



Christmas According to Mary

Luke 1:26-55

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CHRISTMAS ACCORDING TO MARY

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Mary, did you know? What did Mary know? Luke 1 tells us.

This morning, we are going to read the Christmas story from Mary's point of view. We get to hear what was going through her mind after an angel told her that she would give birth to the Messiah. "My soul magnifies the Lord," she said.¹ "Oh, how my soul praises the Lord. How my spirit rejoices in God my Savior!" (Luke 1:46-47). *Two thousand years ago, Mary rejoiced that the Messiah would come through her. And today, we rejoice that the Messiah has come for us.*

Some 360,000 babies are born every day, and some under unusual circumstances. Anna Bates was 7'11" tall and spent much of her life as a sideshow attraction in the circus. But in 1879, she set the Guinness record for giving birth to the largest baby in history, a 22-pound boy.² In 2004, a Singapore woman gave birth to the smallest baby born in history, a 7.5-ounce girl named Kwek Yu Xuan.³ That's the weight of an apple.

Stories of unusual births include women giving birth in a taxi, on a train, and on a plane. Also of women giving birth at a theme park, in a prison cell, and at a Dallas Cowboys' football game. One woman gave birth on the side of the road, her baby delivered by a police officer. Another woman gave birth in the hospital parking lot, just steps from the front door.

Carolina Chirindza gave birth to her baby in a tree. In 2000, Carolina's village in Mozambique was overcome by a flood, so she climbed a tree to avoid crocodile-infested waters. For four days, without food or water, she waited for rescue. On the fourth day, clinging to the top of a tree, she gave birth to a baby girl, and shortly after mother and baby were rescued by a military helicopter.⁴

For every woman who gives birth, her baby and her story are special. That was certainly the case 2,000 years ago when a Jewish teenager gave birth to her son. An angel declared, "I bring you good news of a great joy ... For today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord!" (Luke 2:10-11, NAS). The most unique and most significant birth in history was the birth of Jesus. The birth of the Son of God, the Savior of the world – **HE IS BORN!**

We read the Christmas story year after year, not because it's traditional and not because it's sentimental. We read it because it's true. We believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God, born through the miracle of virgin birth, who sacrificed His life for us on the cross, and then supernaturally rose from the dead proving to be the Son of God and proving that everything He said is true. And we believe Jesus is the Savior of the world. That's what Christmas means to us, worshiping and celebrating Jesus Christ as our Savior.

MARY'S STORY

Luke 1 is Christmas according to Mary. So let's read her story.

“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” (Luke 1:26-29, NLT).

“‘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!’” (Luke 1:30-33, NLT).

Mary asked the angel, “But how can this happen, since I am a virgin?” (Luke 1:34, NLT). From creation to the resurrection, God is a God of miracles. So the first Christians believed Jesus’ birth was supernatural. In the first and second centuries, early church leaders consistently confirmed their belief in the virgin birth – Ignatius (103), Justin (160), Irenaeus (180), and Clement (195). The Apostles’ Creed confirmed the virgin birth and early believers recited it. “I believe ... in Christ Jesus ... born of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary.” And it was necessary that Jesus was both God and man. As God, He was born without sin. As man, He was a human sacrifice for sin. But Mary’s question was not about theology, but how.

Verse 35, 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. What’s more, your relative Elizabeth has become pregnant in her old age! ... For nothing is impossible with God” (Luke 1:35-37, NLT).

Verse 38, “Mary responded, ‘I am the Lord’s servant. Be it done to me according to Your word. May everything you have said about me come true.’ And then the angel left her.” Mary believed the incredible message from the angel because she trusted God. A few days later, she traveled the hill country of Judea to the house of Elizabeth and Zechariah. The Bible says, “At the sound of Mary’s greeting, Elizabeth’s child leaped within her, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit” (Luke 1:38-41, NLT).

Verse 42, “Elizabeth gave a glad cry and exclaimed to Mary, ‘Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. Why am I so honored, that the mother of my Lord should visit me? When I heard your greeting, the baby in my womb jumped for joy. You are blessed because you believed that the Lord would do what he said’” (Luke 1:42-45, NAS, NLT).

