

God Calls On The Faithful, Not The Fancy

It must have been quite the scandal. A young, 14 year old girl, Mary, engaged to be married, had just returned from a visit to her relatives, Elizabeth and Zechariah who lived in the hill country of Judah. She had been gone for three months, and when she returned, she was pregnant.

She had not seen her fiance' Joseph in all that time. We can assume that Joseph knew nothing of Mary's delicate condition; as a carpenter by trade, he had likely been busy working, perhaps building a house for himself and Mary to live in after they were married. In those days, a young man would not marry until he was well established, with a way to provide for his new wife and a place for them to live and raise a family.

Joseph was looking forward to the wedding day, and doing his best to make everything ready to receive Mary as his bride.

Imagine his shock and dismay when Mary returned to town.

Imagine what HE must have thought... his hopes and dreams dashed; all he had been working for these many months, seemingly gone. He may have thought to himself, "Well, at least I found out what sort of girl she is BEFORE we got married." But he did not know what he was about to find out.

We can only imagine the buzz around town. You know how people talk, especially in small towns. Mary takes off for three months and comes back pregnant. Obviously the child was not Joseph's... how her reputation must have been dragged through the mud among the townspeople. She perhaps went from being a "nobody" to being despised.

And her STORY! "The child she was bearing was not by the act of fornication, but of the Holy Spirit!" She may as well have claimed she'd been abducted by a UFO. How the people must

have whispered and gossiped behind her back. Her parents, also, must have had doubts. Often times we read the story of Jesus' conception and birth, but do not really think much about what the people involved endured through it all.

Yes, surely, Mary was the target of much controversy in her little village. And surely most people expected Joseph to call off the wedding, and abandon her in her "sin." "She made her bed," they likely said, "and now she'll have to sleep in it."

Things were different in those days. Premarital sex was absolutely off limits. Fornication was perhaps the greatest sin one could commit, other than murder. Sex outside of Holy Matrimony just was NOT acceptable. And Mary, they thought, had committed that horrendous crime. There could be no forgiveness for her, at least among the townspeople, to say nothing of the religious leaders of her day.

But Mary knew something no one else did. And she had no doubts. Because three months earlier, she had seen something no one else in town ever had: she saw for herself the angel Gabriel. He came to her in person – in her home town of Nazareth in Galilee. Mary was not only pure of heart and innocent of the crime people accused her of. But Gabriel declared, in Luke 1, "Hail, thou art highly favored. The Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women."

The Holman Standard version of the Bible continues, "But she was deeply troubled by this statement, wondering what kind of greeting this could be." Obviously. Here was an angelic being, the angel Gabriel, standing before her, calling her "highly favored" and "blessed among women." She must have been shaking in her shoes... but then imagine how much more disturbing the news must have been for young Mary, as Gabriel went on to explain: "Do not be afraid, Mary. For you have found favor with God. Now listen: you will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will call His name Jesus. 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. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end.”

Can you imagine YOUR response in such a situation? Luke simply states, “But Mary asked the angel, ‘How can this be, since I have not been intimate with a man?’” ABSOLUTELY she would ask that. But the mere words do not convey the emotions and doubts and fears this young maiden must have been experiencing... on top of that, these were the words of an angel. Angels didn’t just go around appearing to EVERYONE in those days, anymore than they appear to us today. This was something truly fantastic and supernatural. And it was happening to HER!

Gabriel explained, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore the Holy One to be born will be called the Son of God.”

What would YOU have done in Mary’s situation? I can only imagine. But likely still trembling in fear and excitement, Mary responded, “I am the Lord’s slave. May it be done to me according to your word.” By the way, Gabriel also let Mary know that her relative Elizabeth had ALSO conceived a son – even in her old age – and was at that very moment, six months pregnant. And he added, “For nothing will be impossible with God!”

Immediately Mary set out to visit Elizabeth and Zechariah... and when Elizabeth heard Mary’s voice in greeting, the baby inside her leapt for joy! Elizabeth then CONFIRMED what the angel had told Mary: “You are the most blessed of women, and your Child will be blessed!” Elizabeth went on, with sheer joy: “How could this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For you see, when the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby leaped for joy inside me! She who has believed is blessed because what was spoken to

her by the Lord will be fulfilled!"

Such joy, such excitement. And such wonder! How could all this BE? Yet it WAS. And it was happening to Mary, just 14 years old, some say, and not yet even married.

Mary must have wondered what her fiancé' Joseph was going to think of all this. Would he believe her story about the angel's visit? And the confirmation from Elizabeth? Yet she had great faith, and great obedience to the Lord. Luke goes on in verses 46-55 with Mary's song of praise because of what the Lord was doing in her life. Unbelievable, yet very, very true.

And what about Joseph? We don't know a lot about him, but we can surmise what HE must have been going through as well.

After a three month visit away from home, Mary returned, pregnant. He KNEW the baby was not his. Matthew tells us only, "When Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost."

We know from Scripture that Joseph was a "just" man, an honorable man, and a Godly man. He was a FAITHFUL man, one the Lord knew He could count on to provide for Mary and the baby Jesus, to protect and defend them. Yet, Joseph could not wrap his mind around the situation. After all, he was only human, and this was the first he had heard of the situation.

