

## **“Why Christmas Is So Important”**

Luke 1:26-56

Take your Bible and be finding your place in Luke 1. We've been in Luke's gospel for last few weeks in a series I have given the title, “Savior for Sinners.” Luke presents us with a picture of how Jesus Christ is the Son of Man who came to seek and to save the lost. (Luke 19:10)

We're two days away from Christmas Day. Many of you will be gathered together with family and friends. For a brief window of time, our fast paced society will slow down, although right now it feels like we're in warp speed. Now I know that it will come as no surprise to you to discover that Christmas, though said to be the most wonderful time of the year, is also one of the most stressful times of the year.

I came across an article last week that said at least 65% of those who were surveyed admitted to being stressed out at Christmas time. Well, what is it that causes people so much annual agony? Nearly half of them said it involved finances. The other stress-causing factors mentioned in the article included family drama, cooking big meals, not being near family, and having to work in the retail industry.

Depending on who you ask, there are some folks who have come to detest this time of year because of all the painful memories they have. All the stress that we encounter at Christmas is really self-induced. It is not Christmas that brings so much stress—it's what we've done with it.

Christmas is the most widely celebrated holiday around the world, yet at the same time it is also the most widely misunderstood. The world's understanding of Christmas is basically as follows: if you are good, you get gifts. At least that is

what we tell our kids. Such a message is the exact opposite of the true message of Christmas which says that God gave His gift to a very undeserving world.

The true meaning behind this Christmas season goes far beyond all the festive gatherings with family and friends. It is much deeper than exchanging gifts. It shines brighter than all the decorations.

**John MacArthur** — *“Christmas honors a divine Person and remembers a divine event. It does not celebrate human achievement, but divine accomplishment. There is nothing man-made about the true Christmas story. It is the most miraculous, compelling narrative in history.”*

To fully understand Christmas, you need to understand the depth of your need. Christmas is all about God honoring His promise to send a Savior into our helpless world.

Why is Christmas so important? That is the question that I want us to ponder for a few minutes this morning. And this passage here in the first chapter of Luke that we’re going to look at gives us several reasons.

Why is Christmas so important? To begin with, it is about:

### **1. The announcement of a coming KING (1:26-33)**

*“In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin’s name was Mary.”*

The reference to the ‘sixth month’ there in verse 26 refers to Elizabeth’s pregnancy. In other words, it was in the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy, six months after Gabriel had announced that Zechariah and Elizabeth would

conceive and give birth to the forerunner. Luke is showing us the connection between the two narratives.

Don't miss the importance of what's being said in verse 26!

God sends Gabriel from heaven to Galilee, to an obscure little village named Nazareth, to deliver a message to an unknown virgin girl named Mary.

Such a fact would have drawn utter amazement from those in the first century world. Most of them weren't looking for the Messiah, but those who were most likely would have been looking for Him to appear among the religious elite in the city of Jerusalem. Yet Gabriel shows up in Galilee of all places, a rough neck part of the world. Galilee was a rugged area in the northern region of Israel some 60-70 miles away from Jerusalem. It known for its mainly Gentile population.

Quoting from Isaiah 9, Matthew writes:

**Matthew 4:15-16—“...Galilee of the Gentiles, the people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light, and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death, on them a light has dawned.”**

None of the scribes and religious authorities of the time were looking for the Messiah to show up in such an obscure place. But that is exactly where the Lord sends Gabriel—to an unlikely place, and to an unlikely person.

This is often the way God works! He chooses the foolish to confound the wise.

According to Jewish custom at the time, Mary would have been no more than 16 years old. She was 'betrothed' to a man named Joseph, and we're told more about him in Matthew's gospel account. Jewish marriage rites involved three stages—engagement, betrothal, and the ceremony.