MARY PRAISED GOD FOR CHOOSING HER

At that moment, this teenage girl knew more about God’s plan than any other person in history. She was more intimately involved in God’s plan than any other person in history. Imagine talking to Mary one-on-one. Imagine interviewing the mother of the Messiah and the Savior of the world. Reading Luke 1 allows us to do that as we listen to Mary tell her story.

“My soul magnifies the Lord” (ESV). *Mary praised God for choosing her.* “Oh, how my soul praises the Lord. How my spirit rejoices in God my Savior! For he took notice of his lowly servant girl, and from now on all generations will call me blessed” (Luke 1:46-48, NLT).

This is the heart of a teenage girl visited by an angel and told she would give birth to the Messiah. The theology is amazing. The theology of a virgin birth and the coming of the Son of God is amazing. But on a human level, it meant scandal. It meant rumors and whispers. It meant being disowned and outcast ... by her family, by her community, and by her beloved Joseph. Explain as she might – “But an angel told me” – no one was going to believe that. From human eyes, it was obvious what she had done, and it was scandalous.⁵

But even before the angel visited Joseph and explained it to him, even before that, when she was all alone and the only one to know, she did not fear or despair. Instead, she burst into praise. “My soul magnifies the Lord. Oh, how my soul praises the Lord. How my spirit rejoices in God my Savior!” What faith! What courage! As Elizabeth said of Mary, “You are blessed because you believed that the Lord would do what he said” (Luke 1:45, NLT).

God chose Mary. It was as if God said to Mary and Joseph, “I trust you with this. Mary, of all the women in the world, and Joseph, of all the men in the world, throughout all generations, I choose you. The time of the Messiah has come. And I want you to be a part of it. I trust you with My Son to be your son.”

With humility and joy, Mary said, “From now on all generations will call me blessed” (Luke 1:48, NLT).

Unfortunately, Luke 1 has been exaggerated into an unbiblical view of Mary. As Protestants, we disagree with the Catholic theology of Mary for several reasons. One, we reject the perpetual virginity of Mary. Catholics argue that the womb of Mary could not be spoiled by having other children. Yet, several New Testament passages mention the siblings of Jesus.⁶ One verse includes their names – James, Joseph, Judas, and Simon, and mentions that Jesus had sisters as well.⁷ We also reject Mary’s own immaculate conception. In the 4th century, Mary was elevated to almost divine status as “the mother of God.”⁸ By the 15th century, it was proposed that Mary was born without sin and remained sinless throughout her life. But Scripture does not support that. We also reject praying to Mary. She’s special, but she’s not divine. Mary is not God. She is not a co-redeemer. She is special as the mother of the Messiah, but that’s all. Yet, we certainly agree when she said, “From now on all generations will call me blessed” (Luke 1:48, NLT).

Two thousand years ago, Mary rejoiced that the Messiah would come through her. And today, we rejoice that the Messiah has come for us.

MARY PRAISED GOD FOR WHO HE IS

Mary also praised God for who He is. “For the Mighty One is holy, and he has done great things for me. He shows mercy from generation to generation to all who fear him” (Luke 1:49-50, NLT).

She praised Him as the “***Mighty One.***” Mary was clearly raised in a home filled with Scripture and would have been familiar with verses such as Jeremiah 32:17, which says, “Behold, You have made the heavens and the earth by Your great power and by Your outstretched arm! Nothing is too difficult for You” (NAS).

She praised Him as the **Holy One**. Again, raised in a home filled with Scripture, Mary would have heard the story of Isaiah when he was allowed to peek into heaven and saw the Lord seated on His throne and heard angels crying out, “Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory.” As they praised the Holy One, “the foundations trembled” and “the temple was filled with smoke” (Isaiah 6:4, NIV).⁹

Mary praised God as the **Merciful One**. In her home Mary would have read Psalm 86:15. “You, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness and truth” (NAS). God’s mercy extends “from generation to generation,” Mary said. And we’ve experienced that mercy, that grace. The moment we fell before Jesus and repented of our sin we were forgiven of everything we’ve ever done wrong. And time and time again, when we fall to our knees and confess our sins, He shows us mercy, and says, “I will remember your sins no more” (Hebrews 8:12, NAS).

