

## Matthew 1 and Luke 1--Announcements of Christmas

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### Overview

Note that the two accounts deal with similar themes:

- the emotional state of Mary and Joseph
- the appearance of an angel to them
- the angel's comforting words
- the coming son: spiritual conception, birth, naming
- reference to OT scripture predicting the event
- end of the supernatural vision
- obedience of Mary and Joseph

These similarities show us the kind of things that the Lord was concerned to bring to the attention of Mary and Joseph as they looked forward to the birth of the Messiah. Perhaps they can teach us something useful as we approach the traditional commemoration of that birth.

Luke 1 Mary	Matthew 1 Joseph
27 ... a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary.	18 Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost. 19 Then Joseph her husband, being a just <i>man</i> , and not willing to make her a publick example, <b>was minded to put her away</b> privily.
26 And in the sixth month <b>the angel Gabriel was sent from God</b> unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth, 27 <b>To ... Mary.</b> 28 And the angel came in unto her, and said,	20 But while he thought on these things, behold, <b>the angel of the Lord appeared unto him</b> in a dream, saying,
Hail, <i>thou that art</i> highly favoured, the Lord <i>is</i> with thee: blessed <i>art</i> thou among women. 29 And when she saw <i>him</i> , she was troubled at his saying, and <b>cast in her mind</b> what manner of salutation this should be.	
30 And the angel said unto her, <b>Fear not, Mary:</b> for thou hast found favour with God.	<b>Joseph</b> , thou son of David, <b>fear not</b> to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for <b>that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost.</b>
31 And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and <b>bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS.</b>	21 And she shall <b>bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS:</b> for he shall save his people from their sins.
32 He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: 33 And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end. << <b>Nathan</b> in 2 Sam 7>>	22 Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by <b>the prophet</b> , saying, 23 Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.
34 Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man? 35 And the angel answered and said unto her, <b>The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of</b>	

God. 36 And, behold, thy cousin Elisabeth, she hath also conceived a son in her old age: and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren. 37 For with God nothing shall be impossible.	
38 And Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the Lord; <b>be it unto me according to thy word.</b> And <b>the angel departed</b> from her.	24 Then Joseph <b>being raised from sleep</b> <b>did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him,</b> and took unto him his wife: 25 And knew her not till she had brought forth her firstborn son: and he called his name JESUS.

## Luke 1, The Annunciation to Mary

### 26-28, *Angelic Appearance*

Gabriel is the angel whom God sent to Daniel on two occasions (8:16; 9:21). The second of these is the prophecy of the 70 weeks, which fixes the approximate time of the coming of the Messiah. So it is appropriate for him to appear at the conclusion of this period to announce the birth.

He greets her with three expressions of God's goodness to her:

**Highly favored.**—She is one who has been the object of God's grace, his unmerited favor. (Contrast this to the Catholic notion that she has more of the inherent graces of the spirit—rather, she has been chosen by sovereign, unmerited love for this honor.)

**The Lord is with thee.**—As we have seen in Genesis, this is the recurring encouragement that God gives his people, particularly in times of trial.

**Blessed art thou among women.**—This expression is repeated on the lips of Elizabeth in v.42, and her action seems to indicate what it means. See also Mary's interpretation of it in v.48, "all generations shall call me blessed." The point is not that she is more blessed than other women, but that other women will declare her to be blessed. All women, and mothers in particular, will recognize the singular blessing that has been bestowed on her to be the mother of the Messiah.

Notes:

- Judg 5:24 LXX has this construction, but the Hebrew has *minna\$im*, not *benasim*. The second clause, with the same Hebrew syntax, is translated *apo gunaikwn*, which is more appropriate. Does LXX read *benasim* in the first clause?
- Judith 14:7 seems a better indication: to be "blessed in X" means that X will bless you. It goes on to describe the reaction that those in whom someone is blessed will have when they hear the name of the blessed one.
- Tobit 4:12 is yet another sense: to be "blessed in X" means to receive blessing in the form of X.

These words are the beginning of the "Hail Mary" that devout Catholics recite ten times in the Rosary for every time they recite the Lord's prayer. Note how completely out of character that usage is. This is not an appeal upward from sinners to Mary as an intercessor, but rather a divine bestowal of favor downward from a holy and sovereign God to sinful Mary. Calvin:

“If Mary’s happiness, righteousness, and life, flow from the undeserved love of God, if her virtues and all her excellence are nothing more than the Divine kindness, it is the height of absurdity to tell us that we should seek from her what she derives from another quarter in the same manner as ourselves.”

### 29, *Her Fear*

Mary is troubled, not just at the appearance of the angel, but at his words.

- In Jewish culture, it was unseemly for men to address women out of their families (see Gill).
- As a modest girl, Mary would be even more on her guard against flattering words.

