

Called to Ministry Class 4
Epiphany to Mary about Jesus
Luke 1:26-38

The Call of Mary to bear a son before she was married was way out of the ordinary...in fact, it was not only a unique calling in all of human history, but it was of great danger to her in every way. God sometimes calls his people to dangerous assignments...this is clearly one of those. Mary was engaged but not married. See Deut 22:23. To be pregnant out of wedlock would cost her husband (they were legally betrothed, the Bride Price had been paid, Mal 2:14), his standing in the community and because they were observant Jews she would be clearly unacceptable as a wife. She was marrying the heir to the throne, even though, no one from the House of David had occupied the throne for 6 centuries...still she would be unacceptable, and would bear the stain of this great sin as would her son. She could have been stoned to death as an adulteress Lev 20:10. Her son could never be acceptable as a messianic candidate. She would likely be driven from her family as one who had brought shame to her father's house. She and her son would likely be destitute and seen as outcasts permanently.

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In our own times, skeptics point to the immaculate conception of Jesus, as a peculiar Hellenistic syncretism, as Greek mythology and Judaism are blended into this strange stew that is Christianity. The idea of a god fathering a child by a human woman is thought to be straight out of Greek paganism. Now it must be understood that Hellenization does take place in Christianity...but later and not in the doctrine of the incarnation...as is often thought today. This is written to Theophilus, possibly a Roman Governor, and perhaps patron and sponsor of Luke's writing. But Luke is not trying to build bridges to the Greek world here, but seeks to make clear to Theophilus and to us that the God of Israel is keeping his ancient promises in this strange story. See particularly Is 7:14; 9:6,7; Jer 23:5ff; 33:14ff.

Again we see the same four step pattern of revelation in Mary's call:

Entrance of Divine epiphany: The appearance of Gabriel 1:26...The same angel seen in the epiphany to Zechariah and to Daniel in Dan 8:16; 9:21, is sent from the very council of God. There are many similarities between this appearance and the appearance to Zechariah but also significant differences. The great and extraordinary work of the conception of John to end Elizabeth's barrenness is to be surpassed by the virginal conception of Jesus. She is told that she has found favor from God...Gen 6:8; 18:3; 39:21; 43:14; Jud 6:17; 1 Sam 1:18; 2 Sam 15:25.

Empowerment of the Spirit: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you." Luke 1:35...just as was experienced by Zechariah that he was filled with the Holy Spirit as the Tabernacle was in Ex 40 and the Temple was in 1 Kings 8, so Mary is promised that she will be 'overshadowed' by the Spirit. Had a great exchange of texts with a member of the class as this phrase captivated her mind as she looked for other overshadowings. Can you think of any more?

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Endowment with Self-consciousness: “He will be **great** and will be called the Son of the Most High.” Luke 1:32...Jesus as John will know His calling and now ahead of time Mary will have the meaning of her life defined by the child she would bring into the world...who would be the Anointed One, the Messiah, the King of Israel. In the OT it is almost exclusively God who is spoken of as ‘great’..notice that Zechariah was told that John would be ‘great before the Lord’. Only Moses and Mordecai are described as ‘great’ in the OT and this may be an allusion to Mic 5:4 where the messiah is referred to as great.

Explanation of Mission: “The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever.” Luke 1:32-33...God is calling this child into being in this way to fulfill his promises to Israel made through Moses and the prophets...to fulfill God’s mission and God’s mission for Israel. This king would somehow reign forever...there would be no other king for Israel from the time he took the throne.

Sometimes God calls people of prominence and sometimes people who outwardly appear to have no notoriety or fame or power to participate in things of massive importance. Mary’s Hebrew name was Miriam(means Excellence), like Moses’ sister. Like Miriam before her she would sing a song that is sung to this present day, see Ex 15 and Luke 1:47ff. Mary would serve as the model disciple before Jesus entered into His public ministry. Her statement, “Let it be to me according to your word.”...is the declaration of faith and trust in the present based on God’s promises for the future. Like Miriam she would play a significant role in this second Exodus type rescue.

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As Luke tells Mary's story, he tells it in relation to Elizabeth's and Zechariah's story...we are told that it was in the sixth month that Gabriel visited her in Nazareth...it was the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy...and Luke sees that the extraordinary thing God did for Elizabeth and Zechariah could not be understood except in relation to the even more 'impossible' thing God did for Mary. These miracle children were not only related by blood but by mission...The Larger Story of God's commitment to rescue his lost creation. Each of us discovers along the way, as God calls us, that we are the object of God's rescue AND that we are to be instruments of God's rescue of others. Our lives and journeys are connected to God and to each other and to those still lost in sin...as we all were and we still battle against.

Mary is remarkable in so many ways...she could be as young a 12 years old...likely no older than 15 or so...she is an observant Jew from the family of the priesthood on at least one side of her family, she is engaged for a year or so to the rightful heir to the throne of David...and may actually be part of the line of David on the other side of her family. She lives in Nazareth, a place that is somewhat out of the way, but perched on the side of a small ridge that overlooks the Jezreel Valley, the place of the great battles and the anticipated battle of Armageddon. She lives in an area rich in the history of God's mighty acts of signs and wonders in the time of Elijah and Elisha. She believes and understands the Bible to teach that she lives in a pivotal time in Israel's and world history Dan 9. She knows the Bible well, has memorized large portions of it, she thinks Biblically, and sees the world and her own life through the lens of the OT.

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She now has been included in the most audacious plot in the history of the world. She will bear the Messiah into the world, all of God's promises for which Israel has waited for centuries will be fulfilled in and through her son...and she will be there to see it. He will be known as the Son of God, see 2 Sam 7:14ff and 1 Chr 22:9-10; Ps 2:7; 89:26...fulfilled initially in Solomon but now will be fulfilled in the child God will give to her. The rescue of the entire world will come down to the child she will bear in her womb. She is prepared to trust God with everything she is and has and will ever have. She willingly and even joyfully places herself in God's hands to make of her life whatever he will. She is determined to live the adventure God has planned, wherever it leads, whatever it costs, convinced that God's plan is better than anything that is not God's plan.

But still we will see how God condescends to Mary and Joseph to meet them in doubt at the fantastic nature of the promises God makes to them and through them to all of us. It is a most unlikely story...who could imagine it, or dream it up...it ties together people, places, things across millennia, over the spans of empires and kingdoms, the rise and fall of nations and the comings and goings of kings.