The engagement was arranged by the parents of the bride and groom (a tradition which, as a dad who has a daughter, I wholeheartedly support bringing back;-). The betrothal period would last about one year as the future groom made preparations for his bride. The actual wedding ceremony itself would involve a banquet for all the relatives. It would last for seven days, after which the marriage would then be consummated.

Mary and Joseph are in the second stage, the betrothal period. It was just as legally binding as the marriage itself.

Notice that Gabriel's announcement to Mary involves an announcement concerning God's presence, favor, and rule.

God's presence (v. 28-29)

*“And he came to her and said, ‘Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!’ But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be.”*

Of all the things that Gabriel could have said to her initially, it is significant that he promises that the Lord's presence is with her. She was about to experience a roller coaster ride in life. The only thing that she would have to cling to was the understanding that God was with her and that God was orchestrating the events of her life to serve His purposes.

Christmas is all about Immanuel—“God With Us.” And let me tell you something right now, that all by itself ought to alleviate any stress that you're currently under. Christmas is about the presence of a holy God who is with us, who has come to take up residence among us as one of us.

God's favor (v. 30)

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

Not only is the angelic announcement a promise of God’s presence with her, but it is also an assurance of God’s grace to her. It is expressed through that word ‘favor.’

**“Favor”** — *word is ‘charis’ and means grace*

Given the fact that she was young and an unlikely person to be chosen for such a privilege, you can imagine Mary’s initial shock and dismay. God’s presence with her and God’s grace to her was to be her confidence in life.

God’s rule (v. 31-33)

*“And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.”*

Notice that the angel mentions five important facts:

- She will will conceive and bear a Son named Jesus
- He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High
- The Lord God will give to Him the throne of David
- He will be Israel’s long awaited Messiah (2 Sam. 7:13)
- His kingdom will endure forever and ever

What an announcement this is—a King is coming to reign!

## 2. The miracle of a virgin BIRTH (1:34-45)

*“And Mary said to the angel, ‘How will this be, since I am a virgin?’”*

Mary’s question isn’t one of doubt, but one of perplexity. She is genuinely perplexed as to how she will conceive and give birth, even though she hasn’t known a man. Her question is quite different from Zechariah’s back up in verse 18. His question insinuated that he needed some miraculous sign before he would believe. Mary’s inquiry here reflects confusion, not unbelief. It is a question of practicality. How would she give birth if she had not known a man? She is then let in on a profound mystery.

From the moment of our first parent’s sin in the garden, God made a promise. As He cursed the serpent, He said:

**Genesis 3:15—“I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.”**

The Scripture is clear in its claim that Jesus Christ is born of a virgin. It is what the prophets clearly foretold and it is what the gospels boldly declare.

**Isaiah 7:14—“Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call his name Immanuel.”**

The virgin birth of Christ is foundational to Christianity and it is the only way to explain how He could be both fully God and fully man. If He had a human father, He would have been just another ordinary man. And if He were just another ordinary man, He could not be the Savior. And if He is not the Savior, then there would be no gospel, no salvation, and no hope for sinners like us.

How would all of this come about? Notice that the angel answers her and says that it will be:

By the power of God's Spirit (v. 35-38)

*“The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God.”*

It would be a supernatural conception. And the language that is used here reflects the first chapter of Genesis where the Bible says God brought life into existence from nothing all through the agency of His Word and His Spirit.

**Genesis 1:1-3—“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. And God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light.”**

Just as the Spirit of God moved over the face of the deep and brought light into the dark and formless void, so also would He overshadow Mary to bring the Light of the world to humanity. And the Son that would be supernaturally conceived in her virgin womb would be unlike any other baby that has ever been born. The angel says, “The child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God.”

**“Holy”** — *free from the contamination of Adam's original sin*

As you can imagine, all of this would have been wonderful and far beyond all rational comprehension. In order to give Mary something to build her confidence, the angel provides her with a tangible illustration of the power of God. Look at what he says in verses 36-37:

*“And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. For nothing will be impossible with God.”*

She learns that God had also given Elizabeth a miraculous pregnancy, something that she could go see for herself. In other words, what man says is impossible, God says, “Let it be!” For nothing is impossible with Him.

