




Born in a Stable - and He Saved the World!

Philippians 2:7: (NASB) *but (he) emptied himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men.*

Christmas is here! It is the time for celebration and food and decoration and gifts and parties and time off from work and football and TV specials and Christmas songs and holiday cheer and holly and mistletoe and shopping and spending money and Santa Claus and elves and snow!!! Whew! By the way, if you can put all of that aside, it is really the time for deep heartfelt thankfulness, for it is the time that we give honor to the birth of the most important, most courageous, most loving, most wise and most humble man to have ever lived. The man Christ Jesus - our savior and Lord! Stay with us for a VERY SPECIAL two hours of praise and thanks!



Before we get into all of the carols and prophecies and spiritual gifts, let's just take a quick look at finding Christmas in our hearts.

 **The Christmas Guest, a reading by Johnny Cash**

So Conrad (per Johnny Cash's story) was set up for a day of blessing, expecting the Lord himself to share the day with him. He had cleaned and decorated and prepared for this most honored of guests. His anticipation would have been barely containable, like that of a child on Christmas morning. Now with everything in place, all that was left to do was to wait...

This is the attitude we should have in our daily lives as well:

Colossians 3:14-17: (NASB) ¹⁴*Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. ¹⁵Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. ¹⁶Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. ¹⁷Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.*

So we can have the fellowship of Christ fulfilled by doing what he did:

Philippians 2:1-11: (NASB) ¹*Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, ²make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. ³Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; ⁴do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. ⁵Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, ⁶who, although he existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷but emptied himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. ⁸Being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. ⁹For this reason also, God highly exalted him, and bestowed on him the name which is*



above every name,¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth,¹¹ and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.



Excerpt from How the Grinch Stole Christmas

- *Maybe Christmas doesn't come from a store...maybe it means a little bit more...*



As we begin to look at prophecy, a question that ought to be asked is how could Christmas have come just when it did and just how it did?

It had been a long time...a very long time. So long a time, that it had become almost hard to count the years - certainly, no one could remember that far back - not even your father's, father's father was around - it was that long ago. All we had were prophecies - old prophecies that spoke about his coming...but they were old, very old...the newest one was over 400 years old!!! And that was the newest one! What did it say? Something dramatic about the Day of the Lord...

Malachi 4:1-2: (NASB) ¹For behold, the day is coming, burning like a furnace; and all the arrogant and every evildoer will be chaff; and the day that is coming will set them ablaze, says the LORD of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch. ²But for you who fear My name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings;

The sun of righteousness rising with healing - what a comforting thought in the midst of all the turmoil that the prophecy detailed...there were other prophecies as well - older - some much older but all pointing to the same thing.

Genesis 3:15: (NASB) *And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel.*

Wow, that was the oldest prophecy, kind of a veiled promise of redemption for the first sin.

Genesis 22:16-18: (NASB) ¹⁶and said, By Myself I have sworn, declares the LORD, because you have done this thing and have not withheld your son, your only son, ¹⁷indeed I will greatly bless you, and I will greatly multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your seed shall possess the gate of their enemies. ¹⁸In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice.

That is another old, old prophecy given to Abraham long before Israel was even a nation. That one gets so much more specific, detailing the blessing of all the nations of all the earth - not just one - or a few, but all!

Isaiah 9:6-7: (NASB) ⁶For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And the government will rest on his shoulders; And his name will be called Wonderful Counselor,



Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. ⁷There will be no end to the increase of his government or of peace,

No end of peace? Isn't that what everyone is hoping for, wishing for, working for...? Now that is a prophecy with a lot of hope!

...on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness from then on and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this.

So it's the zeal of God that gets it done! But it has still been such a long time - thousands of years. Hmm... so if God had been silent for the last 400 years, should that be such a problem? What God says, He does! What did He say at the end of Malachi, the last book of the Old Testament?

Malachi 4:5-6: (NASB) ⁵Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD. ⁶He will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, so that I will not come and smite the land with a curse.

So the last words of the Old Testament essentially tell us how the new Testament is going to start: Before the coming of Messiah there would be the coming of one who would prepare the people for the Messiah, even though hope might be forgotten over time, it does not mean that the giver of all hope forgets!