At this moment in time, Mary understood the great story of history, that from the moment things went wrong in the Garden of Eden, the Mighty One, the Holy One, and the Merciful One has been offering grace to every generation, and He’s still offering it today.

MARY PRAISED GOD FOR WHAT HE HAD DONE AND WHAT HE WAS GOING TO DO

Mary impresses us with her knowledge of the Jewish Scriptures as she ***praised God for what He had done and what He was going to do***. In Mary’s prayer there are at least 15 quotes or references from Old Testament passages.¹⁰ Scripture flowed out of her as she prayed.

Verse 51, “His mighty arm has done tremendous things. He has scattered the proud and haughty ones. He has brought down princes from their thrones and exalted the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away with empty hands” (Luke 1:51-53, NLT).¹¹ Mary praised God for His justice both in the past and in the future.

She was familiar with God’s covenant. Verse 54, “He has helped his servant Israel and remembered to be merciful. For he made this promise to our ancestors, to Abraham and his children forever” (Luke 1:54-55, NLT).

Mary was aware of God’s promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, that the Messiah would come from their family.¹² She was aware of God’s promise to David, that his heir would sit on the throne of Israel forever.¹³ She was aware of God’s promise to Isaiah, that the Messiah would be born of a virgin. And now she realized ***it was her!***¹⁴

In his book *God Came Near*, I love how Max Lucado describes Mary contemplating her baby.¹⁵

Mary looks into the face of the baby. Her son. Her Lord. His Majesty. At this point in history, the human being who best understands who God is and what he is doing is a teenage girl in a smelly stable. She can’t take her eyes off him. Somehow Mary knows she is holding God.

He looks like anything but a king. His face is prunish and red. His cry, though strong and healthy, is still the helpless and piercing cry of a baby. And he is absolutely dependent upon Mary for his well-being.

Majesty in the midst of the mundane. Holiness in the filth of sheep manure and sweat. Divinity entering the world on the floor of a stable, through the womb of a teenager and in the presence of a carpenter.

God became a man ... Divinity arrived. Heaven opened (and God placed His) most precious one in a human womb. He who was larger than the universe became an embryo. And he who sustains the world with a word chose to be dependent upon the nourishment of a young girl ... And it all happened in a most remarkable moment.

The Bible says Mary “treasured” and “pondered” all these things in her heart.¹⁶ *Two thousand years ago, Mary rejoiced that the Messiah would come through her. And today, we rejoice that the Messiah has come for us.*

I AM THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

Luke 1 tells us what Mary thought about her baby. But what about us? What are we to think about Jesus? Jesus helps us with several metaphors to describe Himself. He referred to Himself as “the bread of life,” as “the good shepherd,” as “the door.”¹⁷ He also referred to Himself as “the light of the world.” Jesus said, ***“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me*** (whoever believes in me) ***will not walk in the darkness, but will have the light of life”*** (John 8:12, ESV).

During a dark and desperate time in Israel, God spoke through the prophet Isaiah, and said, “The people who walk in darkness will see a great light. On those who live in a dark land, a light will shine” (Isaiah 9:2).¹⁸ Seven hundred years later that prophecy was fulfilled when an angel announced the coming of that light to some shepherds on the plains of Bethlehem. “I bring you good news of a great joy which will be for all people. For today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:10-11, NAS).

And today, we rejoice because we believe that ***Christmas is the story of God shining His light into a dark world and shining His light into our hearts.*** Jesus said, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me (whoever believes in me) will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” (John 8:12, ESV).

The historical context for His statement was the Jewish Feast of Booths or Tabernacles. The Feast of Booths was a five-day celebration of God’s faithfulness. People built tents to reenact the 40 years the Hebrews wandered in the wilderness after being delivered from Egyptian slavery and prior to entering the Promised Land.

