock and fear of the angel's news about her pregnancy. Joseph too, would have a journey of faith to walk as well.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ MATTHEW 1:18-20

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.'" (ESV)

According to religious law, Joseph had the right to divorce Mary publicly or privately for her apparent adultery. As Matthew 1:19 notes, Joseph was a “just” man whose conviction and desire to follow God’s law, combined with his mercy, led him to choose private divorce. Imagine Joseph’s relief when an angel confirmed Mary’s story.

Is fear an appropriate response to news like this? Why or why not?

What are some reasons that Joseph and Mary were able to face their fears?

How might this story have ended differently if Joseph and Mary had chosen to disobey the angel to avoid their fears?

| NOW HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ LUKE 1:32-37.

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.'" (ESV)

In an instant, Mary’s plans for her life were shattered. The quiet life she’d no doubt imagined with her future husband was suddenly and dramatically derailed. In the moment, it was probably difficult for her to see that God had swapped her ordinary existence for an extraordinary one. Despite the angel’s presence and his assurance that she was in God’s favor, Mary’s initial response to the angel was an honest one: “How can this be?”

What are a few key differences between questioning God and asking questions of Him?

Why is the virgin birth vital to the Christian faith?

The virgin birth is more than an impressive miracle God used to dramatize Jesus' entrance into the world. Jesus came to earth to redeem us from our sins and restore God's relationship with His people. If Jesus had been Joseph's biological Son, He would have been born with the innate sin nature all humans are born with, the curse of Adam and Eve's sin. Because Jesus was "conceived" (Matthew 1:20) by the Holy Spirit, He was born holy and was capable of living in perfect obedience to God. (See Romans 5:14-19.)

| HAVE ANOTHER VOLUNTEER READ 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." (ESV)

What does Mary's response to the angel reveal about her?

How is simple obedience to the Word of God essential in the life of a believer?

In Luke 1:38, we read that Mary showed the same resolve to obedience. She wholeheartedly accepted her new role and mission even though she didn't see the whole picture. No doubt, she wondered what her obedience would cost her—she didn't even know what Joseph's reaction would be—but she trusted in the One who called her.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

Is there a situation in your life that doesn't make sense? How does Mary and Joseph's story encourage you that God knows what He's doing in that situation?

Name something God has asked you to sacrifice in order to follow His plan for your life.

What are some practical ways you can remind yourself that God is working His plan in your life?

PRAYER

Close in prayer, asking God to strengthen our faith and our courage to obey Him this season.

COMMENTARY

| LUKE 1:26-38

1:26-27. The announcement of Jesus' birth carried the authority of God. It came in the sixth month, a reference to the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy with John the Baptist. The term virgin emphasized the purity associated with a young, unmarried woman. Although engaged to a man named Joseph, Mary did not yet live with Joseph. In first-century Jewish culture, engagement (or betrothal) bound them together legally as husband and wife. The wedding and consummation of the marriage, however, followed at a later time. Luke identified Mary's husband, Joseph, as a member of the house of David. The Jews knew from the Scriptures that the future Messiah would be a descendant of the great King David. This fact supported the identification of Jesus as King. The Child to be born, then, would be identified with the lineage through which the Messiah had been promised (see Isa. 9:6-7; 11:1-5).

1:28-30. Mary was favored because the Lord set His undeserved grace upon her, not because she had earned good standing. Understandably, she was deeply troubled (Gk *diatarasso*; "confused, perplexed") by Gabriel's visit and greeting, wondering how she had come to receive such an honor. Gabriel's admonishment that Mary not be afraid was the same thing he said to Zechariah (v. 13).

1:31-33. Mary's conception would be miraculous because she was still a virgin (v. 34). The name Jesus is equivalent to the Hebrew *Yeshua* (Joshua), meaning "the Lord is salvation." In Genesis 14:18, God is referred to as "God Most High." Humanly speaking, Jesus' lineage would be traced legitimately through the royal family of David because Joseph, Jesus' adoptive father, was a descendant of David. This made Jesus heir to David's throne according to God's eternal covenant (see 2 Sam. 7:13,16).

1:34-35. The difference between Mary's response (how can this be) and Zechariah's (v. 18) is that Mary asked her question not from unbelief but from puzzlement (v. 38; see note at v. 20). The answer to Mary's question about how she could get pregnant without being intimate with a man is that the Holy Spirit would overshadow her and cause her to

conceive. Because the Holy Spirit was the agent of conception, the child (the Holy One; 2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 4:15) would be the Son of God.

1:36-38. If ever Mary was tempted to doubt God's promise to her, she could recall Gabriel's words that nothing will be impossible with God, as had been shown in the lives of Abraham and Sarah (see Gen. 18:14). Mary's response is a classic model of humble commitment (I am the Lord's slave) and willing obedience (may it be done to me according to your word).

| MATTHEW 1:18-20

1:18. As Matthew launched the account of Jesus' birth, note that he was careful to highlight the title "Christ"—the title he used in the preceding passage that demonstrated Jesus had the right to claim deity. Watch for Matthew's use of this title throughout his Gospel. His purpose in writing was to make the case for Jesus as the promised King.

To understand the significance of some statements in this passage, it is necessary to understand the Jewish marriage customs of the day. The bride and groom went through a period of betrothal or engagement. In that culture and time, betrothal was virtually as binding as marriage. In this waiting period, Mary was found to be pregnant. Matthew was careful to protect the virtue of Mary and the supernatural origin of Christ.

Why is it so important that the Christ, the promised king, be born to a virgin? The virgin birth is more than a miracle to draw attention to the unique nature of this child. Because Mary was a virgin, only God could have been the father of Jesus, making Jesus the one and only God-Man in all the universe. God's plan would have been impossible if Jesus had been anything less.

1:19. A betrothed couple was as good as married, and breaking off the relationship was seen as divorce, even though the couple had not yet been married. It also helps us gain a better perspective of the emotional state of Mary and Joseph when we realize that she was probably in her teens at the time of these events. The minimum marriageable age in Israel was twelve for women and thirteen for men. To remain unmarried as late as one's twenties may have been cause for social embarrassment.

1:20. Mary, initially fearful of being an unwed mother, accepted God's revealed intentions for her. And Joseph, initially not all that sure himself about the "virgin birth," was originally thinking divorce, albeit quietly and with no public scandal. But when Joseph was

approached by God through the angel, he accepted his role and did precisely as he was instructed by God.