

The Conception of Mary with the Infant Jesus

Reading Luke 1:26 - 38.

The sixth month in v26 is the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy. Luke deliberately links the pregnancy of Elizabeth with that of Mary. Every birth is great. It is great in the lives of the parents, even though it may not always be immediately appreciated. It may interrupt the plans of the parents, but never the less is a natural wonder and a great event to occur for many reasons.

The birth of John was much greater than normal because it happened to a couple who were child bearing, and they were till then childless. To be childless was a sore distress for a woman in many societies in those days, and in many an heart in these days, and even though the cause may not be hers, it pains her heart. A woman is made to bear children, and her heart longs to satisfy the instinct of motherhood. Elizabeth, like Sarah with Abraham and Hannah with Elkanah, Elizabeth longed for a child. The birth of John was a far greater event.

But the birth of Jesus was the greatest event that has occurred in the history of mankind. That almighty God should clothe Himself in human flesh in the person of Jesus. Such an event could not occur except that God had made it known prophetically. Most notable is that of Isaiah, "The Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel². 'God with us.' " and Jesus Although these two names sound different, but they affect the same - Immanuel, 'God with us.' And, Jesus - 'Saviour of mankind.'

Luke often placed two events or teachings beside each other so that his readers would compare and learn. Here we see the greatness of John's birth compared with that of other children, so great that Zechariah questioned the meanings of the angel's words⁰. Gabriel's announcement to Zechariah was met with almost sarcastic unbelief, "How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years." The Angel had to give him his credentials and demonstrate it by dumbing down Zechariah's unbelieving mouth. Zechariah is associated with

high position and calling. He was offering the incense of Israel's praise when the angel came. Highly trained, highly positioned, highly appointed. His bearing associated him with Jerusalem's temple.

Compare him to Joseph, a village carpenter in a small town, engaged to a poor unknown local girl, probably 14 or 15 years old as the custom was then. Joseph and Mary were both of the family of David and their inheritance estate lay in the lowly shepherds town of Bethlehem. It seems as if the family residence should have been Bethlehem of Judea, not Nazareth in Galilee's hills, four days journey north.

Compare the greatness of John's birth and the position of Zechariah in a family of temple priests and his training, to that of Mary and Joseph who, unable to find even an hotel room, gave birth in a stable without any known midwife attendance, without a relative's compassionate care, then to lay her child in the manger stall amid the animals. Luke sets the scene for the life of Jesus. He was shunned by the religious and national leaders of his day, but made His associations with the prostitutes, the tax collectors, the working men, the poor and needy. They flocked to Him in droves and responded to His gospel in thousands from that first remarkable Pentecost. Do you identify with Him today? The greatness of human birth. Greater John and the greatest of all - lowly Jesus.

It Only takes One Angel.

2:9. How many of God's messengers are assigned to a lonely post with the most humble of people! Shepherds were then often despised in the Middle East. That night under a starlit sky just one messenger came to them with the greatest story to tell. Just one. God most often sends a lone messenger to tell his Gospel. Only Philip was sent to the Ethiopian eunuch. Just Jonah to Nineveh. Elijah cried to the Lord, "I even I only am left!" Just Noah, a preacher

of righteousness, and his family entered the ark. Paul found much loneliness in his preaching, "No one came to stand by me . . . but the Lord stood by me" It is God's way. One man often has a much greater acceptance. A company is so often overwhelming and can be contradictory. How would you respond if on a lonely dark night your sky was suddenly filled with an host of angels? Scared out of your wits probably! How much better if one person has a story of hope to tell? Don't be afraid to be God's spokesperson, for behind you, in reserve, is a company of angels, all backing up what you have to say. Don't be afraid. Don't draw back. Be God's angel - a messenger.

And that angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people, for unto you is born, this day, in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." Suddenly the heavens were filled with angels. What an unusual birth - but it was preceded by a more unique conception.

The Angel Gabriel.

Less than a year before, God sent an angel to that girl, called Mary, at Nazareth in the hills of Galilee. She was still in that traditional year between espousal and marriage. Until the ceremony she could not, according to local custom share the protection of her husband's roof. The angel's sudden appearance startled her. The word used in this setting means intrude. She was startled by it to say the least. It was the same for Zechariah. He was troubled, startled, and became increasingly afraid. Gabriel sought to put Mary's mind to rest as he greeted her. "The Lord is with you, behind you, supporting you."

The interview was not hurried as Gabriel gave her time to turn it all over in her heart to work out what all this meant. At length he answered her questions. But it only gave her more. "Mary," he said, "you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his

father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." Luke 1:31-33.

Theologians may ponder the eschatological implication of this statement by Gabriel. But Mary was a very knowing and practical young woman, and as with the wine supply problem at the wedding in Cana of Galilee, she was concerned with the immediate issues at hand. "How will this occur, seeing that I am a virgin?" or more plainly - verse 24 says, "But Mary pointed out to the angel, "In what other way can this happen seeing I am not sexually active."

This did not upset Gabriel. His direct answer though, demands even deeper thought than Mary's question, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you, and for this reason that Holy One being born of you will be called Son of God. - verse 35"

The Conception of Mary

There are two interrelated parts to Gabriel's answer which we need to look at separately but apply interactively. First, the Holy Spirit coming upon her and then the power of the Most High overshadowing her. Their order is correct.

