

“God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets
in many portions and in many ways, in these last days
has spoken to us in His Son...” (Heb. 1:1-2).

“My soul exalts the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior....
His bondsman... For behold, from this time on all generations
will call me blessed. For the mighty One has done
great things for me...” (Luke 1:46)

Divine Disclosure, A Relative's Confirmation, and Mary (Luke 1:5-2:29)

In this brief advent series, we are dealing with the experience of two very remarkable people, Joseph and Mary. Last week our attention was placed on the man betrothed to a teenager (females normally married in their teen years); this week we look at that teenager about to be married to a man normally in his twenties or older in that culture (we can only speculate the age differential since Joseph likely deceased before Mary). Thus, we turn from Matthew's account to that of Luke's not to contrast the two accounts, but to focus on a remarkable and godly female.

A Comparison and Contrast between the two accounts:

I. The comparisons

- A. In both accounts the principal figures are described as godly (“Being a righteous man” [Matt. 1:19], “Hail, favored one.... [Luke 1:28],” “My soul exalts the Lord...in God my Savior” [Luke 1:46-47]).
- B. In both accounts the principal figures expressed shock and were troubled by the divine disclosure (“Do not be afraid to take....” [Matt. 1:20], “...she was greatly troubled...” [Luke 1:29], “Do not be afraid...” [Luke 1:30]).

- C. In both accounts the principal figures were told that the conception was from the Spirit of God; it was purely of divine action (...of the Holy Spirit..." (Matt. 1:2)," "The Holy Spirit will come upon you..." [Luke 1:35].
 - D. In both accounts the principal figures obeyed the instructions they received ("And Joseph arose and...did as the angel...commanded..." [Matt. 1:24], "Behold...be it done to me according to your word" [Luke 1:38]).
 - E. In both accounts people unknown to them visited: the magi and the shepherds. The former appears as wealthy, the latter likely poor. The groups were alerted by a startling phenomenon in the sky ("...we saw His star in the east..." (Matt. 2:2], "an angel...stood before them...there appear a multitude of heavenly hosts praising God...." {Luke 2:9, 13}).
- II. The Contrasts
- A. The four disclosures to Joseph came in his sleep ("Joseph rose from his sleep" [Matt. 1:24]; Mary's single disclosure came when she was awake since there was dialogue and not indication of a semi-conscious state ("...He said to her... [Luke 1:28], "And Mary said..." [1:34], "And the Angel [answered and said to her... [1:35], "And Mary said..." [1:38])."
 - B. Joseph wanted to handle the troublesome disclosure privately and wanted an end to what he perceived as a tragedy; he wanted an immediate solution ("...to put her away secretly" [Matt. 1:19]. Mary accepted the disclosure and disclosed it ("...Mary and went with haste to the hill country...and enter the house...and greeted Elizabeth" [Luke 1:39-40]. Joseph reaction is negative; Mary's is accepting and positive.
 - C. Joseph does not speak in his divine encounters with the angel, the Lord, or anyone else. Mary speaks to an angel ("And Mary said..." [Luke 1:34], to Elizabeth," and the Lord ("And Mary said" [1:46]); She has a lot to say.

The Account

The advance of the progressive disclosure of how God would accomplish His purpose through the redemption of mankind took an enormous leap its disclosure with the announcement and birth of a child in Bethlehem. There were many children born in this obscure village as witnessed by the tyranny and callousness of Herod and the cry of "Rachel" for her children. Yet, the Child was special, the wonder announced by angels, even Gabriel, distant travelers, and humble shepherds. Difficulty in conceiving was a cultural disgrace, as Elizabeth knew all too well in her advanced years (Luke 1:25), but she joined Sarah, Rachel, Hannah,

and others whose barrenness for a time proved to result in advances in God's redemptive program for the ages. This Child was uniquely special, not in the delay of His coming to a couple, but as you know, to a virgin (*Why the virgin birth? Why did He come us in this unparalleled manner? it was to tell us that this Child was no ordinary child, a child who would accomplish what no other child could accomplish!*).

Let's tell the story from Mary's perspective.

A. The preamble: A priest and his wife (Luke 1:5-25)

1. The introduction of the priest and his wife, vv. 5-7

In Luke's account, the story begins in the hill country of Judea with a couple whose collective names mean "God remembers [Zachariah] His covenant [Elizabeth]. He was a Kohath Levitical priest, and his wife was also a child of Levi. They were both aged and Elizabeth could not conceive a child. Their desire of a child to hold in their arms was unmet.

2. The disclosure to Zacharias, vv. 8-23

Serving his two weeks of yearly temple service and chosen by lot to enter the Holy of Holies (v. 9) to burn incense, the very presence of God, Gabriel appeared announcing that Elizabeth would become pregnant (v. 13).

Zacharias doubted, "How shall I know this for certain? (v. 18) and became mute until the child was born

3. The pregnancy of Elizabeth, vv. 24-25

Elizabeth became pregnant as Gabriel indicated and sequestered herself for five months. "...He looked with favor upon me, to take away my disgrace among men" (v. 25).

"Now in the sixth month..." (v. 26) means the Elizabeth's and Mary's pregnancies are connected. The forerunner of the king is six months older than Jesus, the King! Both sons had unique beginnings signifying their roles.

B. The Disclosure of Gabriel to Mary (Luke 1:26-38)

1. The fact, vv. 26-33

The scene shifts to Nazareth in the Galilee to a youthful female, Mary, who is betrothed to a man with the union pending. Gabriel appears to

her to inform her that she would be impregnated and have a son. “And behold, you will conceive in your womb, and bear a son, and you shall call His name Jesus” (v. 31). Shocked by it all, like Zacharias, the angel comforted her by foretelling the uniqueness of the boy (as with Zacharias [vv. 16-17]). “He will be great, the son of the Most High and the Lord will give Him the throne of His father David...” (v. 32).