### 30, *Angelic Comfort*

**Fear not.**—A common reassurance from God and his messengers to his people. We know that we enjoy his favor when he bids us lay aside the fear that naturally grips guilty sinners in his presence.

### 31, *Promise and Name*

The angel’s promise echoes the words of Isa 7:14, “behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son.” LXX for “bear” is the same as “bring forth” here.

The name “Jesus” is the Greek form for Joshua, which means “Jehovah saves.” It is interesting that he gives this name, rather than continuing with “Immanuel” as Isa 7:14 does. We will see this same shift in the message to Joseph in Matt 1.

We noted in our studies in Genesis that the promise of God’s presence (throughout the Bible, not just in Genesis) is inevitably associated with delivering his people from their trials. God is with us, not to keep us company or entertain us, but to protect and save us from our sin and its consequences. Even in context in Isaiah, the name has this association with deliverance: the danger from which he was protecting them was a coalition of the northern kingdom and Syria against them, as a result of their rebellion. Messiah is Immanuel in order to be Jesus; God is with us in order to save us.

### 32-33, *OT Basis*

The five statements in these verses all take Mary back to the promise of God to David in 2 Sam 7. Trace the parallels:

2 Sam 7	Luke 1
8 Now therefore so shalt thou say unto my servant David, Thus saith the LORD of hosts, I took thee from the sheepcote, from following the sheep, to be ruler over my people, over Israel: 9 And I was with thee whithersoever thou wentest, and have cut off all thine enemies out of thy sight, and have made thee a <b>great</b> name, like unto the name of the <b>great</b> men that are in the earth.	32 He shall be <b>great</b> ,

14 I will be his father, and <b>he shall be my son.</b>	and shall be called the <b>Son of the Highest:</b>
12 And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up <b>thy seed</b> after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. 13 He shall build an house for my name, and <b>I will stablish the throne of his kingdom</b> for ever.	and the Lord God shall give unto him <b>the throne of his father David:</b>
8 ... to be ruler over my people, over <b>Israel:</b> ... 10 Moreover I will appoint a place for my people <b>Israel,</b> ... 11 And as since the time that I commanded judges <i>to be</i> over my people <b>Israel,</b>	33 And he shall reign over the house of <b>Jacob for ever;</b>
13 ... I will stablish the throne of his <b>kingdom for ever.</b> 15 But my mercy shall <b>not depart</b> away from him, as I took <i>it</i> from Saul, whom I put away before thee. 16 And thine house and thy <b>kingdom</b> shall be established <b>for ever</b> before thee: thy throne shall be established <b>for ever.</b>	and of his <b>kingdom</b> there shall be <b>no end.</b>

The first two titles emphasize his deity. The second and third emphasize his humanity, and the last three his rule.

**He shall be great.**—In 2 Sam 7:9, God told David, “have made thee a great name, like unto the name of the great *men* that *are* in the earth.” But the simple predication “he is great” goes further, as seen in the Psalms: echoes a common theme in the Psalms: (Note that three of these are explicitly assigned to David, while the others are unsigned and could be by him as well.)

- “Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised,” Psa 48:1; Psa 145:3 (David); 1 Chr 16:25 (David)
- “Thou art great,” Psa 86:10 (David)
- “Great is our Lord,” Psa 147:5
- “The Lord is great,” Psa 135:5; 96:4; 99:2

As a simple declaration, this expression is tantamount to a declaration of Jesus’ deity. Cf. Simon’s claim in Acts 8:9. Something similar was said of John the Baptist (1:15), but there the angel adds, “in the sight of the Lord,” making him subordinate to the Lord. No such qualification is added in the promise to Mary.

**He shall be called the Son of the Highest.**—This title has two elements.

- “The Highest” is a name for God (Psa 18:13; 87:5; Luke 1:35, 76; 6:35), the Hebrew (*elyon*, usually translated “Most High.” This is the name by which Melchizedek identified God to Abraham in Gen 14:18. Thus this is a very formal way of saying, “Son of God.”
- The notion of “Son of God,” in turn, leads to 2 Sam 7:14, where the Lord says to David, “I will be his father, and he shall be my son.”

**the throne of his father David.**—This title identifies him as son of man, as surely as the previous one makes him the son of God. It also introduces the notion of ruling, which is continued in the next two titles.

**He shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever.**—Here we have the objects and the duration of his rule.

**Of his kingdom there shall be no end.**—Once again, the duration is emphasized.

### **34-37, *Spiritual Conception***

The angel describes to her how this promised birth will come about, not by the ordinary means of generation, but by the work of God's Holy Spirit.

### **38, *Obedience***

The course that the angel is describing is a very serious one. To those around, it will appear that Mary has been unfaithful to her betrothal vows, and she will be in danger of execution (Deut 22). Even if she is not, the rumors will cling to her (as we can see in John 8:41, when the Jews said to Jesus, "we be not born of fornication," implying that he was). Yet she yields herself to the divine purpose.

