

**“The Announcements of the Promised One:  
Zacharias, Elizabeth, Mary, Joseph,  
Shepherds, “Astrologists from Babylon”**

The approach that I have chosen today is to look at the six announcement-events in the advent narrative from the perspective a single question: What was the content of the announcements? What do they tell us of the child born in Bethlehem’s manger?

I. The Content

A. Zacharias: The Person (ca. 7-6 BC).

1. The initial disclosure

The angel’s message in the temple before the Altar of Incense in the Holy Place focused upon a son, and only cryptically on what John would do.

“...he will be great in the sight of the Lord.... And it is he  
who will go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah... (Luke 1:15, 17).”

- a. John’s greatness is in his function (“...he ...before Him” [Luke 1:17]) though his preparatory ministry.
- b. Jesus later explained the significance of John (“...those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John” [Matt. 11:11, Luke:1:17]), though he who is least in the kingdom is greater than he (Matt. 11:11 [he announced the kingdom to come; he did not experience it, having been killed before Jesus inaugurated His kingdom by the ascension]). Peter comments in Acts 5:31, “Him God has exalted at His right hand to be Prince and Savior....”

2. The witness

A year later, when his son was born (Luke 1:64), and his muted state ended, he had more to say.

“Because of the tender mercy of our God...the Sunshine from on high shall visit us...to shine upon those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet in the way of peace (Luke 1:78-79).”

- a. John will announce One coming from heaven.
- b. This One will shatter spiritual darkness and give us peace.
- c. While Zacharias does not quote the Hebrew Scriptures, he cites several passages (Ps. 18:2, 89:17, 132:17, 105:8, 106:45; Isa. 9:1; Micah 7:20), many cited by Mary later. This man knew his Bible!

B. Mary: The Person (6-5 BC).

Gabriel said to Mary:

“He will be great, and will be called the son of the Most High,  
And the Lord God will give the throne of His father David; and  
He will reign over the House of Jacob forever (Luke 2:32-33).”

- a. He will be deity in human identity.
- b. He will accomplish great things.
- c. He will be the final and forever king, a son of David. (Luke’s emphasis in upon the humanness of Jesus!).

Mary comments to Elizabeth:

“He has filled the hungry with good things.... He has given help to Israel His servant. In remembrance of His mercies, as He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever (Luke 1:54-55).”

- a. It is interesting that Mary alludes to the Holy Scriptures in responding to Elizabeth (Ps 32; 34:2; 35:9; 98:2; 103:9, 17; 132:11).

*Only Zacharias and Mary use Scripture as the background of their thoughts, mostly from the Psalms. The priest and a young lady appear knowledgeable of the Scriptures and related their experience through its lens.*

- b. Mary praises God for what He is about to do in giving her a son.
- c. Mary connects the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen. 12:1-3) with the unfolding of what is about to take place.

#### C. Elizabeth with Mary: The Person (6 BC).

“And how has it happened to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me (Luke 1:43).”

1. The “leaping in Elizabeth’s womb” by John is a fulfillment of the promise to Zacharias (Luke 1:41, 15).
2. Elizabeth understood that her relative’s, perhaps cousin, baby was her Lord. (The term translated “cousin” could also be translated “sister.” If sister or cousin, He was to be named Jesus, deliverer (Yeshua); His name befitting His purpose in coming (“to save”).
2. The nature of His redemption is related to human sin. We know He did this through His identifying death with and for us.

#### D. Shepherds: The Person (5 BC)

“...today is born in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord (Luke 2:11).”

1. This is their Savior, having been born in Bethlehem; He has human identity with them and us.
2. This is the promised One, the Messiah.
3. This One is their Lord and ours.

#### E. “Astrologers” from Babylon: The Person (5 BC).

“Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? ...we have come to worship Him (Matt 2:2).”

“...and they fell down and worshipped Him... (Matt. 2:11).”

1. This child was born a king; He did not become a king.
2. They worshipped Him meaning they conceived Him to be God in the identity of flesh.

#### II. The confirmation: the Holy Scriptures

What is amazing in the narratives is that Matthew in the gospel account adds confirmation by citing relevant passages in the Old Testament confirming what was said in the dream to Joseph (Luke quotes words of others from Scripture, not the Scriptures themselves).

