

**Exegetical Notes, Luke 1:26-35 & Matthew 1:18-25**  
**The Plan Revealed**

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**Luke 1:26-35**

**Verse 26**

*In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee,*

- “The sixth month” may refer to the sixth month of the year or to the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy. Verse 36 connects the reference and strongly suggests that the reference is to the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy not to the month of the year.
- “Gabriel” is one of three angels mentioned in the Bible. The other two are Michael and Lucifer. The name means “mighty man of God.” Gabriel is the angel who carries the message of Christ’s birth throughout the Christmas story.
- “Nazareth in Galilee” was an obscure little village with no real significance. However, the reference to it lends reality to the story. It is now located in time and space. It happened in the sixth month at this particular place. It is, thereby, set in history.

**Verse 27**

*to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin’s name was Mary.*

- Again the historical setting is reported. This time by telling us the names of the individuals involved. This event happened at this particular time, in this particular place, to these particular people.
- “Joseph” (see Matthew 1:19-24.) We have no other information about Joseph. After the birth and childhood stories about Jesus, Joseph disappears from the record. Beyond this, and that he was descended from David (see Matthew 1:16 and Luke 3:23) other information about Joseph is based on speculation and church tradition. It is to be noted that the Matthew and Luke genealogies of Jesus list different

names for Joseph's father. Scholars suggest that Joseph's father was known by two names, one was probably his given name and the other the name by which he was known.

- Even though some scholars believe that Luke's genealogy traces Jesus' descent through Mary, we know very little about Mary. We know that her close relative was Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist. But we do not know her family of origin, her age, etc. All such information is based on the traditions of the church, not the Scripture.
- One fact that is made clear in this passage is that Mary was a virgin. We are told so twice in this verse. The Greek word which stands behind the English word, "virgin," means a person who has had no sexual experience. The virginal conception of Jesus Christ is an essential doctrine of the church proclaimed without explanation or excuse by the Bible. If it did not occur, as some modern theologians argue, then the Biblical record is false in this and cannot be trusted as truth in any part.

### **Verse 28**

***The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you."***

- Gabriel greets Mary with great respect and announces to her the good news that she is highly favored. The explanation of her favor is in the next sentence. She is highly favored because God is with her.

### **Verse 29**

***Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be.***

- It seems odd that Mary would receive the good news of God's favor and be troubled by it and that she would be suspicious of the nature of the angel's greeting. Perhaps it is best to understand her reaction as being overwhelmed by what was happening to her and afraid of what she could not comprehend.
- It is also to be noted that everyone to whom the angel appears has a similar reaction. Perhaps this is the normal human response to an angelic visit.

### **Verse 30**

***But the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God.”***

- The angel quickly reassures Mary that her fear is misplaced. She should not be afraid because she is in God’s favor.

### **Verse 31**

***“You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus.”***

- Mary is unmarried, only betrothed to marry Joseph. She is virgin. This news could hardly have come to Mary without causing her some concern.
- The name Jesus means “savior.”

### **Verse 32 - 33**

***“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, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.”***

- The title, “Son of the Most High,” conveys that Jesus is (1) the divine Son of God (God is called the “Most High” in both the Old and the New Testaments, and (2) the Messiah of Israel.
- This second fact is confirmed by the promised granting of David’s throne to Jesus (see 2 Samuel 7:13,16, Psalm 2:6-7, 89:26-27, Isaiah 9:6-7) and by the eternal nature of his kingdom and his reign.
- Mary is being granted the favor every Hebrew girl dreamed of. She will be the mother of the Messiah.

### **Verse 34**

***“How will this be,” Mary asked the angel, “since I am a virgin?”***

- Mary’s question presents the great dilemma. This plan cannot work because it is impossible. She is a virgin. This is the stumbling block that is both illogical and unscientific. God’s plan cannot work because Mary is a virgin.
- Once again the fact of Mary’s virginity is presented as historical fact.

### **Verse 35**

***The angel answered, “The Holy Spirit will come upon 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.”***

- The angel gives Mary an explanation as to how all this will be accomplished. However, the explanation lacks detail. We are to know that God has it all worked out but we are still to understand that it is mystery beyond our comprehension.
- It is to happen in this way so as to affirm Jesus' divinity. As a result of this mystery, he will be known as God's son.

## **Matthew 1:18-25**

### **Verse 18**

*This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together,*

- This is the story of Jesus' birth according to the Gospel of Matthew. While the details of Matthew's telling of the story are not the same as those recorded in the other Gospels, the details from the telling in each Gospel dovetail. The result is that the full story can only be known by reading the story in all the Gospels. Over the centuries, scholars have fitted the timing of the events told in each Gospel into a unified history. However, in Matthew we will only learn those details of the story that interested Matthew.
- Jesus' mother's name was Mary. We know very little about Mary except what is told us here and in Luke 1:26-38. In Luke's details we learn that Mary was a virgin; that she was highly favored by God and thus chosen for this role; that she was afraid when the angel came to her; that she questions the process by which she would become Jesus' mother, but eventually submitted to her involvement in the plan of God. Scholars say that Mary was just 14 years old when all this happened to her.
- Mary was pledged to be married to a man named Joseph. This means that they were betrothed but in the Biblical sense. The betrothal period was much more formal than is our engagement period today. During this time the woman was considered the man's wife. Thus Matthew calls Mary, Joseph's wife and he, her husband. The betrothal could only be broken by a decree of divorce. In fact, in that time, betrothed people were considered married in every way but one, sexual relations were forbidden.