The conception of Jesus the man was a miracle. All miracles are to some degree an act of creation, whether it be very evident such as the provision of a meal for thousands from one small boy's packed lunch, or of re-creation, such as the raising of a youth to life in the gateway of the township of Nain. The birth of the Son of God was by logic and by definition a creative act of the Almighty. Jesus as God in the flesh was that which had not happened before. Adam also was an original creation of God, that which had not existed before. The division of Adam into male and female was another creative act, the provision of like beings, each originals. When Adam and Eve sinned, not just the individuals, but all creation was forever broken. The whole human race, then consisting of just two people, but becoming millions was eternally changed. Broken in soul. Spiritually dead and on a journey to an

earthly grave, and by nature unresponsive to God. Perfect man, created in the image of God was no more, so soon and so easily marred and needing to be remade. God's plan was for a redemption from sin and a restoration to His original perfection through the work of a redeemer. His redeemer was to be a perfect man, a 'new' original, tested and proven to be perfect in body, true in soul and whole in spirit, who was capable and qualified for the task. As the human race began with one man, so it was God's intention to redeem mankind by one man. This is what God was doing in the birth of Jesus all through the availability of the virgin - Mary. A restart; a beginning again of humanity, not by an extension of the blood line and thus life of sinful Adam, but a new original of the life of God Himself directly through the Holy Spirit. "Therefore the child to be born will be called holy - the Son of God. Let's examine that a little more closely.

We need to keep this distinction in mind. It is not new. It is found in the teaching of Paul in his passage on the resurrection of the body. 1 Corinthians 15:45-47.

It is written, "The first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. But it is not the spiritual that is first but the natural, and then the spiritual. The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven.

Paul's reference is to the question of the resurrection of the body, and in that he appeals to a likeness of creation. Jesus was not born of human sexuality, but the overshadowing work of the Holy Spirit. In this action the transmitted sinfully marred succession was broken and supplanted by the holiness of the Spirit of God

To Mary, Gabriel said, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God." And then from Hebrews ten, "A body have you prepared for me . . . then I said, 'Behold, I have come to do your will, O God', as it is written of me in the scroll of the book. Then I said, 'Behold, I have come to do your will, O God, as it is written of me in the scroll of the book.

The work of the Spirit of God in Creation.

Now see a similarity to the conception of Jesus the redeemer to the work of the Spirit of God in the Creation story, Genesis one: one tells us the who, when and what of Creation. Genesis one: two tells us why and how it was done. Of course two verses of Scripture are only the briefest statement, not anything like an explanation, some of which very briefly follows them. But it does tell us the order, and that is important. It is this that is of particular interest to our subject today. And we concentrate on that.

Both are the sovereign creative work of God which is always through the working of the Spirit of God. And we are reminded of that classic verse which speaks of the working together of the triune God, and especially in the things of the Son of God.

This record demonstrates the inter-dependence of the Trinity in the work of God. And this order is also stated in Hebrews 9:14.

"How much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God."

The remainder of the chapter from Genesis 1:3 to 2:3 inclusive provides a brief summary of what God did in that creative act. Our interest today centres in verse 1:2b.

"And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters."

Compared to:

"The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you."

Both these Scripture verses speak of the creative work of the Holy Spirit. And there is another well known verse that needs to be linked to them. When we do so it may clear up some confusion. Have you ever wondered about the opening words of Jesus to Nicodemus? Why was he confused Turn in your Bible to John 3:1-5.

We read in verse three:

Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."

Nicodemus told Jesus of his conceptual problems.

"How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?"

The answer of Jesus cleared it all up for him and for us, or did it?

Verse five:

Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

Now doesn't that give you a crystal clear, or perhaps a new understanding of this part of Scripture? If you are still wondering about it let me tell you a little story.

In my early twenties I was a student at the Churches of Christ College of the Bible. That is the local theological training college of Churches of Christ in Victoria. The meaning of that verse was occasionally discussed by the students and there were two general theories as to its meaning and teaching. One was that it was speaking about natural birth (Born of water.) And spiritual birth (And of the Spirit.) We need both to be saved. The other theory was that to be saved we needed to confess Christ as risen from the dead and then be baptised by immersion in water to confirm it. These theories only confused me further. They are wrong on both accounts.

This verse says that to see the kingdom of God, the Spirit of God must 'overshadow' us in His convicting power, convincing of sin, righteousness and judgement to come until at last we flee from the wrath to come to find cleansing from sin at the foot of His cross. Just as in creation the Spirit of God hovered over the waters He hovers in conviction bringing light and life to the chaos, darkness and formlessness of our confusion and emptiness until the urgency and hate of our sin makes us cry at the foot of the cross to the Saviour for relief. It is more than moral influence it is the infusion of life from above resulting in new birth

Just as the beginning of this world was a creation of the Spirit of God. Just as the coming of a Saviour to this world was a creation of the Spirit of God so the new birth

of a believer is also a creation of the Spirit of God. We do not 'decide for Jesus' we must be created by new birth to be a child of God. Jesus put it that way to Nicodemus.

John 16:8-11. And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgement : concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer; concerning judgement , because the ruler of this world is judged.

2 Corinthians 4.6 God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Romans 5.5 God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

The Methodist Theologian Dr. Adam Clarke 1762-1832 in his Commentary. Summarised the concept.

"The Holy Ghost shall come upon you- This event shall take place suddenly, and the Holy Spirit himself shall be the grand operator. The power, *dunamis*, the miracle-working power, of the Most High shall overshadow you to accomplish this purpose, and to protect you from danger, even as there is a plain allusion to the Spirit of God brooding over the face of the waters, to render them prolific, Genesis 1:2, I am the more firmly established in the opinion advanced on Matthew 1:20, that the rudiments of the human nature of Christ was a real creation in the womb of the virgin, by the energy of the Spirit of God."