"Silent Night," Sissel Kyrkjebø



Prophecy: Born in Bethlehem

Micah 5:2: (KJV) *But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.*

Prophecy fulfilled!

Matthew 2:1: (KJV) *Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem,*



Prophecy: Flight to Egypt

Hosea 11:1: (KJV) *When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt.*

Prophecy fulfilled!

Matthew 2:14: (KJV) *When he arose, he took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt:*

Interesting side point - the gifts of the three wise men would have been enough in value to sustain them in this time away...the Lord provides.



Prophecy: Betrayed by a friend

Psalms 41:9: (KJV) *Yea, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me.*



Prophecy fulfilled!

John 13:26-27: (NRSV) *Jesus answered, It is the one to whom I give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish. So when he had dipped the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas son of Simon.*

Even the method by which Jesus would be betrayed was revealed in prophecy!



 *The true meaning of Christmas, as spoken by Lea Salonga-Chien, a mezzo-soprano singer and actress from the Philippines*

It's pretty easy to look at prophecy and its fulfillment and figure, "Now that's a no brainer!" After all, all of the pieces are in place, the timing is right, the right people are all present - let's get this thing fulfilled and move on!

Not so fast, because it's not so easy! Did you ever think about being one of those people whom God has chosen to use? Did you ever wonder at the extraordinary faith they would have had to exhibit to follow through on the things God was putting in front of them? We will briefly focus on Mary and Joseph and how their faith must have inspired them and inspires us today.

Luke 1:26-29: (NASB) ²⁶Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city...called Nazareth, ²⁷to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the descendants of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸And coming in, he said to her, Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you. ²⁹But she was very perplexed at this statement, and kept pondering what kind of salutation this was.

Again we see the angel Gabriel reappearing, now six months after Elizabeth conceived. This time the circumstances were near opposite. Elizabeth had been old and married. Mary was young and only engaged. Gabriel had spoken to the husband the first time, but here he spoke to the young bride to be. His greeting was one of great favor, yet Mary's reaction was confused and fearful. The angel Gabriel? Speaking to me? An angel? For what reason?

The angel continued:

Luke 1:30-33: (NASB) ³⁰...Do not be afraid, Mary; for you have found favor with God. ³¹And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus. ³²He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David; ³³and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and his kingdom will have no end.

Questions would have swirled in Mary's head. Me? Have a son? He is to be called the "Son of the Most High?" He is to be a king...FOREVER...? His kingdom will have *no end*? How? Why?

Then the question that needed answering above all else, for faith could perceive of these other things, but this one question could not be fathomed: "How can this be, since I am a virgin?"

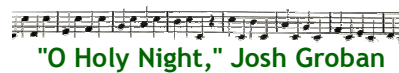


Gabriel answered:

Luke 1:35-37: (NASB) ³⁵...*The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy child shall be called the Son of God.* ³⁶*And behold, even your relative Elizabeth has also conceived a son in her old age; and she who was called barren is now in her sixth month.* ³⁷*For nothing will be impossible with God.*

Well, the angel had answered - an answer so unexpected and so out of the ordinary that for most people it would have been overload. For Mary, Gabriel's last words must have rung true in the deepest recesses of her young heart - *for nothing will be impossible with God.*

Luke 1:38: (NASB) *And Mary said, Behold, the bondservant of the Lord; may it be done to me according to your word. And the angel departed from her.*



(Source www.carols.org.uk)

The words and lyrics of the old carol 'O Holy Night' were written by Placide Cappeau de Roquemaure in 1847. Cappeau was a wine seller by trade but was asked by the parish priest to write a poem for Christmas. He obliged and wrote the beautiful words of the hymn. He then realized that it should have music to accompany the words and he approached his friend Adolphe Charles Adams. (1803-1856).

He agreed and the music for the poem was therefore composed by Adolphe Charles Adams. Adolphe had attended the Paris conservatoire and forged a brilliant career as a composer. It was translated into English by John Sullivan Dwight (1812-1893).

O Holy Night! The stars are brightly shining,
It is the night of the dear Savior's birth.
Long lay the world in sin and error pining.
Till he appeared and the Spirit felt its worth.
A thrill of hope the weary world rejoices,
For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn.
Fall on your knees! Oh, hear the angel voices!
O night divine, the night when Christ was born;
O night, O Holy Night, O night divine!
O night, O Holy Night, O night divine!

