

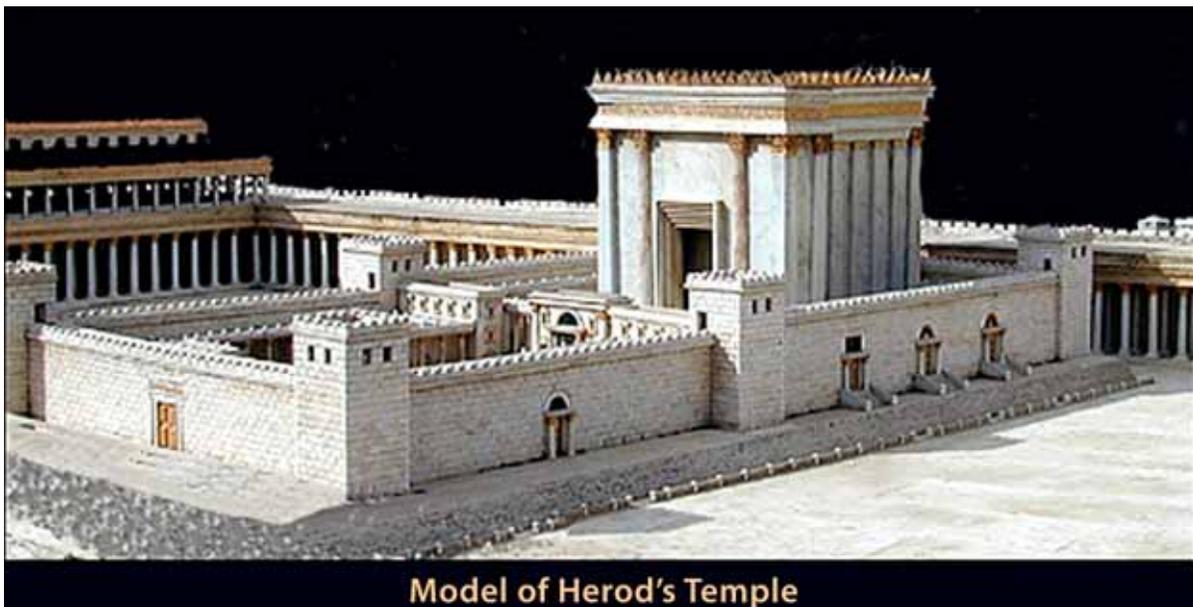
Gabriel Visits Mary

At the conclusion of our last study Zacharias, the priest, was inside the Holy Place of Herod's Temple. Upon entering he would have made preparations to offer incense and maybe prayed. We do not know when he saw the angel standing to the right of the Altar of Incense. But when Zacharias saw Gabriel, he was full of fear. So Gabriel encouraged him not to be fearful and told him that his prayers had been answered. Zacharias and his wife would have a son, and his name would be John. John would be filled with the Holy Spirit before he was born, and his future ministry would be in the spirit and power of Elijah. Most fathers would have been excited and thrilled that their request for a son had been granted, but not Zacharias. He complained, "How will I know this for certain? For I am an old man and my wife is advanced in years." (Luke 1:18). The Greek language suggests that Zacharias thought he was too old. Apparently, Zacharias and his wife had been praying for a long time and now he could not believe this was possible. He might have stopped praying but Elizabeth had not. Elizabeth was still hoping (v. 25).

THE RIGHT TIME. God had apparently waited for years before answering their prayer. He waited until Zacharias was able to offer incense in the Holy Place. He waited until Zacharias was an old man and his wife was "advanced in years." She was much older than he was.