### **Genesis 18:14—“Is anything too hard for the Lord?”**

Notice in verse 38 how Mary responds to all of this: *“And Mary said, ‘Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.’ And the angel departed from her.”*

There is no hesitation on her part, nothing wishy washy, no weighing out the pros and cons, not even a, ‘Let me get back to you,’ kind of response. She’s a submitted servant.

**“Servant”** — *refers to a bonds slave; one who has voluntarily sold himself/herself into slavery*

She is fully submitted to the will of God for her life. She willingly commits herself to God’s agenda, no questions asked. There are some lessons we can learn from these women in Luke 1 and how they respond to the will of God.

Have you ever considered what Mary would face? She is going to experience a scandalous pregnancy. With it would come the stares, the looks, the whispers of others.

**Charles Swindoll** — *“Mary felt stunned, surprised, humbled, and curious, but never once did she say, ‘This is impossible! I don’t believe what I’m hearing.’ Nor did she object, ‘There’s no way I’m going to stand before the people of*

*Nazareth and listen to them call my son illegitimate. I refuse to spend the rest of my life defending my honor!’ Quite the opposite! While not understanding all the particulars, she responded with immediate belief, complete submission, and total trust in her Lord.”*

What if she had said, “Thanks, but no thanks!” After all, it was an interruption to her plans. But instead of seeing it all as an unwelcome imposition, she is willing to bear the reproach of Christ. And in this way, Mary becomes an example of obedient discipleship—“I am His servant!”

To the praise of God’s grace (v. 39-45)

*“In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah, and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth.”*

She has to go see Elizabeth and tell her the good news. No doubt she wants to see Elizabeth’s baby bump for herself and celebrate what God has graciously done.

Look at what happens in verse 41:

*“And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, and she exclaimed with a loud cry, ‘Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.”*

No sooner than Mary has arrived, Elizabeth is filled with the Holy Spirit and breaks out in spontaneous praise. And her words will also serve as confirmation

to Mary concerning all that she has been told. No less than three separate times does Elizabeth use the term ‘blessed’ to refer to Mary. She is extolling the grace of God. Mary is to give birth to the incarnate Son of God, and by illumination of the Holy Spirit, Elizabeth recognizes it.

No sooner does Elizabeth hear Mary’s greeting than does the baby in her own womb leaps. The sense is that before Elizabeth could even return the greeting, baby John leaps for joy within her.

**“Leaped”** — *a word used to describe skipping or leaping as that of sheep in an open field*

I’ll tell you what this is—it is John the Baptist’s very first prophecy! He is already fulfilling the purpose that God has for him, and from his mother’s womb no less. Let me tell you something right now. This ought to serve as an eye opener to anyone who would support the notion of abortion and the wicked ideas behind it that refuse to acknowledge the humanity of a baby growing inside his mother’s womb. While the world around us wants to celebrate the activities of Planned Parenthood, God chose to bring blessing into the world through an ‘unplanned’ parenthood, though He had planned it all from the foundation of the world.

Think about it. God entered our world through a virgin womb, first in embryonic form. He was in gestation for nine months where He began to form tiny little hands, tiny little feet, a tiny little heart began to beat. Those little hands would one day take five loaves and two small fish and feed a multitude of thousands. Those tiny little feet would one day walk upon the Sea of Galilee as if it were pavement. That tiny little heart would beat with compassion for a world of lost humanity.

Those same hands and feet would take the nails for me. That same heart would literally burst in Jesus' chest as He suffered and endured the wrath of God while on the cross.

