

§3: THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE BIRTH OF JESUS

Luke 1:26–38

Gabriel Appears to Mary

1:26–28

26 Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee, with *the* name Nazareth,
27 to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David;
and the name of the virgin was Mary.
28 And when he came to her, he said: Greetings, highly favored one! The Lord is with you.

Mary's Astonishment

1:29

29 But she was greatly perplexed at the statement, and was pondering what kind of greeting this might be.

Gabriel's Message

1:30–33

30 And the angel said to her: Do not fear, 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.
32 He 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;
33 and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever; and His kingdom will have no end.

Mary's Question

1:34

34 And Mary said to the angel: How shall this be, since I know no man [sexually]?

Gabriel's Explanation

1:35–37

35 And the angel answered and said to her: The Holy Spirit will come upon you,
and the power of the Most High will overshadow you;
and for this reason the holy offspring shall be called the Son of God.
36 And behold, Elizabeth, your relative, even she has conceived a son in her old age;
and this is the sixth month of her who was called barren.
37 For not any word will be powerless with God.

Mary's Submission

1:38

38 And Mary said: Behold, the bondservant of the Lord; be it done to me according to your word.
And the angel departed from her.

Notes

1. **Galilee/Nazareth (Lk. 1:26).** Begin using maps found in your Bible or a Bible atlas to locate all of the places mentioned in the text. This will help you follow Jesus' travels and also help you remember what was said and done.
2. **Betrothed (Lk. 1:27).** The word is often translated in modern English versions "engaged." However, the betrothal in Near Eastern culture was a legally binding act, not just a "promise" to marry with the right to cancel the agreement at any time.

Betrothal in the O.T.

At betrothal, a public and legally binding agreement is made between the bridegroom and the father of the bride. The agreement involves payment of the “bridal price.” Generally the bridal price is set by the father of the bride (Gen. 34:11–12). The bridal price can take the form of service instead of money (Josh. 15:16 cp. Judg. 1:12–13; 1 Sam. 17:25; 18:25 cp. 2 Sam. 3:14). In the case of fornication between a man and an unbetrothed, unmarried woman, the man is required to pay the bridal price which was set at 50 shekels (for further details see Ex. 22:16–17; Deut. 22:28–29). In Hosea, God pays the most meaningful and lasting type of bridal price—“And I will betroth you to me forever; and I will betroth you to me with righteousness and with justice and with lovingkindness and with compassion; and I will betroth you to me in faithfulness. And you will know Yahweh.” (Hos. 2:19–20). The bridal price that God pays for a new, faithful Israel is a quality relationship consisting of righteousness, justice, lovingkindness, compassion and faithfulness that lasts forever. To truly “know” each other in a marriage, these things must be included along with the sexual relationship.

Evidence of the legally binding nature of the betrothal is seen in the fact that a betrothed woman is referred to as a “wife” (Deut. 22:24). Like marriage, betrothal as a legal relationship is protected by law, for the sexual violation of the betrothal requires the same penalty as violation of marriage by adultery—death (Deut. 22:23–27 cp. 22:22 and Lev. 20:10; note also Deut. 28:30).

Yet betrothal is not automatically identical with “marriage.” A man could be betrothed, but not yet have “taken her” (i.e. married her, Deut. 20:7). The marriage, or wedding ceremony, was generally a week long feast during which the betrothed couple came together in sexual union for the first time (Gen. 29:21–20 cp. Judg. 14:10ff; John 2:1ff). Note also Deut. 24:5!

Betrothal in the N.T.

Betrothal is mentioned in the N.T. only in connection with Mary. In Matt. 1:18 it is stated that Mary was betrothed to Joseph, but they had not yet “come together” (i.e. for the sexual relationship). This follows the standard Israelite cultural pattern. An interesting passage is Lk. 2:5 which will be discussed later in §7.

3. **House of David (Lk. 1:27).** Of the descendants of David. Jesus’ genealogy is discussed in §§6,19.
4. **Relative (Lk 1:36).** This may mean more than just “fellow-Israelite.” It appears that both Joseph and Mary were of the house of David, tribe of Judah, while Zacharias and Elizabeth were of the tribe of Levi. It may be that Mary’s mother was a blood-relative of Elizabeth, but this is purely speculative.
5. **(Lk. 1:37).** This is a literal translation. By taking “word” to mean “thing” in general and “powerless” to mean “impossible,” we arrive at a more standard translation of the verse: “For nothing will be impossible with God.”