

Sunday 19-Dec-2021

Isaiah 7:14

¹⁴ Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.

Luke 1:26-56

The Birth of Jesus Foretold

²⁶ In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, ²⁷ to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸ The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favoured! The Lord is with you."

²⁹ Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. ³⁰ But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favour with God. ³¹ You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. ³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, ³³ and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end."

³⁴ "How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"

³⁵ The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. ³⁶ Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. ³⁷ For no word from God will ever fail."

³⁸ "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled." Then the angel left her.

Mary Visits Elizabeth

³⁹ At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, ⁴⁰ where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹ When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. ⁴² In a loud voice she exclaimed: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! ⁴³ But why am I so favoured, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? ⁴⁴ As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. ⁴⁵ Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!"

Mary's Song

⁴⁶ And Mary said:

"My soul glorifies the Lord

⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,

⁴⁸ for he has been mindful

of the humble state of his servant.

From now on all generations will call me blessed,

⁴⁹ for the Mighty One has done great things for me—
holy is his name.

⁵⁰ His mercy extends to those who fear him,
from generation to generation.

⁵¹ He has performed mighty deeds with his arm;
he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.

⁵² He has brought down rulers from their thrones
but has lifted up the humble.

⁵³ He has filled the hungry with good things
but has sent the rich away empty.

⁵⁴ He has helped his servant Israel,
remembering to be merciful

⁵⁵ to Abraham and his descendants forever,
just as he promised our ancestors.”

⁵⁶ Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months and then returned home.

Sermon: The Virgin Birth

Please have your bibles open at Luke 1:26-56

Let me pray for God’s guidance and understanding

Let’s pray...

Intro

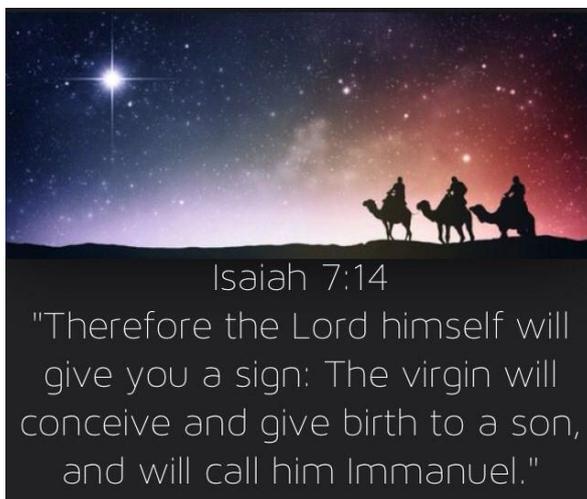
- **Predicting the future** can be quite **tricky** – I think we’ve all experienced this during these COVID times
- Every time someone says we’ve broken the back of COVID – something else happens – you’d be **very game to predict the future** right now
- Here’s **some epic failures** when it comes to **predicting the future**
 - **King George II** said in **1773** that the **American colonies** had **little stomach for a revolution**
 - One of the **officials of the White Star Shipping Company** said the **Titanic** was **unsinkable**
 - An **English professor in the 19th century** said that **air travel at high speed** would be **impossible** because **passengers** would **suffocate**
 - In **2006** The **New York Times** declared “*everyone is asking **when Apple** will come out with a **mobile phone**, the answer is “**probably, never**”*. The **apple iPhone** came out the **next year** (2007)
 - In **1943** **Thomas Watson** the president of **IBM** – said “*I think there’s a world market for maybe five computers”*

- In **1903** the **president of Michigan Bank** told people not to invest in the Ford Motor company because *“the horse is here to stay and the automobile is only a novelty – just a fad”*
- Thankfully - God’s predictions aren’t like that – **What He says – WILL - come to pass** – in His own good and perfect time – and it doesn’t matter even if what God predicts - seems - unlikely – impossible – even outrageous – we can be confident it WILL happen

God’s “Sign” Revealed (Isaiah 7:14)

- In our **OT reading from Isaiah 7:14** – the prophet **Isaiah** reveals a **“sign”** from God of something that will happen in the future
- The date of Isaiah’s prophecy is about **735 BC**
- **God says this to Isaiah**

[PowerPoint 1-Read Isaiah 7:14]



- So, **God’s “sign”** is that a **VIRGIN** will conceive
- Some people will say that the **Hebrew word** translated as Virgin (almah) can mean “young woman” and not necessarily a “virgin”
- However, in the Bible – when this word is used – it’s always to do with a **woman who is unmarried** and therefore a virgin

- For example, in Gen 24:43 – the word is **used** when Isaac is seeking a bride to marry
- So, God's sign is a **virgin will conceive** and have a son
- As much as this **might sound impossible**
- **God** is in the **miracle business**
- We can't do miracles – only God can
- As we read about His Miracles in the Bible – we can either reject them – as some do – or accept them
- If we accept them – that is **FAITH**
- **Faith** is - **believing in something that you can't explain** – or can't see
- And trusting that God always says and does the truth
- And even more miraculous
- This **baby son** – will have the **title** – **Immanuel** – meaning “God is with us”
- Somehow this baby – will be God living with His people