During this feast was a night called the Illumination of the Temple. Thousands gathered around the temple. In the temple courtyard, there were four giant candelabras. Each candelabra stood 75' tall and had four branches with huge bowls filled with gallons of oil. These bowls of oil perched 75' in the air were ignited and shined a light that could be seen all over Jerusalem. Every

courtyard of every home was lit up as well. The night sky was lit for miles around. And the people danced with torches in their hands and sang all night in worship to God.

As Jesus and His disciples looked on this magnificent scene, He made this audacious claim. “I am the light of the world.” Imagine the disciples looking at each other and realizing what He was implying. He was saying that He was God.¹⁹ Perhaps Jesus said to them, “Tonight, you see the temple lights piercing the dark sky. Tonight, you see all of Jerusalem lit and people dancing with joy. But I tell you, there is a light that shines far brighter than this. Me! I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me (whoever believes in me) will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”

Christmas is when He came. The Gospel is why He came. He came to tell us the truth – the truth about God, the truth about ourselves, and the truth about our need.

What light is to darkness, Jesus is to the soul. As “the light of the world,” Jesus reveals our need. He is the light that pierces our sin-darkened hearts and reveals the truth about us.

As “the light of the world,” Jesus exposes our sin. Because of personal sin, every person walks in spiritual darkness. There is something wrong between us and God. We admit we’re not perfect, but it’s still hard to admit personal sin because we think we’re good. But the Bible insists that “all have sinned” (Romans 3:23, NAS). The Bible says, “Your sins have separated you from your God, your sins have hidden his face from you” (Isaiah 59:2, NIV). Sin separates us from the love of God and from the blessing of God. And worst of all, sin separates us from God for eternity.

As “the light of the world,” Jesus exposes our sin and reveals our need. But He also shows us the answer to our spiritual desperation, and He is the answer. As a lighthouse guides a ship to safe harbor, so Jesus guides us home to our heavenly Father. The Bible says Jesus came to “bring us to God.”²⁰

Jesus said, “I am the light of the world” (John 8:12, ESV). He said, “Believe in the light” (John 12:36, ESV). “Believe in Me!” Jesus said, “I am the light of the world ... so that whoever believes in me ... will have the light of life.”²¹ “The light of life” is our salvation. “The light of life” is knowing we are loved, accepted, and forgiven. “The light of life” is the promise of eternal life, of one day, seeing Jesus face to face and living with Him forever in heaven.

Christmas is the story of God shining His light into the world and shining His light into our hearts ... so that we might be saved.

NOTES

¹ Luke 1 is called Mary's Magnificat, because of the first word in the Latin translation is "magnify."

² See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anna_Haining_Bates.

³ Rob Picheta, "World's smallest known baby at birth, who weighed 7.5 ounces, leaves hospital," CNN, August 10, 2021.

⁴ See <https://listverse.com/2010/01/21/10-stories-of-bizarre-births>.

⁵ For Mary something miraculous happened, but for Joseph something scandalous happened. It was the shock of his life. He was disappointed, he was embarrassed, he was enraged. One moment he could have punched a hole in the wall, and the next sobbing his eyes out. "How could she do this to me? ... How can I explain this to my family? ... Does she think I'm a fool to believe a story like that?" Joseph and Mary were "betrothed" (Matthew 1:18). As such, they were legally considered husband and wife. So much so, that if the man died during betrothal, the woman would be considered a widow. Betrothal lasted a full year. This was to give the man time to establish himself in a trade and time to reveal that the woman was pure. According to the Old Testament law, a woman could be stoned for breaking that trust. It was obvious that Mary had broken that trust, or so it seemed, and a broken-hearted Joseph was ready to walk away. There were two ways he could do it. He could charge Mary in court with adultery and publicly disgrace her. Or he could break the engagement with a private divorce certificate. Joseph showed compassion and "decided to break the engagement quietly" and not "disgrace her publicly" (Matthew 1:19, NLT). But he didn't go through with it because an angel spoke to him as had spoken to Mary. "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 1:20, NAS).