Zacharias said to the angel, "How will I know this for certain?
For I am an old man and my wife is advanced in years." (NASB)
Luke 1:18

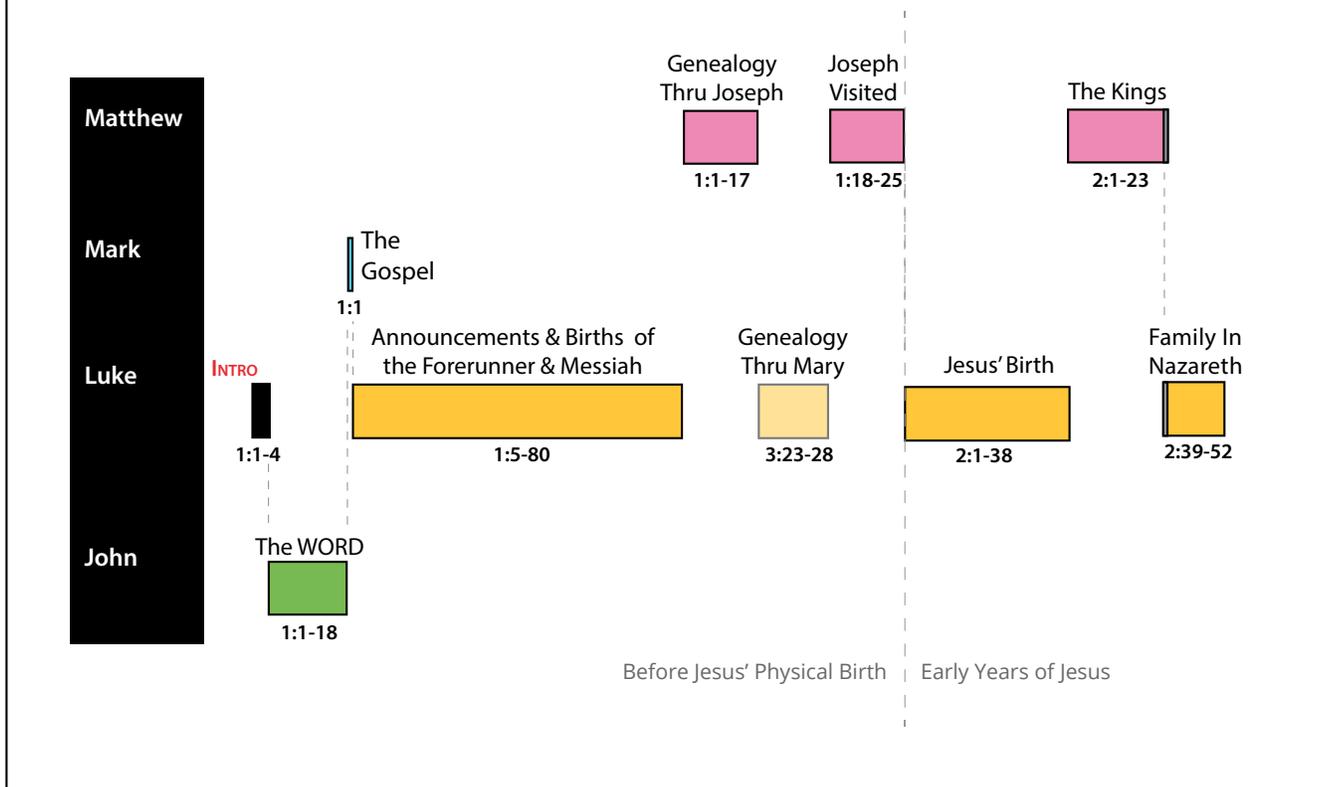
But God's timing was right. He waited until it was time for the birth of the Messiah. God is in the business of perfectly timing when He grants our requests. He waits until the "right time." He uses circumstances to accomplish His purpose in our lives. Sometimes He is more interested in what is best for us than in our comfort. So He waited to grant Zacharias and Elizabeth their urgent petition. He accomplished His purpose and blessed them at the same time. The forerunner was coming and the Messiah was near.



Model of Herod's Temple

Life and Heart of Jesus

Before Jesus' Physical Birth - Early Years of Jesus



When Gabriel announced the birth of John, Zacharias could not believe what he had heard. Instead of rejoicing, he did not believe. Instead of thanks and gratitude, he doubted.

I know a young man who had no hearing in his right ear and several years ago was going deaf in his left ear. He had visited highly recommended ear specialists in an attempt to stop the loss of his hearing. The doctors told him that there was nothing they could do for him until he was legally deaf. The doctors said that he had to lose 90-95 percent of his hearing before they could do anything for him.