“...through the prophet might be fulfilled, saying, ‘Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and they shall call His name Immanuel, which means ‘God with us’ (Matt 1:22-23).”

1. Here is a clear statement of how Matthew understood Jesus; He is God.
2. He was announced 700 years before He came to us by Isaiah (7:14). Deliverance will come through a divine visitation. Matthew understood that Jesus was the fulfillment of deliverance that would come to Israel in the time it would for the prophet to have a son.
3. The word “virgin” is not age or status specific, meaning a young woman. In Isaiah the emphasis is on time. Before a young women could conceive and bear a child Israel will be delivered. In the next chapter Isaiah’s son, Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz, is born and deliverance had come (his name means “swift to the spoil”). Matthew cites the passage indicating its deeper meaning, soon deliverance of a greater significance will come.

A. Matthew, also, confirms that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem by quoting Micah 5:2.

“As it is written.... And you, Bethlehem, Land of Judea...for out of you shall come forth a ruler, who will shepherd the people of Israel (Matt. 2:6).”

1. Bethlehem means “House of Bread.” We should not be missed the connection with Jesus’s comment that “I am the Bread of Life (6:36, 41, 48).” He who was born in the “House of Bread” is the “True bread from Heaven.” It us described as obscure and insignificant, like Nazareth, but obscurity does not eliminate significance!
2. He would be a ruler, a king.
3. He would lead and care for His people.

### III. Conclusions

1. What does the composite witness to these people tell us about Jesus?  
Great (2xs)  
Davidic King (2xs)  
Reign  
Most High  
[He is the] fulfillment of Abrahamic promise, 2000 years prior.  
God (Immanuel)  
Son  
Lord (2xs)  
Messiah, Deliverer, Jesus
2. What did He come to do for us?  
To visit us  
To dispel darkness  
To bring peace  
To save  
To help
3. What are we to learn personally?  
We all need to worship Him for who He is and what He has done for us.  
We should listen and obey.  
What a privilege that Jesus would come for us.  
We all need to share with others.

### IV. Endings

Based on Psalm 73:23 (“Nevertheless, I am continually with you, you hold my right hand”), Henry Jackson van Dyke (1853-1933, a Presbyterian cleric, Princeton University and Seminary graduate, scholar-teacher, at Princeton and the University of Paris, diplomat to the Netherlands and Luxembourg under President Wilson [classmates at Princeton]) in 1907 composed a wonderful poem of praise.

Though not in any sense a traditional Christmas-season song, it speaks much of the joyful praise that should fill our hearts and minds every season because of God's infinite care for us.

Joyful, joyful, we adore Thee,  
God of glory, Lord of love;  
Hearts unfold like flow'rs before Thee,  
Op'ning to the sun above.  
Melt the clouds of sin and sadness;  
Drive the dark of doubt away;  
Giver of immortal gladness,  
Fill us with the light of day!

All Thy works with joy surround Thee,  
Earth and heav'n reflect Thy rays,  
Stars and angels sing around Thee,  
Center of unbroken praise.  
Field and forest, vale and mountain,  
Flow'ry meadow, flashing sea,  
Singing bird and flowing fountain  
Call us to rejoice in Thee.

Thou art giving and forgiving,  
Ever blessing, ever blest,  
Wellspring of the joy of living,  
Ocean depth of happy rest!  
Thou our Father, Christ our Brother,  
All who live in love are Thine;  
Teach us how to love each other,  
Lift us to the joy divine.

Mortals, join the happy chorus,  
Which the morning stars began;  
Father love is reigning o'er us,  
Brother love binds man to man.  
Ever singing, march we onward,  
Victors in the midst of strife,  
Joyful music leads us Sunward  
In the triumph song of life.

Quotes from van Dyke.

"Time is too slow for those who wait, too swift for those who fear, too long for those who grieve, too short for those who rejoice, but for those who love, time is eternity."

"Use what talents you possess; the woods would be very quiet if only those birds sing there that sang best."

"Be glad of life because it gives you the chance to love and to work and to play and to look up at the stars."

"Look around for a place to sow a few seeds."

"A friend is what the heart needs all the time."