Chains he shall break, for the slave is our brother.
And in his name all oppression shall cease.
Sweet hymns of joy in grateful chorus raise we,
Let all within us praise his holy name.
Christ is the Lord! Then ever, ever praise we,
Noel, noel
O Night, O night divine
Noel, noel,
O night, O night divine
Noel, noel
O night, O night divine!

For Joseph, this would have been a unique and fearful dilemma. What should he do? He could have sent Mary away in public shame, but the scriptures tell us that he was a righteous man and did not want to disgrace her, so he



determined to do it privately, as was his right. He slept on the decision, and as he slept, an angel of the Lord came to him in a dream...

Matthew 1:20-21: (NASB) ²⁰...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. ²¹She will bear a son; and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.

Here was an explanation (though seemingly far-fetched) that carried with it clear direction and a Godly purpose.

The angel continued:

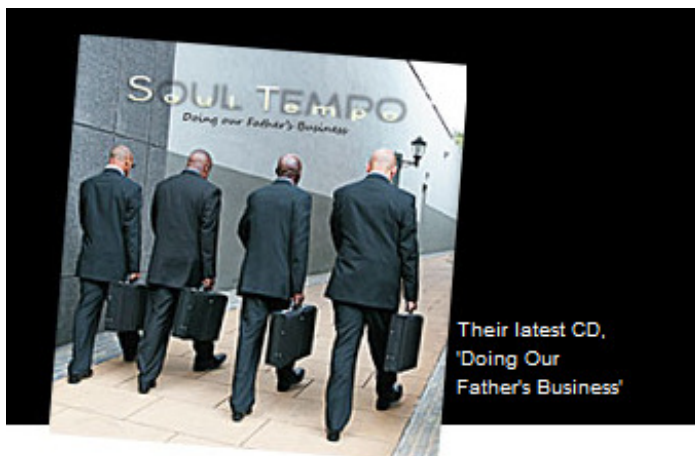
Matthew 1:22-23: (NASB) ²²Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet: ²³Behold, the virgin shall be with child and shall bear a Son, and they shall call his name Immanuel, which translated means, God with us.

Joseph awoke and thought a moment... this was *not* some far-fetched explanation at all, rather it was a fulfillment of prophecy! Not just any prophecy, but THE prophecy of THE MESSIAH! Mary, my espoused, was carrying the savior of all and I, Joseph, would have the opportunity to raise him to manhood! Glory to God!

And so we can see how a fear of the unknown can, by the grace and overruling power of God, be turned to faith through the unknown. For Mary and Joseph, this would be their experience.



www.soultempoingers.com



Jerry Brunson, Tony Burnett, Kevin and Phillip Mitchell

The cover of their CD shows them in suits, walking away from the camera, briefcases in hand. When I first saw this cover the message was clear - it's not about them, it is about our Father's business. What better way to focus on praise than to have these four here with us to sing praises to God!



Christmas IS celebration!

Psalms 66:1-4: (NASB) ¹Shout joyfully to God, all the earth; ²Sing the glory of His name; Make His praise glorious. ³Say to God, "How awesome are Your works! Because of the greatness of Your power Your enemies will give feigned obedience to You. ⁴All the earth will worship You, and will sing praises to You; They will sing praises to Your name. Selah.


"White Christmas," Soul Tempo



Philippians 4:4-7: (NASB) ⁴Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice! ⁵Let your gentle spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near. ⁶Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.


"Deck the Halls," Soul Tempo

This gives us spiritual exuberance:

Philippians 4:8: (NASB) Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things.

There is excellence in a lot of things, but is everything worthy of praise? We need to focus our celebration on that which has true value.



Luke 2:1-5: (KJV) ¹And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed. ²... ³And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city. ⁴And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem;...⁵To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child. ⁶And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered.

The experience of Mary and Joseph was one of complete normality. There were no special provisions, no special exemptions, no special circumstances. They were required to do what everyone else did. They had to travel where everyone else traveled and pay what everyone else paid.

Luke 2:7: (KJV) And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.