God's “Sign” Confirmed (Luke 1:26-37)

- So, we **fast forward 700 or so years** to around about **4 or 5 BC**
- To our **NT passage** from **Luke 1:26-56** [[Please turn there now](#)]
- We pick up the story where the **context** is we've just been told that a lady called **Elizabeth is 6 months pregnant**
- She is **married to Zechariah** and is **expecting a son** – who will be **John the Baptist**
- Then v26 – **God sends an angel** – one of His messengers – called **Gabriel** – to a place called **Nazareth**

- To speak to a **virgin** [there's that word again] called **Mary** who is **pledged to** be married to a man called **Joseph**
- We're not told **how old either Mary or Joseph are** - or **how long they've been engaged**
- Gabriel says **Mary is highly favoured** and **God is with her**
- **Mary is troubled by these words** from the angel and by his greeting
- It's a bit like me saying to you *"You're just the person I need – have I got a job for you"* – you'd be thinking *"Oh no – what does he want me to do – am I up to the challenge?"*
- But **Gabriel reassures Mary** there's **nothing to be afraid of** – she has **found favour with God**
- The word used for **favour** is the **Greek** word for **grace**
- Grace is **God's merciful kindness on people**
- God could have chosen any woman – but in His grace and **kindness** - **God chose Mary**
- Basically, it's a **privilege for Mary to be God's servant**
- Then the angel Gabriel **confirms the "sign"** that **God gave Isaiah over 700 years earlier**

[PowerPoint 2-Confirmed]



- See v31
- Gabriel says **Mary will conceive and give birth to a Son** – and call him **JESUS**
- From this we can say with confidence: **God always keeps His promises** – His prophecies and predictions will always come true – in His own perfect timing and His own perfect and sometimes miraculous and supernatural way
- The name **Jesus** is from the Hebrew name “**Yeh-ho-shoo’-ah**” which means “**God is Salvation**” or “**God saves**”
- Jesus’ name is a **picture of what He will grow up to do**
- To **save people** from the punishment of their sins – **by dying on a cruel cross**
- The **Angel** goes on to **say some amazing things** about Jesus
- See v32 – **Jesus will be great** – literally He will be **MEGA**
- We can’t underestimate how great – **how mega Jesus is**
- Here’s how **Charles Spurgeon puts it**
- *No one has influenced history more than Jesus Christ. “Is it not proven that he is great? Conquerors are great, and he is the greatest of them. Deliverers are great, and he is the greatest of them. Liberators are great, and he is the greatest of them. Saviours are great, and he is the greatest of them.” (Spurgeon)*
- **Gabriel also says:**
 - **Jesus** will be called the **Son of the Most High** – so Jesus is not only Mary’s son – but He will be known as **the Son of God** – that **fulfils** what **Isaiah** said about – the baby having the title – **Immanuel** – “**God with us**”
 - And **Jesus** will also **reign** on His ancestor **King David’s throne** – **forever** – again fulfilling another **promise that God made to King David** over 1000 years earlier – that someone would be on his throne forever
 - That’s only possible because **God has sent His son to be born of Mary** – who belongs to King David’s family tree

- And it's only possible that Jesus reigns forever – because He has existed forever – He was **there at the creation of the Earth** – and He **continues forever**
- Rightly – v34 – **Mary is wondering how she is going to have a baby and yet still remain a virgin**
- So **Gabriel explains** in v35 – exactly how this will happen
- The child **Mary will conceive** will be through the power of the Holy Spirit
- Gabriel says the **power of the Most High** (that's God) **will overshadow her**
- Note – overshadow here **means literally covered with a cloud** – we saw that in Solomon's temple – when the presence of God entered the temple it was in a cloud
- It's hard for us to know from this one verse exactly what happens – we can talk about Mary's DNA and God's DNA – and whether Mary's egg is fertilized by God – or is she just a vessel carrying baby Jesus – and we can talk about whether Jesus is 50% from God and 50% from Mary - but we'd really **only be speculating**
- And as I said earlier – **we accept God's supernatural stuff in FAITH**
- However, **we can say a few things for sure**
 - It is a **supernatural event**
 - **Mary becomes pregnant** by the power of the Holy Spirit – rather than by having intercourse with Joseph
 - That **the child in her womb** – is from God – and is **God's Son** – **as well as Mary's son**
 - That the **child is fully human** – see 1 Tim 2:5
 - And more importantly the child is fully God – see John 1:1, 14; John 10:30, 33; Phil 2:5-6; John 17:21; John 1:18; Col 2:9-10;
 - And because the child is fully God – **He is without sin** – see Heb 4:15; 1 Peter 2:22; 2 Cor 5:21; 1 John 3:5

