

God Uses Mary's Obedience

To Fulfill Prophecy

As you just heard Brother **Garth** read, the angel Gabriel comes to Mary just as he did to the priest Zechariah we studied last week. With these two appearances the Old Testament prophecies begin being fulfilled; David wrote in Psalm 2:7 about 1000 years before the birth of Christ, “I will tell of the decree: The LORD said to me, ‘You are my Son; today I have begotten you.’ ” This is quoted in Acts and Hebrews showing that Jesus is the Christ and the only Son begotten by God the Father. The Prophet Isaiah wrote in about 700 B.C., “Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.” (Isaiah 4:7) The name “Immanuel” means, “with us is God” and this is exactly who Jesus is. The foretold child of Mary also fulfilled what the prophet Isaiah wrote in chapter 9, “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” (Isaiah 9:6) The prophet Micah a contemporary of Isaiah also wrote, “But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah (ef·rawth), who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days.

³Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in labor has given birth ...” (Micah 5:2-3) Ephrathah is the place near Bethel where **Rachel** died and was buried, and is another name for Bethlehem. This is why when Herod slaughtered all the male children in the Bethlehem area after the birth of Christ this fulfilled Micah’s prophecy, we read, “A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and loud lamentation, **Rachel** weeping for her children; she refused to be comforted, because they are no

more.” (Matthew 2:18) These are just a few of the hundreds of prophecies from the Old Testament that Jesus fulfilled and are a few of the ones concerning his birth.

Reading verses 26 and 27 of Luke chapter 1, which also fulfills Micah’s prophecy, “In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, ²⁷ to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin’s name was Mary.” The reason God gives us rich detail is to reinforce the truth and accuracy of Luke’s writing. Mary was apparently unaware of Elizabeth’s pregnancy with John and she is now in her 6th month of pregnancy. Unlike John the Baptist whose greatness was the honor of heralding the Messiah, Mary’s child will know unlimited greatness. These verses also tell us as we saw last week that Elizabeth was a daughter of Aaron, the priestly line and in verse 36 we learn that Mary is Elizabeth’s relative or kinswoman, meaning Mary may also be from the priestly lineage of Aaron. Further, verse 32 shows Mary was a descendant of King David because it states, “the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David.” So, if Jesus comes from the lineage of King David, so too must Mary as his only human parent.

At the appearance of Gabriel it says Mary was greatly troubled. Can you imagine a young woman of 12 to 13 years old having an angel standing before her? I certainly can understand why she was trying to figure out why he was there. So in verse 30 Gabriel says to Mary “Do not be afraid, for you have found favor with God.” This calms Mary down and she takes a deep breath and lets it out as Gabriel says, “you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus.” At this point I can see Mary now dumbfounded for even though she is betrothed to Joseph she has not had relations with him and is still a virgin. Betrothal was a much more serious commitment than today’s engagement. Betrothals could only be dissolved by a divorce decree.

A little background might help here. We do not know the ages of Mary and Joseph. However young women were unusually betrothed at the age of puberty about 12 to 13 years old. Young men were betrothed between the ages of 16 and 19. The betrothal lasted a year and during that time the man built a home for his wife. Boys began their apprenticeships around the age of 8 and were prepared to support a wife by the time they were 16 to 18 years old. During this year of betrothal they prepared for the formal marriage, but did not live together or have relations.

Here again, is how man has changed the patterns of life and marriage. Today we have something that one cannot find historically and that is teenagers. We determined that the teenage years were the transition from childhood to adulthood. Now we have expanded what we call the teenage years to about 30. This has allowed many to grow up with a lack of responsibility and allowed many to remain immature. Historically at about 8 or 9 years old boys would begin the process of becoming a man by starting to work with their father or sometimes an uncle or other relative and learn a trade or profession. We know from Mark that Jesus was trained as a carpenter and he would have by custom learned this trade from his father, Joseph and begun his apprenticeship at about 8 years old. Luke would have begun the process of learning and preparing to become a physician at 8 or 9. So, let me clear, those of you who are in your teenage years are in fact by biblical standards men and women and need to be responsible for your behavior and actions. We have expanded the training and apprenticeship process to prepare for living in a highly specialized world. High school, trade school and college are part of the process. The goal is for each of you to be productive and prepare for life, marriage and service to God's kingdom. So, historically there is no such thing as the "teenage years" of slow transition that now lasts until 30. We, and I am not speaking of most of us in this room, but we as the worldwide church, have done a great disservice to our children by not training them in the Word of God and expecting them to grow up and act as responsible men and

women by the time they reach the teenage years. This puts a great deal of responsibility upon parents and us as a church community – for we only have a dozen years to give our children the foundation for the rest of their lives.