- We know less about Joseph than we do about Mary. In both Matthew and Luke, Jesus' official lineage is traced through Joseph. That means that Joseph was considered Jesus' legal father even though he was not Jesus' physical father.

***she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit.***

- Matthew does not tell us the details about the angel's visit, etc. See Luke 1:26-38 for those details. All Mathew says is that during the betrothal period Mary was discovered to be pregnant.
- That the baby was the product of union between Mary and the Holy Spirit is the mystery of Jesus' conception. No theory or explanation can fully explain how this happened. It happened as part of the will and plan of God.
- Though the issue is not raised here, Luke makes it very clear that Mary was a virgin, meaning that she conceived Jesus without having had any sexual experience.

**Verse 19**

***Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.***

- The period of betrothal could not be ended except by a decree of divorce. When Joseph learned that Mary was pregnant, he knew that he was not the father of her baby since they had not had sexual contact. His decision to divorce Mary was based on this fact.
- He did not want to expose her to the public. If he did, Mary would have been stoned to death, as this was the punishment given to a woman who had illicit sexual relationships. See Deuteronomy 22:23-24. Certainly the reason for the divorce would become obvious in time. Joseph's hope was that Mary would marry the baby's father and thus escape the punishment she was due according to the Law of Moses.
- The reason for Joseph's action was that he was "righteous." He was known as a man who followed the Law of Moses and the Tradition of the Elders. If he married Mary, under these circumstances, his reputation would be ruined.
- He was also a merciful man and not one overcome by the pride of his reputation. Though it was important to him to maintain his reputation, he also thought of Mary.

## Verse 20

***But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said,***

- After Joseph had determined that he would divorce Mary, an angel appeared to him. The angel is a messenger from God sent specifically to Joseph with a message for Joseph's ears alone. Therefore, this is Joseph's testimony. No one but Joseph could have known of this event.
- The angel came to Joseph "in a dream." In Greek, as in Hebrew, the word for dream and vision is the same. God can use dreams to impart vision if he chooses. In the dream the angel spoke to Joseph.

***"Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife,***

- The angel addresses Joseph as the "Son of David," recognizing Joseph's direct descent from the great king and the promised father of the Messiah.
  1. The angel tells Joseph that he should not be afraid to marry Mary and take her into his house as his wife.

***"because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.***

- Mary may have told Joseph this. It is certain that she knew all this. See Luke 1:26-38. However, it is not likely that Joseph would have believed the story from Mary. However, the angel now confirms what is impossible to explain.

## Verse 21

***"She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."***

- The angel confirms the message that Mary received in Luke 1:31 that she will bear a son.
- Joseph is then given detailed instructions about the naming of the baby. Naming the baby was the duty/right of the father. By assuming this function, Joseph accepts responsibility for being Jesus' father.
- Under normal circumstances the baby would be named after his father or given the name of one of his ancestors. However, in this case, Joseph is instructed to give the baby a name that does not come from his family.
- The baby is to be called "Jesus," the Greek/English form of the Hebrew name Joshua. It means "savior" in Hebrew and thereby

establishes the function that this baby will perform when grown. He is to be called “savior” for “he will save his people from their sin.”

### **Verse 22**

***All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet:***

- The prophet is Isaiah. See Isaiah 7:14.
- The phrase, “this took place to fulfill” is used twelve times in the Gospel of Matthew. Each time it is used, its purpose is to show that some event in the story was foretold by one of Israel’s great prophets. This is to help us understand that these events were of God and not of man.

### **Verse 23**

***“The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel,” -- which means, “God with us.”***

- Isaiah says that a young woman will give birth to a son. The Hebrew word that Isaiah uses is the word that means young woman. It is not the word that means virgin. However, the word used in Luke 1:27 and 34 is the Greek word that means virgin. The word used here is also the Greek word that means virgin. Therefore, despite the word which is used in Isaiah, the New Testament clearly and consistently uses the Greek word which establishes the virgin birth of Jesus Christ beyond any doubt. If the virgin birth is not historical fact, then all of the New Testament is founded on a lie. However, that is not so, and the doctrine of the virgin birth is essential to Christian faith.
- What is prophesied according to Matthew is the virgin conception of Jesus Christ and that the child born to the virgin would be male.
- Often we get confused in this passage because we think that the name, Immanuel, was prophesied to be the baby’s name but Joseph was just told to name the baby Jesus. What is prophesied is that the baby born to the virgin “**will be called** Immanuel.” The fact is that while his given name is Jesus, people do call him Immanuel just as the prophet said.

### **Verse 24**

***When Joseph woke up,***

- This tells us that Joseph’s vision came in the form of a dream for he was asleep. See notes on verse 20 above.

***he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife.***

- Like Mary in Luke 1, Joseph was immediately obedient to the command of God that came to him in a dream. He did exactly as he was told.

### **Verse 25**

***But he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.***

- The fact that Joseph and Mary abstained from sexual relations until after the birth of Jesus is designed to re-establish the importance of Jesus' virgin conception. This doctrine is essential to confirm the truth that Jesus was the Son of God.

That Joseph named the baby Jesus shows his devotion to doing exactly as he was commanded and highlights the historical function that Jesus played in the plan of God. He is our Savior!

(These exegetical notes are the foundational study for the sermon entitled *The Plan Revealed*. They have been prepared by the Reverend Doctor Charles H. Jensen, Senior Pastor at Cornerstone Fellowship, Coatesville Pennsylvania. All rights are reserved by Dr. Jensen and *Cornerstone Fellowship*.)