Eventually, his Ménière's disease worsened in his left ear and progressively he lost most of the hearing in the remaining ear. Now he qualified for cochlear implants. A cochlear implant is a small electronic device that is placed inside the head and replaces the inner ear. The patient is able to hear because of a hearing device on the outside of the head that is connected to the implant. The patient is able to hear again as if he had a normal ear. This was great news until he heard

that the operation would cost \$144,000 and it would not be covered by the medical insurance. So he started asking God to "rain money down from heaven." God granted his request. The hospital, doctor, and the manufacturer of the cochlear implants agreed to cut their costs to \$40,000. His family helped pay for the operation. He continued to ask God to pay for the operation. Just recently God emptied His bucket when it was discovered the insurance company had paid even the \$40,000. God rained money from heaven for him. Originally, the insurance company had refused to pay everything, but when God grants a request, He grants a request. Nothing is impossible with God. The young man believed, and God honored his faith.

LESSON IN FAITH. God tells us that we need to live by faith.

Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord - for we

walk by faith, not by sight - we are of good courage . . . (NASB) 2
Cor. 5:6-8

And James 4:2 tells us that we do not have because we do not ask. That means God has not planned everything in our lives. Our prayers can change things. Zacharias and Elizabeth might not have been the parents of John the Baptist if they had not asked for a child.

Faith is a big issue to God. Faith is required to become a Christian. We are told that we must believe in Jesus.

For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. (NASB) John 3:16

Why is this true? We are not sure, but it might be traced back to Adam and Eve. Sin entered the world because Eve did not believe God. Is it possible that because they did not believe that God now requires us to believe? Whatever the answer might be, God wants His righteous ones to believe Him. Faith honors God.

Zacharias had a test of faith and he failed it. But it was a critical test since he was a righteous man (v.6) who should have believed God. Therefore, Gabriel responded with this,

The angel answered and said to him, "I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news. And behold, you shall be silent and unable to speak until the day when these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their proper time." (NASB) Luke 1:19-20

When Gabriel answered, the Greek language tells us that Gabriel responded strongly and emphasized the fact that he was Gabriel and he represented God. I wonder how Zacharias felt after his response? Did he realize his mistake? Even if he did, he was too late. Gabriel was now going to give him a sign that the announcement was real. The sign was a simple one. Zacharias would not be able to speak until his son was born. That is a sign we know that Zacharias understood. That was a miracle.

HONOR TO GOD. Luke records very little about the conversation between Gabriel and Zacharias. This is normal in the gospels. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John do not attempt to tell us everything that occurred or everything that was said. They give us the highlights. The next verse implies that Gabriel and Zacharias spent a long time together because the people were worried.

The people were waiting for Zacharias, and were wondering at his delay in the temple. But when he came out, he was unable to speak to them; and they realized that he had seen a vision in the temple; and he kept making signs to them, and remained mute. (NASB) Luke 1:21-22

But when he came out, they understood that he had had an encounter with God or an angel. Zacharias now knew what it was like not to be able to speak.

