**The Gospel of Luke**

**Witness to the Gentiles - #3**

**Two Women in the Plan of Salvation**

**The Conception and the Birth of Jesus**

**Luke 1:26-38**

**Luke 1:25-38**

***26*** *In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth,* ***27****to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin’s name was Mary.* ***28*** *And having come in, the angel said to her, “Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!”*

***29****But when Mary saw him, she was perplexed at his saying, and considered what manner of greeting this was.* ***30****Then the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have favor with God.* ***31*** *And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus.* ***32****He will be great, and will be hailed the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David.* ***33****And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end.”*

***34****Then Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I do not know a man?”*

***35****And the angel answered and said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God.* ***36****Now indeed, Elizabeth your relative has also conceived a son in her old age; and this is now the sixth month for her who was called barren.* ***37****For with God nothing will be impossible.”*

***38****Then Mary said, “Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word.” And the angel departed from her.*

**Notes and studies**

The virginity of Mary is at the center of this passage; no fair reader can fail to see that. We can see this in the words Luke used to highlight this fact.

– The angel came to a virgin

– Mary was betrothed

– Mary asks how she can conceive, “*How can this be, since I do not know a man?*”

**Ancient understanding of the Virginal Conception**

***St. Cyril of Alexandria (376-444 AD)***

***Christ is One - abridged and updated by GHB***

Question: Why was Jesus born of a Virgin?

Answer: Christ somewhere said to the Jews who denied the resurrection of the dead,

“Don’t you read that *He which made man at the beginning made them male and female (Matthew 19:4)?* The Divine Paul too writes, *Marriage is honorable in all and the bed pure (Hebrews 13:4\*)*.” Then how did the Only-begotten Word of God, plan to enter the likeness of our life humans? How can he do this and disregard the laws of human nature and be born of His own flesh? He did not dishonor marriage but from un-married Virgin and unwedded, she conceived her child of the Spirit, *the Power of* God *over-shadowing her,* as it is written. (Luke 1:35). Since God therefore dishonored not marriage yea rather honored it with blessing, why did the Word being God make a Virgin with child of the Spirit the mother of His flesh?

Yet how is not the reason hereof clear to all who consider this? The Son came (as I said) or was made man, changing our humanity in Himself first unto a holy and admirable and truly marvelous birth and life: and Himself first became born of the Holy Spirit, I mean as to the flesh, in order that, the grace passing through as by a path unto ourselves too, we also are born like him not *from blood nor from the will of the flesh nor from the will of man but from God (John 1: 13)* through the Spirit our souls' new birth and spiritual conformation unto the Son Who is by Nature and truly, might call God Father and might thus our adoption abide in him un-decaying, as possessing no longer the first father, Adam, as its origin, in whom we decayed. And truly Christ said, at one time, *And call no one your father on the earth, for one is your Father who is in Heaven (Matthew 23:9),* at another, for that He therefore descended in our estate in order that He might bring us to His own God-befitting dignity, *I am going to My Father and your Father and My God and your God. (Johnn 20:17).* For *His* Father by Nature is He Who is in Heaven, *our* God; but since He that is the Son by Nature and truly has been made as we, He says that He has had Him as His God, after the manner that fits his self-emptying, and has given His own Father to us too; for it is written, *But as many as received Him He gave them authority to* be made *children of God, (John 1:12) them who believe on His Name.*  And the most wise Paul says; After whom shall we any more be formed, andbe called begotten of God through the Spirit? Whom shall we take as a first-fruit for us in this, or who at all will bring the dignity unto us? The Incarnation of the Word.

How will this be true, except He have been made flesh, i.e. man, making the human body His own by a union which may not be plucked asunder, in order that it may belong to him and not anyone's else? For thus will He send unto us too the grace of the adoption and we too shall be born of the Spirit, in that in Him first the nature of man attained this new birth. And the Divine Paul appears to me, thinking over with himself something of this sort, to have said full rightly, *For as we bear the image of the earthy we shall bear the image too of the heavenly:* and he said that *the first man* was *from out of earth, earthy, the second from out of Heaven.* But *as the earthy such* (he says) *are the earthy ones too, and as the Heavenly One such the Heavenly ones also (1 Cor 15:49, 47, 48).* For we are *earthy,* in that this earthly garment was upon us as from *the earthy* one, Adam, the curse, decay, through which the law of sin too entered in, which is in the members of our flesh: but we have been made *heavenly,* receiving this in Christ. For He being God by Nature and out of God and from above, has come down in our estate, in an wonderful and strange way, made us offspring of the Spirit according to the flesh, in order that we too as He might remain holy and un-decaying, the grace descending upon us as from out of a second beginning and root,

i.e., Him.