To be born in a stable and to be laid in a manger among the animals was the most fitting of places for the Lord of men to enter the world. After all, Jesus would live these humble beginnings each and every day for 33½ years, for it was through this humility that he would be able to pay the ransom price.

Luke 2:8-12: (KJV) ⁸And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. ¹⁰And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. ¹¹For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord. ¹²And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.

The fulfillment of prophecy required an angelic announcement to the most humble audience of shepherds. This was fitting - the baby Jesus would grow to assume the throne of David, once a shepherd himself.

Luke 2:13: (KJV) And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, ¹⁴Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.

Humility does not preclude heavenly celebration, rather it provokes it! In this manner was Jesus our Lord born.



"Joy to the World," Soul Tempo

There were those who stood in great anticipation of the coming of the Christ, Simeon in particular:

Luke 2:21-24: (NASB) ²¹And when eight days had passed, before his circumcision, his name was then called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.



²²And when the days for their purification...were completed, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord ²³...²⁴and to offer a sacrifice according to what was said in the Law of the Lord...

Again this reminds us that Mary, Joseph and Jesus are given no special entitlement or dispensation; they are simply given opportunity to show their faith.

Luke 2:25-26: (NASB) ²⁵And there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; and this man was righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel; and the Holy Spirit was upon him. ²⁶And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ.

Here was a man who had NOT forgotten hope, who had NOT allowed doubt or fear to rule his heart, rather he lived in anticipation and expectation of God's gift.

Luke 2:27-29: (NASB) ²⁷And he came in the Spirit into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to carry out for him the custom of the Law, ²⁸then he took him into his arms, and blessed God, and said, ²⁹Now Lord, You are releasing Your bond-servant to depart in peace, according to Your word;

Being aged, the only thing Simeon looked forward to in his life was a glimpse, just a glimpse of God's gift of redemption. He sees the baby, takes him in his arms and knows that his life is now complete, thinking, "in my arms I hold the hope of the world!"

Luke 2:30-33: (NASB) ³⁰For my eyes have seen your salvation, ³¹Which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, ³²A light of revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel. ³³And his father and mother were amazed at the things which were being said about him.

Simeon realizes the full import of redemption - "I have seen your salvation with my own eyes! He is a light that even reaches to all Gentiles - he is a light that is the glory of Israel! This light is now just a baby, but this baby is the hope of the world!"

What cause for prayer and gratitude!



"Soul Tempo Prayer," Soul Tempo

Luke 2:34-35: (NASB) ³⁴And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and for a sign to be opposed - ³⁵and a sword will pierce even your own soul—to the end that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.

Simeon also knew that with great accomplishment comes great sacrifice, sometimes heart-breaking sacrifice.



One overriding theme for Christmas is the giving and receiving of gifts. Santa Claus has taken the spotlight in all of this. So, where do the best Christmas gifts come from?



"My Grownup Christmas List, (Part 1)" Lea Salonga-Chien

Do you remember me?
I sat upon your knee.
I wrote to you with childhood fantasies.
I'm all grown up now,
can you still help somehow?
I'm not a child, but my heart still can dream...
So, here's my lifelong wish,
my grown up Christmas list
- not for myself, but for a world in need...

She is all grown up and now and seeing life not as playtime anymore, but seeing its hardships and tragedies. So, with this firm reality present, is it better to go to Santa or to our Creator with our requests?



"The Lord's Prayer," Soul Tempo



"My Grownup Christmas List, (Parts 2 and 3)" Lea Salonga-Chien

No more lives torn apart
that wars would never start
and time would heal all hearts.
Every man would have a friend
and right would always win
and love would never end.
This is my grownup Christmas list.
What is this illusion called "the innocence of youth?"
Maybe only in that blind belief can we ever find the truth...

With Santa Claus, blind belief is the only answer, but with God Almighty through his son Jesus, the answer is not only clear, just, loving and wise, it was foretold!