- **That bit is really really important** – because without Jesus being sinless – **He would not be able to be fully obedient to God** – and He would not be able to be the perfect once and for all sacrifice for sin
- And so, without this supernatural event of the virgin birth and without the birth of sinless Jesus – **we would have no forgiveness and no eternal life**
- **Gabriel** than goes on to **confirm God’s supernatural activity** by telling Mary in v36 – that even Mary’s cousin, Elizabeth, who is an older woman and has been unable to have a baby – **is also pregnant**
- And **Gabriel confirms** what we should already know - in v37 – that “*no word from God will ever fail*” – some translations say “*for nothing is impossible for God*” – and **that’s the bottom line - isn’t it** – “**nothing is impossible for God**” – that’s what we can hang on today – as we face an uncertain future – **we don’t know what lies ahead** – **we don’t know what trials we will face** – **we may have COVID anxiety** – **we may rightly get upset by the tragedies we hear and see** – **we may have concerns about our climate** – or the threat of China - but God is still on the throne – and **nothing is impossible for Him**

The Response to God’s “Sign” (Luke 1:38-56)

- So, we’ve had - **God’s sign revealed by Isaiah**
- And we’ve had - **God’s sign confirmed by the angel Gabriel**
- Now let’s look at - **the response to God’s sign**

[PowerPoint 3-Response]

The Response to God's "sign"



- And we'll look at **Elizabeth's response**, **John the Baptist's response**, **Mary's response**, and finish up by asking ourselves what our response should be

- So first, **Elizabeth's response...**

Elizabeth's Response

- When **Mary visits** her cousin **Elizabeth**
- Before Mary can say anything - Elizabeth knows through the power of God's Holy Spirit:
 - that **Mary has been blessed by God** and **been shown great favour by God**
 - She knows that the child Mary is carrying is blessed by God – and that **the baby is the Lord**
 - And Elizabeth feels blessed that Mary would come to her - carrying the Lord in her tummy
- How does **Elizabeth know** all this? Because **God is in the miracle business!**

John the Baptist's response

- Second, there's **John the Baptist's response**
- **John** is not mentioned by name in the passage – but he's there – **inside Elizabeth's tummy**

- Look at **John's response** in **v41** – when Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting – **the unborn baby John leapt in his mother's womb** – and **acknowledged the unborn Lord Jesus in Mary's womb** – how amazing is that
- This is only possible because the **Holy Spirit communicates** to the unborn John – that **Mary is carrying the Son of God!**

Mary's Response

- Third, there's **Mary's response**
- Look at **v38** – when she heard from the angel Gabriel, she was going to have God's Son
- **Mary is humble and accepting** “*I am the Lord's servant*” and “*may your word to me be fulfilled*”
- Then during her visit to Elizabeth – **Mary** breaks into **song** – in verses 46 to 55
- This song is known as **Mary's Magnificat** – based on the Latin translation of the first words of her song “My soul magnifies the Lord”
- **Mary's song shows** that through the Holy Spirit – **she knows God's Word**
- In summary she says:
 - God is her **Saviour**
 - God, the **Mighty One** **has done great things** – and for her – v49
 - His **Name** is **Holy** – v49
 - His **mercy extends throughout generations** – v50 – see Exodus 20:6; Psalm 103:17
 - He has **performed mighty deeds with His arm** – v51 – see Psalm 98:1; Isaiah 40:10
 - He **scatters the proud** – v51 – see Gen 11:8; Exodus 18:11; 2 Sam 22:28
 - He **brings down rulers and lifts up the humble** – v52

- *He **feeds the hungry** and **sends the rich away emptyhanded** – v53 – see Psalm 107:9*
- *He has been **loving** and **faithful** and **merciful** to Israel – v54 – see Psalm 98:3*
- *He **keeps His promises**, just like He did for Abraham*
- *All this shows us that **Mary knew God’s Word** and His Word was in her heart!*

Our Response

- So how should we **respond** this morning to **God’s sign in sending Jesus**?
 - Like Mary – we can be **humble unquestioning servants of God** – accepting His Word, however strange or unlikely it might seem, in human terms – and **accept that God is in the miracle business** – and we **simply walk in faith** – and **not by sight**
 - Our response should be like Mary’s – we must also say “*I am the Lord’s servant*” – “*may your word to me be fulfilled*”
 - We too are **blessed** – we **have God’s grace** on us – because Jesus is available to us too
 - Like Mary – we need to acknowledge that **we need Jesus as our Saviour** – so that our sins are forgiven and we can have eternal life
 - And like Mary does in her song – the Magnificat – it is good for us to recall God’s mighty acts from history and to recall how He has worked in our lives in the past – to **remind ourselves how truly awesome God is**. God deserves our constant thanks and praise.

Let me pray...

Father thank you that you revealed your plan to send Jesus in the Old Testament.

Thank you that in your own perfect timing and in your own perfect way – you brought Your Son to this Earth – through the power of the Holy Spirit – and through a virgin called Mary.

Thank you that in your grace and love and mercy – you made this happen – so that Jesus could be our Lord and our Saviour – and grow up to give us forgiveness of our sins – and grant us eternal life.

Help us to respond with humble servant-like hearts – walking by faith – not by sight.

In Jesus' name, we pray. AMEN.

Benediction (2 Corinthians 4:16-18)

¹⁶Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. ¹⁷For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. ¹⁸So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.