How do they say that He has been *made like* also *in all things to His brethren,* i.e., us? Or who at all will He be conceived to be who entered into this likeness, unless He were other by Nature and not in our estate? For that which is *made like to* any, must fully, surely be different from them and not like them but rather of other form, other nature. The Only-Begotten therefore being by Nature unlike us is said to have been *made like* when made as we, i.e. man: and this will take place rightly and solely in birth in our estate, even though in wondrous ways in Him, for He Who was Incarnate was God. Yet let it be acknowledged that the body united to Him has also human soul: for the Word being God, would not – letting alone that which is superior in us, i.e., the soul, – have taken thought for the earthy body only, but in wisdom provided for soul and body alike.”

From *Christ is One*, Cyril of Alexandria, fifth century AD, abridged and updated by GHB. See the full text translated with notes by Dr. P E Pusey on the website, “The writings of St Cyril of Alexandria.”

*\* (Previous page) Early church scholarship held that the Apostle Paul authored the Letter to the Hebrews.*

**Notes on the Text**

**Verse 29 -**  … *Mary was perplexed* …

This also means “fears,” so Gabriel says don’t be afraid.

**Verses 1:32-33 -**  *he will be great … [and given] the throne of his father David …*

Thisechoes the OT (2 Sam 7:9, 13). Now Jesus is the New David, but Jesus is going to be a King forever.

*…[son of] God the Most high…*

Glossed over by the lack of the Hebrew background, this is certainly “***El Elyon”*** Hebrew: **עליון**” not God Yahweh. Jesus being the Son of the highest God will take the whole narrative to the Gentiles.

*Joseph,* ***Yosip-yeh*** means “may Yahweh help.”

*Mary*, ***Miryam*** or ***Maryh***, means height or summit.

**Mary the New Tabernacle**

**Verse 35 -** … *the angel will come upon you … the power of the Most High will overshadow you…*

Luke used a verb for the Lord’s “overshadowing” her – Greek LXX ***episkiazen*** – that was used in the OT for the Cloud of God’s Glory that “overshadowed (or “covered”) the Tent of Meeting: “*Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle.*” (Exodus 40:34). This then describes Mary as the New Tabernacle. The “coming” (***epeleusetai***) of the Holy Spirit is a common verb used by Luke (11:22, Acts 1:8; 13:40, 14:19), and see also Ephesians 2:27 and James 5:1)

**A Letter from Philēmōn**

My dear brother,

May the joy of our Humble God the Father of our Lord Jesus rest in your heart forever. The coming of the Holy Spirit is one way of saying how our Humble God seeks us sinners, not because God is absent and then He comes. He is always present but makes His presence known in many ways. He pours joy, peace, and assurance of His mercy and kindles a spark of love in our heart like a “mustard seed” that will be watered by His Spirit so that this very little seed will grow and becomes a great tree as our Lord said.

Mary is the prototype for the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit and His eternal covering of all us. The Spirit comes upon us to give us our new birth and to nourish us so that we may become truly the brothers of the Lord Jesus.

We honor Mary as the prototype of those who become the temple of the Holy Spirit.

So my beloved brother, whenever Mary is mentioned in any hymn be aware that we are sharing the same glory and he same indwelling of the Holy Spirit with her. Be also careful that there are no ranks or higher status for the work of grace. There are no saints first class and then second class and then the rest who have no grade. Not at all, we are all the children of God. When we honor one who received a grace, we honor the Giver and keep his grace for ourselves.

Rest in his grace for this is our only shelter, here and in eternity.

Philēmōn, a child of God only by his grace.

No date, 1966.

**Luke 1:39-45 – Mary Visits Elizabeth**

***39****Now Mary arose in those days and went into the hill country with haste, to a city of Judah,* ***40****and entered the house of Zachariah and greeted Elizabeth.* ***41****And it happened, when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary that the babe leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.* ***42****Then she spoke out with a loud voice and said, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!* ***43****“But why is this granted to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?* ***44****For indeed, as soon as the voice of your greeting sounded in my ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy.”* ***45****Blessed is she who believed, for there will be a fulfillment of those things which were told her from the Lord.*

**Luke 46-56 – The Song of Mary**

***46****And Mary said: “My soul declares the greatness of the Lord,* ***47****and my spirit finds delight in God my Savior.* ***48*** *For He has regard for the lowly state of His maidservant; from now on all generations will call me blessed.* ***49****For He who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is His name.* ***50****And His mercy is on those who fear Him from generation to generation*