He could have joined the rest of the townspeople in their derision and slander. He could have accused her of sleeping around and he could have made it public record that this baby was NOT his – HE was not a fornicator! He could have defended his own pride and reputation. Imagine Joseph's turmoil. The sleepless nights, the anguish as all his hopes and dreams had been dashed, yet he knew he had to do the right thing. He loved Mary, still, regardless of what she might have done.

But what would he do now? Matthew tells us, "Being a just man, and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privately."

But then we read, "But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, 'Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife. For that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. She shall bring forth a Son, and thou shall call His name Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins.'"

Matthew reminds us that all these things were foretold by the prophet Isaiah... which Joseph likely was familiar with, being a Godly man. You, too, can read about it in Isaiah 7. But still: how INCREDIBLE that the Lord had chosen HIM as the husband of that virgin, foretold in the Scriptures so long ago. But Joseph was a good man. When he awoke, the Bible tells us, without a second thought, he did as the angel had told him, and took Mary as his wife. Yet Mary and Joseph did not consummate their marriage until after Jesus had been born.

We all know the rest of the story of the birth of the Savior, how the entire heavenly host of angels praised the God of Creation, how the shepherds came and, in awesome faith, worshiped the baby Savior, as He lay sleeping – in of all places, an animal's feeding trough in a barn. We also know what took place after. Joseph proved himself to be a faithful man, a good provider and protector of his family. When Herod sought to kill the infant Jesus, he again did as the angel of the Lord instructed him: with NO hesitation and with no doubt in his mind, he immediately took his family to safety and settled in Egypt until after Herod's death. Then, again following the Lord's instructions, he returned his family back home to Nazareth.

It's a beautiful story. But it is also a TRUE story. It is HISTORY, not a fairy tale. It's the miraculous story of the birth of our Savior, Jesus Christ. The ENTIRE story of Jesus' birth, childhood, ministry, death, resurrection and His soon return is indeed, the greatest story ever told. And depending on where YOU stand with God, it's either real GOOD news or real BAD NEWS for you.

As the song says, "Wonderful, Merciful Savior, precious Redeemer and Friend; who would have thought that a Lamb could rescue the souls of men?"

Such is the love of our Heavenly Father for His children.

Jesus said, "There is no greater love than this: that a man lay down his life for his friends." But second to that, as a father myself, I can tell you there is no greater love than a parent for their precious child. I cannot imagine the INFINITE love it must take to sacrifice your own Son to save the souls of those that are born predisposed to hate you.

Scripture tells us, "While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

Jesus came to show us Who God is, and like His Father, during His earthly ministry, He called the "least in the Kingdom" – men and women of no reputation to be His followers, ministers and disciples. Imagine, a 14 year old girl and a carpenter, from the middle of nowhere, bearing and raising the very Son of God Himself... because God knew, these were FAITHFUL people He could trust. These were His true servants. They BELIEVED God and they OBEYED Him, without hesitation. That's real faith.

It is the same today. God calls those who love Him, those He can count on to be faithful to Him, who believe Him. He calls faithful men and women to be His servants, His hands and feet in this world, and those who are the MOST faithful you will probably never hear of in this life. To the world, they are "nobodys." But the prideful, the "high and mighty," the famous – those He has little use for, and in fact, Jesus Himself most often had to condemn the religious leaders, the Priests, Scribes and Pharisees – as well as the rich people – for their hypocrisy. Those He made examples of, for us NOT to follow.

It's sad that so many today follow and worship the celebrities, the fancy folks who we see on TV, in movies, in

politics, in popular music, in the media... even many church leaders. Worldly people LOVE the rich and famous. But those rich and famous ones may have made a name for themselves here in THIS world, but unless they repent and turn to Jesus Christ as their LORD, and not JUST their pseudo-Savior, life on this earth is the only heaven they will ever know. Because it doesn't matter that they know who Jesus IS.

What matters is, does Jesus know YOU. For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world but loses his soul?

God doesn't care if you're a 'nobody' in this world. In fact, that's usually who He chooses to do His best and most important work. In the Kingdom of God, the first become last and the last become first and the greatest is servant of all. These are the ones who honor Him with their HEARTS AND LIVES, not just with their lips. Those who BELIEVE and OBEY.

So let us each examine our own hearts today. Do we truly BELIEVE and OBEY God, or do we just know OF Him? Could YOU have done what Mary did? WOULD YOU have done as Joseph did? Or would your response – today – be drastically different?

You may not be seeing angels, but God has still given you His Word. Will you believe? Will you obey? Jesus commanded us to go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature, teaching them to OBEY all He had commanded. Not just the "nice" parts – not just the warm and fuzzy parts, those parts of God's Word that make us and other feel GOOD – but the HARD parts too. You see, Truth is often a hard pill to swallow, but it's always what we need. If we neglect to preach ALL Jesus commanded, in order to be popular and well-liked in this world, we are not good and faithful, nor are we servants to those who need Jesus' saving grace the most. So let us be faithful. Let us be servants to all. Let us always tell the WHOLE truth, protect and provide for the helpless and innocent. Be about His Kingdom business, occupying until He returns. Let us judge with righteous judgment, never afraid or ashamed of the only One Who offers a transformed heart and

mind, and everlasting life, for all who will forsake the world, lay down their lives and humbly seek the Savior. And then, when our time on this earth is through, we may hear those amazing words that Mary heard: “you are highly favored; you are blessed. Enter into the joy of your Lord.”

Audio CDs and transcripts of this message are available when you call me at (715) 486-8066 or email Rob@WisconsinChristianNews.com. Ask for message number 238.

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