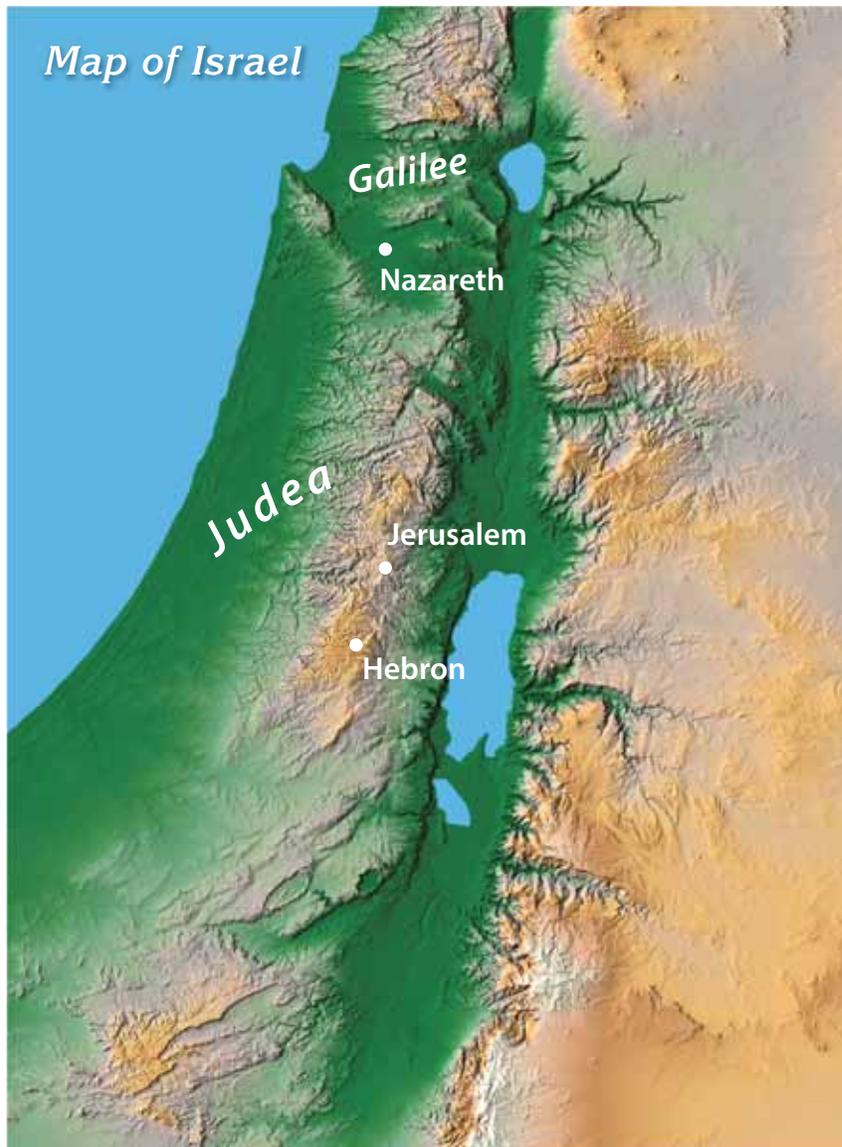
Zacharias did not go home immediately. He remained in Jerusalem in order to complete his priestly responsibilities.

When the days of his priestly service were ended, he went back home. After these days Elizabeth his wife became pregnant, and she kept herself in seclusion for five months, saying, "This is the way the Lord has dealt with me in the days when He looked with favor upon me, to take away my disgrace among men." (NASB) Luke 1:23-25

When his ministry was over, he went back home. Luke 1:39 tells us that Zacharias and Elizabeth lived in the hill country. Since they were of priestly descent, many believe that they came from Hebron (Josh. 21:13) or the surrounding region.

Sometime after he arrived at home, his wife became pregnant. It is interesting that she kept herself in seclusion for five months. At six months Zacharias would have had to return to Jerusalem in order to serve at the temple again. The one trip between Jerusalem and Hebron or the surrounding region was probably about one week.

It appears that she stayed home only while her husband was at home. Just imagine what it must have been like at home. Zacharias could not talk, and she must have been a



very excited woman with no one to talk to, except for him. Verse 25 tells us that she was excited, and experience tells us that she probably talked and talked with a man who could only write on a tablet. That would have been a funny scene to watch.

THE VIRGIN. In the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy, Gabriel makes a return visit to planet earth but this time to the region of Galilee and not Judah.

Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the descendants of David; and the virgin’s name was Mary. (NASB) Luke 1:26-27

He visits a teenage woman in the city of Nazareth. Nazareth was located in the southern part of Galilee. Mary was probably about twelve or fifteen years old. By Jewish custom her marriage would have been arranged by her parents. The marriage contract would have been negotiated with the parents of the prospective husband, Joseph. She was probably poor, as we will see later.

Mary was also a virgin. The Greek word used for “virgin” is PARTHENOS. It usually means virgin, but sometimes it can mean “young woman” as in 1 Cor. 7:25. Isaiah 7:14 predicted that Mary would be a virgin.

Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name



Upper Galilee Along The Israel Trail



Lower Galilee Hills by Israel Trail



Immanuel. (NASB) Isa. 7:14

The Hebrew word translated as “virgin” is ALMAH. This word means “virgin.” Some have said that Mary was not a virgin, claiming that neither PARTHENOS or ALMAH means ‘virgin.’ But Isaiah 7:14 is talking about a sign. The sign was that a “virgin” would give birth. Now that is a miracle! But a sexually experienced or married woman giving birth is not a sign. It is something to be expected. The context proves that Isaiah is talking about a virgin. Also, Mary will make it clear in a few verses that she has not been sexually active, when she says that she does not know a man.