Why is Christmas important? Because it is all about:

### **3. The unfolding of a redemptive PLAN (1:46-56)**

Had the Son of God not come the way that He did, we would all be in our sins. Redemption would be an illusive mystery. But He came! Well, in verse 46 notice how Mary goes on to acknowledge that all of this is part of God's unfolding drama of redeeming the fallen members of Adam's race. She rejoices in God as she also recognizes that the Child she will soon give birth to is the fulfillment of God's redemptive plan.

Cause for personal worship (v. 46-49)

*"And Mary said, 'My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name.'"*

This passage is known as the Magnificat, taken from the Latin translation of the expression Mary uses there in verse 46. This is her song of praise, the reflex of her worshipful heart in deep gratitude to the One who showed her grace.

**"Magnifies"** — *to make great; to enlarge*

Literally, she is saying, "My soul enlarges the Lord!" Now obviously you and I can't make God any bigger than He already is. However, He can be 'enlarged' in your heart and life through personal worship. (illus. of magnify lens)

**A.W. Tozer** — *“The essence of idolatry is the entertainment of thoughts about God that are unworthy of Him...What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.”*

Mary says, “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.” As God is enlarged in her thinking, He is also savored and enjoyed in her heart.

**John 4:23**—**“But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship Him.”**

Worship is a matter of both the mind and the emotions. It isn't a matter of outward ritual, but instead is internal and from the heart. As the mind contemplates the truth about who God is, He is enlarged and magnified. It then results in passionate love and devotion from deep within the heart of the worshiper.

And by the way, Mary is using present tense verbs—‘My soul magnifies, my spirit rejoices.’ It suggests that worship happened naturally and continuously in the flow of her life.

In other words, Mary is saying that she worships God with all that she is. And notice why as she gives four personal reasons:

- He has looked on the humble estate of His servant
- From now on, all generations will call me blessed
- He who is mighty has done great things for me
- Holy is His name

The unfolding of God's redemptive plan is a cause for personal worship in Mary's heart. Notice also how she says it serves as the:

Evidence of prophetic fulfillment (v. 50-55)

*“And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts; he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate; he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever.”*

She praises God for His mercy, strength, provision, and grace. He has given divine aid and has remembered His covenant promise to Abraham and his offspring.

Application:

- Is Christ **enthroned** in my heart?

For many, Jesus is nothing more than a historical figure. A swear word for when they stump their toe. For others, He is a bumper sticker, a Facebook like, or one who exists to give us our hearts desire like a genie in a lamp.

But not for Mary. The Son of God would take up residence within Mary's womb for nine months. But beyond that, He had taken up residence in her heart and life. She well understood the depth of her own need, and her Son would also be her Savior. The baby she would soon hold in her arms would be none other than the Lord, the very One who upholds the universe by His power.

Is He enthroned in your heart? And if so, how large and prominent a place does He occupy? May your soul enlarge Him, and may your spirit rejoice in Him.

- Is faith **evident** in my life?

Consider how Mary's faith is on display here in this text. It is more than intellectual belief. Faith is more than merely intellectual assent, agreeing in your mind to certain set of facts. Biblical faith is belief plus trust. Faith is made visible by obedience. So by that definition, is faith truly evident in your life? Faith means committing your entire way to Him.

- Is worship **expressed** in my words?

Faith is demonstrated through obedience. And obedience is the essence of true worship. As Mary contemplated all that the angel had promised her, she bursts forth in song. She magnifies the One who had shown her such lavish and undeserved grace.

What's the big deal about Christmas? If you take away all the trappings of it—the things we get so caught up in, such as the decorations, the family gatherings, the gifts, etc—what does it mean at its most basic essence? Christmas is important because it about the announcement of a coming King. It is important because it involves the miracle of a virgin birth. And it is important because it is all about the unfolding of a redemptive plan.

*“Father, we praise You for the gift of Your Son. You so loved the world that You gave Your only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him will not perish, but will have everlasting life. We have reason to rejoice this Christmas because it is all about Jesus Christ. May He come to live within the hearts of those who trust in Him, and may He be magnified above all else! Amen.”*