To Reflect His Will

Now we go back to Mary, as a young woman preparing for marriage to Joseph. Mary's reaction to Gabriel's pronouncement is quite different than Zechariah's doubt or unbelief. She asks, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?" Even at this young age Mary understood she was unworthy for like all people she was a sinner. Look at verses 46 and 47, "And Mary said, 'My soul magnifies the Lord, ⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.' " Only sinners need a Savior and Mary understands this basic state of mankind and her need for God the Savior. So Mary seeks to understand how she can possibly bear a child when she is a virgin and Gabriel answers her saying, "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." Of first importance, the miraculous virgin birth of Jesus is foundation to Christianity. It is the only way God could be both human and divine and is unique to Christianity. The second thing to take note of is Mary's response is different than the doubt of Zechariah for she believes and responds in verse 38, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." Mary is not only the mother of the Messiah but she gives us an example of living one's faith. She is obedient to what God tells her to do and be. Mary was not obedient by force or shame and she knew the consequences of what God had called her to do. She would have to share what was to happen with Joseph. He might reject her and we later find he almost did, and he could even have had her put to death under the Old Testament law. Mary was obedient and trusting in the God. How about you? Are you obedient to what God has called you to do in this life that prepares you for eternal life? Do you trust God for the future that you cannot yet see? Are you more concerned with God's plan of salvation for

mankind than your own life? If you believe in Christ as your Savior, well then your life belongs to him and he requires obedience from a surrendered heart.

Mary's obedience and the obedience that God calls all believers to have reminds me of a story. 125 years ago 3 men, Walter Gowans, Rowland Bingham and Thomas Kent left North America for Africa because God had called them to spread his gospel. They left with glad obedience. A year and half later Rowland returned alone and discouraged, both Walter and Thomas lay buried in Africa. Rowland journeyed to the home of Mrs. Alberta Gowans, Walter's mother, to give her his personal belongings. Mrs. Gowans shared how God had called her daughter to China and her son to Africa. She shared how her heart was burdened for the people of Sudan and their desperate need of the gospel. As Rowland prepared to leave she looked at her son's belongings and then looked Rowland in the eye and said, "I would rather have had Walter go out to the Soudan and die there, all alone, than have him home today, disobeying his Lord." This placed a burden on Rowland's heart. He felt God calling him back to Sudan and returned founding the Sudan Interior Missions, which is still working in Africa to this day. Rowland wrote shortly after visiting Mrs. Gowans, "Our success in this venture means nothing less than the opening of the country for the gospel; our failure, at most, nothing more than the death of two or three deluded fanatics. Still, even death is not failure. God's purposes are accomplished. He uses deaths as well as lives in the furtherance of His cause." Rowland understood that proclaiming God's glory and Jesus' gospel to the world was more important than this earthly life and it was of the greatest honor to be used by God.

My beloved, like Mary and Rowland we know not the future in detail, but in faith we can move forward being faithful to the Lord knowing he uses all for the furtherance of his salvation plan. What Paul wrote almost 2000 years ago was true for Mary and Joseph and John the Baptist and for himself and Rowland Bingham and remains true today, not only for pastors but also for all who are faithful to Christ.

Reading from Philippians 1 beginning at verse 21, “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. ²² If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. ²³ I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. ²⁴ But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account. ²⁵ Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith, ²⁶ so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again.” (Philippians 1:21-26) God calls all Christians to live in fruitful labor until he returns or calls us home.

This amazing segment of the story between the angel Gabriel and Mary that would change everything ends simply but also with great meaning. Mary says in verse 38, “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.” The word translated here as “servant” means slave. Mary is saying she belongs to God and as her Master she will do, as he desires or “according to your word” and Gabriel leaves.

To Be A Vessel Of Blessing

With all the impact of what Mary had just learned she begins making plans. Beginning in verse 39, “In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah, ⁴⁰ and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth.” Luke does not give details of this trip of 80 to 90 miles depending the route taken from Nazareth to Hebron. Mary was young and would have been able to make the trip and we know she made it. I wondered if Mary’s mother and others went with her. She certainly would not have been allowed to travel alone at the age of 12 to 13. Some questions we cannot answer. Luke wanted to focus on the important points of the story. First in verse 41, when Mary arrives John leaped in Elizabeth’s womb. Just as King David wrote concerning God his Creator, ¹³ “For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother’s womb. ¹⁴ I praise you, for I am fearfully

and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well. ¹⁵ My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. *Here earth is a metaphor for womb both are hidden from the sight of man.* ¹⁶ Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.” (Psalm 139:13-16) This is true of all who are created by God including John and Jesus and you and me. John knew Jesus was the Messiah even in the womb. John desired to fulfill God’s calling for him to introduce the Messiah to Israel and God’s plan for John begins to unfold even in the womb.