GABRIEL’S MESSAGE. When Gabriel spoke, this humble, young girl heard gracious and kind words,

And coming in, he said to her, “Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.” (NASB) Luke 1:28

What did she hear? She did not hear, “Hail, Mary full of grace.” Gabriel did not speak those words. Those words come from the Latin Vulgate which is an inaccurate translation of the Greek. Instead Mary heard that she was favored. While every Christian is favored by our Lord God, these words imply something special. She must have wondered, “In what way am I favored?”

But she was very perplexed at this statement, and kept pondering what kind of salutation this was. The angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary; for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end.” (NASB) Luke 1:29-33

Gabriel’s message must sound like fiction. A virgin will

have a baby. No, it is not fiction. It is a divine MIRACLE! It is God intervening in history. It is God making sure that His will, His plan, His desire, His purpose is fulfilled. This son will be God in the flesh and some day He will be a king like King David. He will rule forever over the nations of the world. The Old Testament prophecies predicted that this would happen (2 Sam. 7:16; Isa. 11:1-4). He will rule forever.

But it is clear from the angel's answer that she did not doubt. She only wanted to know how it would happen. So Gabriel explained that a miracle would occur. Then he quickly encouraged her when he told her that another miracle has already occurred.

“And behold, even your relative Elizabeth has also conceived a son



MARY'S QUESTION. Then Mary asked a question that appears to express doubt.

Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I am a virgin?” The angel answered and said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy Child shall be called the Son of God.” (NASB) Luke 1:34-35

in her old age; and she who was called barren is now in her sixth month. For nothing will be impossible with God.” (NASB) Luke 1:36-37

It is not difficult for us to believe in simple miracles such as being healed, or God giving us a job. But when it comes to big miracles, as “raining down money from heaven” to pay for a \$144,000 medical bill, a senior citizen giving birth, or a virgin having a baby, we have doubts. Mary believed that which was impossible would come true. Now that is faith.

Faith is believing that God will forgive us - now that seems impossible. How can a holy God justify forgiving our sins? But He will if we believe. Jesus came to do just that and Jesus wants us to believe that He can and will do the impossible.

So Mary submitted to God's will. Mary submitted to that which seemed to be impossible.

And Mary said, "Behold, the bondservant of the Lord; may it be done to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her. (NASB) Luke 1:38

How many times have we not submitted to God's directions because we thought that His directions were flawed? Sometimes we have thought that His directions were imperfect and the result of following Him would be a mistake. That is a common error Christians make. Some years ago a young woman declared that God did not understand what He was asking her to do when it came to her husband. There was no way her marriage would be healed if she remained married and submitted to her husband. She argued that God wanted to her leave her marriage declaring that her husband had already left her emotionally. But God never approves of that reason for getting a divorce. It was clear she did not believe God could "rain money from heaven."

St. Augustine once said, "If you believe what you like in the gospel and reject what you do not like; it is not the gospel you believe, but yourself."

She was hurt and lacked faith. That is almost always the test of weak faith. It is the result of one who has not walked with God day by day. The righteous shall live by faith. Do you?

CONCLUSION. In the next verses that follow Mary will go and seek support. She will go to talk with someone - Elizabeth - that she hopes will understand her situation. She will go for spiritual counsel and guidance. She does not go because she lacks faith but because she does believe. She believes something wonderful will happen. Elizabeth says,

And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what had been spoken to her by the Lord. (NASB) Luke 1:45

Mary believed! Does she go to discover what the scriptures say about the Messiah? Elizabeth's husband, who is a priest, would know. Mary is a young woman who honors God by believing what she was told. She believed and submitted. She believed and acted accordingly. She believed and searched for more. She honored God.

. . . yet, with respect to the promise of God, [Abraham] did not waver in unbelief but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God . . . (NASB) Rom. 4:20

Faith gives glory to God. Mary honored Him. Come, let's honor God . . .