2. The query, vv. 34-35

Mary does not question the truth of the angel’s disclosure, but only the mechanics (“...since I am a virgin?” [v. 34]). Her conception will be as unique as His person (Nothing finite can create the infinite; thus, it is entirely a work of God; He is the “Son of God,” being deity in the flesh [v. 35].”

3. The evidence, vv. 36-38

The angel discloses the evidence of his claim; it is Elizabeth who is six months into her pregnancy, quite noticeable by now, a member of the family, a relative, that was “barren and both advanced in years [v. 7, 18].” *This means that Mary had Levitical DNA as well as Davidic; the Child is both priest and king, priest and ruler (only in Him are the two offices combined, the spiritual and the political).*

C. The visit of Mary to Elizabeth (Luke 1:39-56)

1. The meeting, vv. 39-41a.

It is little wonder that Mary “rose and went with haste” to see her relative; there was the proof. Not only was her pregnancy noticeable, “the baby leaped in her womb (v. 41). “I can only imagine the conversations that followed!”

2. The recognition by Elizabeth, vv. 41b-45

Elizabeth caught the significance of the moment. She cried out, “Blessed among women are you, and blessed is the fruit of your womb” (v. 42). What a delight to Elizabeth “...that the mother of my Lord should come to me” (v. 43).

3. The praise of Mary, vv. 46-56

a. Mary recognized the honor of giving birth to a son, a privilege that outweighed the hazard; this young lady was thrilled (“My soul exalts the Lord” [v. 46]. “The Mighty One has done great things for me...” [v. 49]).

- b. Mary recognized that she was given a privilege beyond anything she deserved or caused. "...My spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior.... He has regarded the humble state of His bondservant (vv. 47-48).
- c. Mary understood that God is full of mercy and grace toward His people through the promise made to Abraham (v. 55). "He has done mighty deeds.... He has brought down rulers.... He has filled the hungry with good things.... He has given help to Israel..." (vv. 51-54).

"And Mary stayed three months and then returned home" (v. 56). This means that Mary may have witnessed the birth of Elizabeth's son; what is clear is that Mary is in the beginning of her two tri-semester, meaning her pregnancy would be evidence when Joseph hugged her in greeting upon her return. What would he think? What would he do?

This means that the revelation of Mary's child came to Joseph in the context of her return (Matt. 1:17-25). She obviously did not know Joseph's reaction, but when he learned of it, he was severely disappointed and crushed. Was Mary's promiscuous when away? An angel of the Lord intervened!

When you approach Luke 2, you are some six months from Mary's return to Joseph and a tax registration by the Caesar (Tiberius) that required Joseph to go to Bethlehem "because he 'was' of the house and lineage of David" (v. 4). The text says only that Mary "accompanied him (v. 5). Mary had Levitical DNA as is evident from the heritage of her relative Elizabeth who married a Kohathite.

D. The context of Jesus' birth (2:1-7)

The scene now shifts to Bethlehem, and we are told very cryptically that Mary delivered her first born in the stable of an inn and placed Him in a stone feeding bin.

E. The visit of the shepherds (2:8-18, 20)

1. The disclosure to shepherds, vv. 8-14

Caring for their flock one night, an angel appeared, and the sky became gloriously illuminated (vv. 8-9); they became the first to hear of the

Savior's birth outside the immediate family. Born in Bethlehem was the Messiah who is the Lord, the sovereign King!

This was confirmed as a multitude of angels sang praises to God, celebrating the event. "Glory to God in the highest and peace on earth... (v.14).

2. The visit of the shepherds, vv. 15-18

- a. The shepherds, unlike the Magi, had little to offer and brought nothing but themselves, though they had the privilege of being the first to see Jesus other than Mary and Joseph, at least as the text suggests. "And they made haste and found their way to Mary and Joseph, and the baby as He lay in the manger" (v. 16). *(How would they find the Child? The clue was in the instructions; he would be in a manger wrapped in strips of cloth. Bethlehem was small so there were likely only a few inns, if not just one.)*

The shepherds were granted the privilege of being the first to proclaim the birth of Jesus outside the immediate family. "And when they had seen this, they made known the statement, which had been told them about this child. And all who heard it wondered at the things told them by the shepherds" (vv. 17-18).

- b. What did they hear from the angels about this child?
 - The news would be the occasion of great joy (v. 10).
 - "There has been born for you a Savior..." (v. 11), a deliverer.
 - This Savior is unique; He is the promised one and He is the Lord (v. 11). He is unlimited in power to accomplish His office!
- c. How were the messages confirmed to the shepherd?

Glory filled the sky and multitudes of angels sang! "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace...." (v. 14). Think of the "Hallelujah Chorus" in Handel's "Messiah." The Savior, the Son of Abraham and of David, had come (Matt. 1:1).

F. The aftermath, v. 19

"And Mary treasured up all these things,

treasuring them in her heart” (v. 19).

Mary’s reaction is worthy of reflection. The word “treasured” means keeping something of value within herself while the word “pondering” conveys the idea of comparing things one with another, contemplating. The words together suggest that Mary thought often on the words that the shepherds brought to her, such words as “Savior,” “the Christ,” “Lord,” “good news,” and “for all the people,” all the while clinging affectionately to the child in her arms.

My challenge to all of us at this season is that we would pause often to follow the example of Mary!