⁶ Matthew 1:25 alludes to later sexual relations between Joseph and Mary. Other passages on the siblings of Jesus are Matthew 12:46, Mark 6:3, John 7:5, Acts 1:14.

⁷ See Mark 6:3.

⁸ Mary was referred to as *theotokos*, as the "mother of God."

⁹ Isaiah had this vision in 740 BC, and 800 years later, the Apostle John had a vision too. And guess what John saw? "I saw a throne in heaven and someone sitting on it" (Revelation 4:2). And guess what John heard? He heard the angels shouting back and forth, "Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord God, the Almighty, who was and who is and who is to come." And even now, the angels in heaven are singing, "Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory!"

¹⁰ Some of the Old Testament quotes or allusions are from Abraham in Genesis 12 and 17, from Leah in Genesis 30, from Hannah in 1 Samuel 2, from David in Psalm 34, from Isaiah in Isaiah 45, and from many of the Psalms (98, 103, 111, 107, 118, 126, 132, 136).

¹¹ Theological liberals view Mary's words through the lens of social justice. Calling Mary a revolutionary, by her very words, focused on toppling oppressive governments, feeding the hungry, and income redistribution. Social justice certainly has a biblical foundation, but was that going through Mary's mind? Probably not. An angel had just spoken to her. Telling her that she was going to be part of a miracle. Telling her that she was going to conceive. Telling her that she was going to be the mother of the Messiah. Yes, when He returns, Jesus will crush all injustice, punish every crime, lift the oppressed, and make things right. That's the meaning of *shalom*. As the Prince of Peace, Jesus will make things right. But the purpose of His coming was not to improve society. If it were, He would have overthrown the Roman government. The purpose of His coming was to sacrifice His life on the cross so that we might be saved. The purpose of His coming was to bring peace between us and God.

¹² Messiah being a descendant of Abraham was predicted in Genesis 12:1-3, verified in Matthew 1:1, and explained in Galatians 3:16. Messiah being a descendant of Isaac was predicted in Genesis 17:19 and verified in Luke 3:34. Messiah being a descendant of Jacob was predicted in Numbers 24:17 and verified in Matthew 1:2. Messiah being of the tribe of Judah was predicted in Genesis 49:10, and verified in Luke 3:33.

¹³ Messiah being a descendent of David was predicted in Jeremiah 23:5-6 and verified in Matthew 1:1. Messiah being the heir to the throne of David was predicted in Isaiah 9:7 and verified in Luke 1:32-33.

¹⁴ John MacArthur writes of Mary, "She loved God deep down in her heart and knew the truth about God and knew her God well. And in response to the great mercy of God, the great blessing to make her the mother of the Messiah and to bring into the world the Savior of the world, the Lamb of God, the great, glorious, promised King, she bursts into praise. And it isn't just that she was thankful for what God is doing for her, she was amazed at what was going to happen in the whole history of redemption through the Messiah's arrival." [John MacArthur, "Mary's Praise," Luke 1:46-55, Grace to You, www.gty.org.]

¹⁵ Max Lucado, *God Came Near* (Portland, OR: Multnomah Press, 1987), pages 23, 25-27.

¹⁶ See Luke 2:19.

¹⁷ See John 6:35, 10:11, 10:7.

¹⁸ Matthew 4:14-16 declares that Jesus is the fulfillment of the prophecy in Isaiah 9.

¹⁹ In Psalm 27:1, David said, "The Lord is my light and my salvation" (NAS). When Jesus said, "I am the light of the world," He was claiming to be God. See also John 1:5, where John said, "God is light."

²⁰ See 1 Peter 3:18. Colossians 1:13 says, "He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son" (NAS). Ephesians 5:8 adds, "For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light" (NAS). Acts 26:18 says the purpose of the Gospel is "to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins" (Acts 26:18, ESV). First Peter 2:9 adds, "You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:9, ESV).

²¹ Combination of John 8:12 and John 12:46.