Micah 4:1-5: (KJV) ¹*But in the last days it shall come to pass, that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established in the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills; and people shall flow unto it. (Christmas wish fulfilled! "and right would always win")* ²*And many nations shall come, and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, and to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways,*



(Christmas wish fulfilled! "and time would heal all hearts") and we will walk in his paths: for the law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. (Christmas wish fulfilled! "No more lives torn apart") ³And he shall judge among many people, and rebuke strong nations afar off; (Christmas wish fulfilled! "that wars would never start") and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more (Christmas wish fulfilled! "and love would never end") ⁴But they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree; and none shall make them afraid: for the mouth of the LORD of hosts hath spoken it. ⁵For all people will walk every one in the name of his god, (Christmas wish fulfilled! "every man would have a friend") and we will walk in the name of the LORD our God for ever and ever.

Now, instead of a Christmas wish list to Santa, let's look at this list as God's predetermined "to do" list - one that He has promised and will absolutely complete!



The Lord's Prayer," Soul Tempo

The Old Testament prophecies point to the results of Jesus' work as well as his life. These are not just poetic utterings, these are true prophecies:

Isaiah 35:5-10: (NASB) ⁵Then the eyes of the blind will be opened and the ears of the deaf will be unstopped. ⁶Then the lame will leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute will shout for joy. For waters will break forth in the wilderness and streams in the Arabah. ⁷he scorched land will become a pool and the thirsty ground springs of water; In the haunt of jackals, its resting place, grass becomes reeds and rushes. ⁸A highway will be there, a roadway, and it will be called the Highway of Holiness. The unclean will not travel on it, but it will be for him who walks that way, and fools will not wander on it. ⁹No lion will be there, nor will any vicious beast go up on it; These will not be found there. But the redeemed will walk there, ¹⁰and the ransomed of the LORD will return and come with joyful shouting to Zion, with everlasting joy upon their heads. They will find gladness and joy, and sorrow and sighing will flee away.

Revelation 21:3-4: (NASB) ³And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, ⁴and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away.

This is what is coming! Jesus himself was the ransom for all men, to be testified in due time.

Matthew 6:9-10: (NASB) ⁹Pray, then, in this way: Our Father who is in heaven, hallowed be Your name. ¹⁰Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Jesus taught us to pray for this kingdom so that means it is coming!

Have the spirit of Christmas in your heart!



**Born in a stable and he CHANGED the world!
For Jonathan and Rick and Christian Questions...
Think about it...!**

A Merry Christmas to you from all of us here at Christian Questions!





*And now even more to think about...
only in the **Full Edition** of CQ Rewind!*

Left to right: Matt (back up board operator) Anthony (Soul Tempo), Jonathan (host), Jerry (Soul Tempo), Fred (board operator) Tricia (call screener/Mrs. Rick) Kevin (Soul Tempo), Rick (host), Phillip (Soul Tempo)



Christmas is a time when kids tell Santa what they want
and adults pay for it.
Deficits are when adults tell the government what they want
and their kids pay for it. ~Richard Lamm

Next, a look at the faith of others when the prophecies for the coming of Messiah were first beginning to be fulfilled:

Zacharias and Elizabeth were very faithful and the Scriptures say that they were righteous in the sight of God. Zacharias served the people as a priest of God and in spite of their faithfulness, his wife was childless. As they grew older, so did their hopes and their prayers for children. Yet, they went on with their lives humbly serving their God, until one day when Zacharias was serving in the Temple...



Luke 1:11-13: (NASB) ¹¹... an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing to the right of the altar of incense. ¹²Zacharias was troubled when he saw the angel, and fear gripped him. ¹³But the angel said to him, Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your petition has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will give him the name John.

There must have been great fear and great exhilaration - all at once!

Just like that, there was an answer to the years of humility and prayer before God. Not only was it an answer, but it was an answer delivered by an angel - a child and it was to be a boy!

Zacharias' mind must have begun to race as the fear subsided. This was impossible - why me? Why here? Why now? Why the angel? Why?

The angel continued...

Luke 1:14-15: (NASB) ¹⁴You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth. ¹⁵For he will be great in the sight of the Lord; and he will drink no wine or liquor, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit while yet in his mother's womb.

Okay, so he is going to be special, very special. He will be a great man? He will be filled with the Holy Spirit? How is this possible?

There was more and the angel continued...