In the Old Testament the Holy Spirit was given to specific people at specific times for specific purposes. This is one of those times. Elizabeth was filled with God’s Spirit. It was by the Holy Spirit that her baby John moved with joy being close to the Messiah. It was by the empowering wisdom of the Holy Spirit that Elizabeth knew Mary was carrying the Savior of the world. Elizabeth could not help but exclaim “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! ⁴³ And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me?” Elizabeth shares with Mary, ⁴⁴ “For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. ⁴⁵ And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.” God’s plan will be fulfilled and as Gabriel said earlier in verse 37, “For nothing will be impossible with God.” Elizabeth was no longer in childbearing years and she became pregnant and gave birth to John. Mary had not had relations with a man and by the power of the Holy Spirit she too became pregnant and was carrying the Messiah – fully human and fully God.

I have to take a moment to discuss man’s corruption of God’s Word. Back in verse 28 Gabriel says to Mary, “Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you.” This verse became the basis for the Roman Catholic prayer “Ave Maria” or “Hail Mary” around 1000 A.D. Pope Pius X in the early 20th century decided that instead of Mary

being the recipient of God's grace she was the dispenser of God's grace. All that Jesus did by his life, death and resurrection through the grace of God the Father according to Pope Pius became Mary's to dispense. Because Elizabeth says to Mary in verse 42, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!" Pope Leo XIII distorts God's Word from Mary being blessed to Mary as the divine blesser and set the stage for his successor to declare Mary as the dispenser of God's grace a few years earlier when he wrote, "Mary is the intermediary through whom is distributed unto us this immense treasure of mercies gathered by God." This is why the Catholic Catechism declares that the traditions of the Church have equal authority to the Bible in order to justify this and many other perversions of the Bible. Mary was humbled to be chosen to carry the Messiah. She would be appalled with the worship of her. To worship Mary, as the dispenser of grace, is blasphemous for it robs honor and worship of Christ. Mary is recognized as Matrix of Heaven meaning she dispenses God's grace. The Catholic Church is not the only system of false belief, but it is one of the oldest and its followers believe in a Christ, and Mary and saints that are not of the Bible and it is therefore a false belief system. Here is quickly what some of the beliefs of the Catholic Church about Mary and why they worship Mary.

- Prayers begin to be offered to Mary for intercession. AD 600. Paul clearly wrote proving this false, "This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, ⁴ who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. One cannot be saved if they do not have the "knowledge of the truth" false religions and false doctrine do not save but condemn. ⁵ For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, *Mary never has had any special ability to offer intercessory pray on the behalf of people and to pray to her is idolatry.* ⁶ who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time." (2 Timothy 2:3-6)
- Immaculate Conception (Mary lead a sinless life) AD 1854
- Assumption of Mary (she did not die but was taken directly to heaven)AD 1950
- Mary is proclaimed "Mother of the Church" AD 1965

Titles for Mary by RCC

- Mother of the members of Christ
- Mother of the Church
- Advocate, Helper, Benefactress, Mediatrix – meaning she is the intercessory for salvation.
- Queen of Angels – 11th Century
- Queen over all things
- Queen of the prophets
- Spouse of the Holy Spirit - 3rd or 4th century
- Holy Mother of God
- Mother of divine grace
- Mary Queen of the Apostles
- By Mary's prayer, she delivers souls from the dead according to (CCC 966)
- Mary by grace has been exalted above all angels and mankind to a position second only to her Son (Vatican II – p 421)
- Mary did not suffer from original sin according to (CCC 966)
- Mary was virgin all her life and had no children other than Jesus according to (CCC 510)

Mary was blessed by God to be the mother of the human Jesus, but she did not have any role in Jesus' divinity. If it were possible Mary would turn over in her grave at what the Catholic Church has done to elevate her and diminish Jesus. Mary as a humble servant or slave of God closes our study with her worshiping God and calling his name holy.

To Magnify The Lord

Mary's heart is so full of joy she sings, "My soul magnifies the Lord,⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,⁴⁸ for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed;⁴⁹ for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name.⁵⁰ And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.⁵¹ He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts;⁵² he has brought down

the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate; ⁵³ he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty. ⁵⁴ He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, ⁵⁵ as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever.” I did not sing these words when God saved me, but my heart was filled with a joy I had not known. I did not know the scriptures well and had not heard this song of praise by Mary. I understood, simply, that God loved me and would show the right path as I trod life’s path in this crazy world. Like Mary is verse 47, “my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, ⁴⁸ for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant.” I did not deserve or earn my salvation; it was a gift from God. Mary did not earn or deserve the privilege of carrying the Savior of the world and giving him birth into humanity, it was a gift of God. This morning see Mary begins serving God and then her Savior and son and would continue to serve God until her death for he owned her and he was her Master and it was most blessed to be the child of God. This is what my heart told me when my heart and soul was filled with the Spirit of God. I hope my beloved you never forget the awe and joy of your salvation. One way to keep the wonder and joy afresh is to share your testimony with others. Let them know what God has done and is doing and will do in your life! Sing out your love for Christ with a grateful heart as Mary did and commit to serve and honor God until you return home to heaven.