### **38, *End of the Vision***

**The angel departed.**—It would have been nice if the angel had stayed by her throughout the time she carried the baby and gave birth. But he departed. God uses spiritual mountaintops to encourage and guide us, not as daily sustenance.

## **Matthew 1, Joseph**

It is striking that the same basic elements we saw in the annunciation to Mary recur in the announcement to Joseph.

### **18-19, *His Fear***

Joseph, like Mary, was emotionally distraught, for the angel must say to him, "fear not" (v.20). In his case, the upset came not from the angelic appearance, but from the news that his bride was with child. We see his condition in the tension between two characteristics that are ascribed to him.

- On the one hand, he was "a just man," that is, righteous, and so committed to comply with the law of God.
- On the other, he was compassionate, "not willing to make her a public example" by accusing her publicly and having her stoned. Contrast the attitude of Judah toward Tamar in Gen 38:24, "bring her forth and let her be burned."

### **20, *Angelic Appearance***

To him as to Mary, an angel is sent to explain what is happening.

## **20, Angelic Comfort**

As to Mary, so to Joseph, the angel says, "Fear not."

## **20-21, Spiritual Conception, Promise, and Name**

The angel gives Joseph a much-abbreviated version of the message he gave Mary; that her conception is due to the HS, and that the child is to be named Jesus. (He does specify the meaning of the name to Joseph; Mary received no such explanation).

## **22, OT Basis**

I've always thought that this is Matthew's comment, not what the angel said, as most claims about things being fulfilled are. But examination of the phrase "this was done that it might be fulfilled" in Matthew shows that it can be spoken by the character rather than the narrator.

Characters in the gospel do talk about fulfillment (26:54). The precise phrase *touto gegonen hina pl8rwq8/pl8rwqwsin*, which occurs three times in Matthew, is once unambiguously on the Lord's lips (26:56) and could be on the speaker's lips in the other two cases (here and 21:4). It seems best to take it this way here. When it is narrative, the purpose clause *hina/hopws pl8rwq8* supports a clause in the narrative. Only these three instances stand independent by virtue of the *touto gegonen*, and it is reasonable to see them as spoken by the characters.

Thus Joseph as well as Mary receives a scriptural confirmation of what the angel is saying. In his case, the reassurance comes from Isa 7, the prophecy of the virgin birth of the Messiah.

The critical point is that a supernatural appearance alone is not sufficient to constrain these saints. The angel may get their attention and comfort their fears, but it is the authority of the word of God that persuades them to obey.

Compare the role of the Holy Spirit today. He gets our attention and comforts us, but the authority for what he says is always confirmed by the scriptures that he calls to our attention.

## **24a, End of the Vision**

Joseph's encounter was in a dream. When he awoke, the angel disappeared. Like Mary, he does not have the ongoing presence of the angel to buoy him through the ridicule that must have surrounded the family.

## **24b, Obedience**

Yet he, like Mary, obeyed.

## **Applications to Us Today**

In our daily walk, the Lord comes to us just as he did to Mary and Joseph.

**Our fear.**—Like Mary and Joseph, we are confronted daily with fears, apprehensions, and trials. In the 60's, student activists used to say, "If you're not angry, you're not paying attention." We might say more broadly, "If you're not afraid, you're not paying attention." Yoda had it right when he told Luke Skywalker, who said he was not afraid, "You will be, Luke. You will be."

The world is filled with sin and turmoil, and any sensitive person must feel the strain. You have your battles and trials; I have mine, but none of us is free from the burdens of living in this life.

**Divine comfort.**—Into our perplexed world, the Lord speaks now, as he did then. In OT times, his messenger was typically an angel. Today, it is more regularly his Holy Spirit, the one the Savior has designated particularly as our comforter. But the message is the same: “Fear not.”

**Focus on the Lord Jesus.**—The promises to both Mary and Joseph drew their attention to the Lord Jesus, and his role as Savior. No true heavenly messenger will guide our gaze anywhere other than to him. Preoccupation with the Holy Spirit or with angels is only a sign that one does not understand the function of either of these entities. We need to be reminded that it is the Lord who saves us, not only from our sin but from every other threat that we face every day.

**Scriptural reinforcement.**—The Holy Spirit may use many different ways to capture our attention, but ultimately he will draw our attention to the Word of God as the authority and persistent reminder of the Lord’s care for us.

**End of the mountaintop.**—If there are to be highs in our spiritual lives, there must also be times that are more routine, when we do not feel the immediacy of the Spirit’s working. This does not mean that the world has come to an end. The Lord is still with us. We still have the Scriptures that he has brought to our attention to guide us.

**Ongoing obedience.**—What matters for us is that we continue to conduct ourselves in obedience to what he has revealed to us.