Luke 1:16-17: (NASB) ¹⁶And he will turn many of the sons of Israel back to the Lord their God. ¹⁷It is he who will go as a forerunner before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers back to the children, and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous, so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.

My son will turn the hearts of Israel back to God? How would he do this? He is to be a forerunner to...no, this can't be, for these words are from the prophet Malachi - the last spoken words of a prophet in over 400 years! They were a prophecy of the coming of...wait... my son is to be the forerunner of the Messiah??? I just don't see how this can happen!

The doubt was too much for Zacharias. After all, none of this made any logical sense. He faced the angel, for he needed answers. His question, though a bold one in his mind, somehow didn't present such authority once spoken, "How will I know this *for certain*? For I am an old man and my wife is advanced in years."

The angel was quick to respond:

Luke 1:19: (NASB) ¹⁹...I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news.

I AM GABRIEL! The angels words echoed in Zacharias' mind...I AM GABRIEL! This surely was one of those most high in all of the Almighty's spiritual creation! Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God! Gabriel himself sent to deliver *me* this miraculous news!

I am speaking to Gabriel and I am doubting...

Gabriel continued...



Luke 1:20: (NASB) ²⁰And behold, you shall be silent and unable to speak until the day when these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their proper time.

Unable to speak? Even at that very moment, Zacharias felt his speech leave him. Unable to speak! I have been visited by a Holy Angel of the Almighty and can tell no one about it?! Zacharias thought a moment - doubt - doubt in the face of God's power and mercy does bring consequence - but it does not cancel His power and mercy! What a glorious God we have! Praise be unto God!

Luke 1:23-25: (NASB) ²³When the days of his priestly service were ended, he went back home. ²⁴After these days Elizabeth his wife became pregnant, and she kept herself in seclusion for five months, saying, ²⁵This is the way the Lord has dealt with me in the days when He looked with favor upon me, to take away my disgrace among men.

Even in the face of a long forgotten hope and under the circumstances of unlikely events, God's blessing would take root and grow. Elizabeth took this news with great humility and once pregnant, kept herself in seclusion, perhaps as a precaution due to her age; perhaps as a special time for prayer and meditation; perhaps as a time to marvel at the mercy of God. The will of God is sure and the plan of God is complete; all we need do is wait for His timing.

Later when John is born and Zacharias regains his speech...

Luke 1:67-74: (NASB) ⁶⁷And his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied, saying: ⁶⁸"Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited us and accomplished redemption for His people, ⁶⁹And has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of David His servant— ⁷⁰As He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from of old— ⁷¹Salvation from our enemies, and from the hand of all who hate us; ⁷²To show mercy toward our fathers, and to remember His holy covenant, ⁷³The oath which He swore to Abraham our father, ⁷⁴To grant us that we, being rescued from the hand of our enemies, might serve Him without fear...

The faith of these individuals is inspiring! Shortly after these events, Mary goes to visit Elizabeth. Here again we see their faith shine through.

First, Elizabeth's faith:

Luke 1:39-45: (NASB) ³⁹Now at this time Mary arose and went in a hurry to the hill country, to a city of Judah, ⁴⁰and entered the house of Zacharias and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. ⁴²And she cried out with a loud voice and said, Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! ⁴³And how has it happened to me, that the mother of my Lord would come to me? ⁴⁴For behold, when the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby leaped in my womb for joy. ⁴⁵And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what had been spoken to her by the Lord.

Next, Mary's faith:

Luke 1:46-56: (NASB) ⁴⁶And Mary said: My soul exalts the Lord, ⁴⁷And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior. ⁴⁸For He has had regard for the humble state of His bondservant; For behold, from this time on all generations will count me blessed. ⁴⁹For the Mighty One has done great things for me; and holy is His name. ⁵⁰and His mercy is upon generation after generation toward those who fear Him. ⁵¹He has done mighty deeds with His arm; He has scattered those who were proud in the thoughts of their heart. ⁵²He has brought down rulers from their thrones, and has exalted those who were humble. ⁵³He has filled the hungry with good things; and sent away the rich empty-handed. ⁵⁴He has given help to Israel His servant, in



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remembrance of His mercy, ⁵⁵as He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and his descendants forever. ⁵⁶And Mary stayed with her about three months, and then returned to her home.