***51*** *He has shown strength with His arm; He has put to flight the arrogant in the conceit of their hearts.* ***52****He has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted the lowly.* ***53****He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He has sent away empty.*

***54****He has helped His servant Israel, in remembrance of His mercy,* ***55*** *as He promised our fathers, Abraham and to his seed forever.”*

***56****And Mary remained with her for three months, before returning to her house.*

**Notes on the text**

1. Mary knew about Elizabeth conception from Gabriel. This was the evidence that she has to witness.
2. At the greeting, John leaps and Elizabeth is filled with the Holy Spirit. So even now John acknowledges the Lord who is still an embryo.
3. Elizabeth, by the Holy Spirit, recognizes that Mary is pregnant, saying, “*blest is the fruit of our womb*” which echoes Genesis 30:2, Deuteronomy 7:13
4. Elizabeth saying “*the mother of my Lord*” is the earliest confession of the divinity of Jesus and of the Incarnation. This title “my Lord” comes again in Luke 20:41-44 and Acts 2:34. The OT origin is in Psalm 110:1, and was then used by Jesus himself, “*how is the Messiah son of David and David calls the Messiah, ‘My Lord’”*?
5. John leaps with joy or delight while he was only 6 months old; an unusual way of recognition.

1. The song of Mary is also called the *Magnificat*. It does not rhyme like some of the Psalms, but it contains the same theology of the Unusual God who does all things contrary to human measures.
2. *My soul declares the greatness of the Lord*, (see Ps 69:31). “My soul” in all Semitic languages means “I” and also “My spirit.” Both are the pronoun “I”, (see, Gen 6:3, Ps 143:4)
3. “*God has regard for the lowly state of His maidservant*” Mary accepted to give birth to the Messiah and this is the greatest honor. ”*How am I to carry the Messiah in my womb?*” She calls herself handmaid or maidservant, echoing 1 Samuel 1:11. It is a state of humility.

**A Note from Philemon**

“Humility is not to say “I am a sinner” as it is common in our time, but to see the greatness of God’s grace and to see that you have not done anything that makes you qualify for having God’s grace. If you say “I am a sinner,” say so not as a custom but as a confession of the great grace of God. In fact being a sinner is what makes you qualified for the grace and the mercy of God.”

1. All generations shall call Mary “blessed” because of conceiving Jesus.
2. God is not mentioned by name but by his actions: He is mighty and holy, and both attributes are used here for the fulfillment of God’s promises. Sin our favorite topic is mentioned not at all but the praise is for God’s mighty work and mercy. This is what Mary says: God “*has done great things for me, and holy is His name,* (see also Deut 10:21). *He is your God who has done these great and awesome things for you.”*

**The Holiness of God**

The holiness of God has been misunderstood over the years. In this passage of Luke we have just examined, God’s name is the Holy One. As we read in Psalm 111:2ff:

***2*** *The works of the Lord are great, sought out of all them that have pleasure therein.* ***3****His work is honorable and glorious: and his righteousness endures forever.* ***4****He has made his wonderful works to be remembered: the Lord is gracious and full of compassion.* ***5****He has given meat unto them that fear him: he will ever be mindful of his covenant.* ***6****He hath shown his people the power of his works, that he may give them the heritage of the heathen.* ***7****The works of his hands are verity and judgment; all his commandments are sure.* ***8****They stand fast for ever and ever, and are done in truth and uprightness.* ***9****He sent redemption unto his people: he has commanded his covenant for ever: holy and reverend is his name.”*

Also we read in read Isaiah 57:15:

*For thus says the High and Lofty One Who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy:*

*“I dwell in the high and holy place, with him who has a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.”*

Our mistake is that we see the Holiness of God

as a rejection and condemnation of sinners.

Question: Was Isaiah holy and righteous when he saw God according to chapter 6?

**A Note from Philemon**

If you think that the Holy God hates sinners, why did God sent His Son to save sinners? If you say that our Lord came to save us from the wrath of His Holy Father, do you know that you have denied the Holiness of Jesus? For Jesus was Holy even when he was on the cross according to the words of St Paul, that Jesus is our high priest “*who is holy and blameless undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens*” (Heb 7:26). Be aware my brother that Satan tries his best to make us afraid of our God and can use biblical words as obstacles to halt us from coming to God and thus delay our healing and our salvation.

**Two Women**

This excerpt is from the 3rd century, Origen of Alexandria, *Homilies on Luke,* on the prophecy of both Elizabeth and Mary:

“Sin began from the woman and then spread to the man. In the same way, salvation had its first beginnings from women. Thus the rest of women can also lay aside the weakness of their nature.” (Homilies 8:1).

***Pope’s Notes***

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