

Luke 1:30-45

³⁰ Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid Mary, for you have found 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 called 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.

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 Zacharias 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."

How Handy is Your Bible?

To put this in perspective, Mary and Joseph were living in Nazareth when the Angel visited Mary. Nazareth is about 60 miles from Jerusalem and about 80 miles from where Elizabeth and Zacharias lived in the land of Judah. As the scripture said, for Mary to go with haste to visit Elizabeth probably took about 5 days, being a young girl in great shape. They walked everywhere they went. The area of Judah is very mountainous. When Zacharias left Jerusalem to go home to Elizabeth, that was about 20 miles and probably took him a couple of days. I bet he probably had a little more giddy up in his step this time. Soon it will be what we celebrate as the birthday of our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ. Back then it wasn't like today, that they could get their handy dandy bible by the nightstand or where-ever we keep it and open the scripture. For them to be as familiar with the scriptures as we can or should be, took going to the synagogue every day or multiple times per day and listening to the reading of the old testament scrolls by the priests. And for women, that was even harder because they were not allowed in the inner court or what was called the third court. That was where the men would be. And only very few priests were allowed in the inner temple where the Holy of Holy's was. Women relied mostly on their husbands to tell them this kind of information.

So when the Angel of the Lord visited Mary, a young girl probably 13-14 years old, that was a big deal! Imagine being Mary. Mary could have been very skeptical when the Angel told her what was going to happen. Or even Elizabeth. Patty is probably about the same age as Elizabeth. I can just hear her now when I would tell her that the Angel Gabriel said she was going to get pregnant, have a son, and we should name him John. Her answer would be, "That ain't gonna

happen; you'll have to catch me first!" How about it Frank, what would Lorraine say?

But I digress. Back to Mary and Elizabeth. These were great women of faith, both filled with the Holy Spirit. The Holy spirit revealed many things to them and didn't need the reading of the scrolls to learn about the prophecies. Both men in their lives were also great men of faith. They loved the Lord and did what was right. Imagine being Joseph and seeing your future wife coming back from Judea and being pregnant. He didn't see her for more than 3 months. He did what God asked him to do.

I doubt very many people knew all the prophecies regarding the coming Messiah. Most knew of a coming Messiah but probably not a lot of detail, and mostly men at that. Even King Herod didn't know where the Messiah would be born or come from and had to ask the priests.

We do live in a special time. Knowledge or information of about anything is literally at our fingertips. Unfortunately, we don't use our fingertips for the right reasons especially the middle one. I think that in the times we are living, being in the scripture is more important than most realize. What's happening today in our crazy mixed-up world needs to be brought into perspective of what the bible says. Now more than ever, we cannot let ourselves be deceived or misled. Where we spend eternity may depend on it.

God gave all of us free will to believe and live how we want to believe. But the belief we choose or want to believe may not get us into heaven. When we stand before the Lord, we will hear one of 2 things. "Well done good and faithful servant, here is your reward" or "Depart from me you sinner for I never knew you". There's no air conditioning where they're going!

Pope Francis who is a Jesuit, may be one of the deceivers in our world. He talks about a one world religion, that all religions lead to the same god. He wants to bring the world into one religion and already signed a document with muslims that they are also god's chosen people. He sounds like an evangelical when he talks with Christians and is trying to make them believe that the catholics and evangelical Christians are the same. Many people are being misled. Don't be one of them.

John 14:6 says:

"Jesus said unto them, I am the way the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father, but by me."

It doesn't say that only professing Christians must go through him, Jesus and all other religions can bypass him and go straight to the Father!

John 3:36 says,

"He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.

Since our generation was born, we have more than a hundred different versions of the bible. That doesn't count the bibles that were translated into around 150 different languages. Hopefully they were translated from the original Hebrew and Greek. Unfortunately, like Paul says, most are saying what itching ears want to hear. For the past 60, 70 years, a slow but purposeful change has been occurring in our society without many Christians detecting it. It's like the story of boiling a frog. If you throw him in a boiling pot, he'll just jump out. But if you put him in room temperature water and slowly heat up the water, the change will be so slow that by the time he realizes the danger, it will be too late. Cooked Frog! Would you like garlic butter with that?

I think *that* has happened to many Christians today. For some, it's too late, for others, there still may be time to get them to jump out of that pot. Know the bible and know Jesus.

Mary and Joseph knew that Jesus was the son of God.

Elizabeth and Zechariah knew that their son John was the messenger preparing the way for the Lord. They also knew Jesus was the son of God.

The Shepherds out in those fields, by the proclamation of thousands of Angels knew that Jesus was the son of God.

The wisemen from the east knew that Jesus was the son of God.

Before Jesus went back up to heaven to sit at the right hand of the Father, the disciples and followers, people that he healed and somehow touched their lives knew he was the son of God.

Knowing that he is the son of God is a beginning. Doing something with that information is what comes next. I can't say this enough, know the bible and know Jesus. Have a personal relationship with him, as a friend, as a brother, as a teacher and as a Savior.

Today we lit the candle of Peace. I think a very good representation of that peace comes when Mary and Joseph took the baby Jesus to the temple to be consecrated to God, Simeon sees God's salvation as described in Luke 2: 25-38.

I won't read all of it, but YOU should. I'll read Luke 2: 29-32:

²⁹ "Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace,
According to Your word;

³⁰ For my eyes have seen Your salvation

³¹ Which You have prepared before the face of all peoples,

³² A light to *bring* revelation to the Gentiles, (that's us)
And the glory of Your people Israel." (the Jews)

Fourth Advent - Peace

So as promised, before Simeon passed away, in peace, God showed him the savior, the Messiah not only for the Jews, but for us Gentiles as well.

Soon, we'll be going downstairs for our Christmas Pot-luck luncheon. I look forward to this all year, not only for the great food, but also for the fellowship. As we go downstairs today to celebrate the birth of Jesus, feel the hope, faith, joy, peace and love that only Jesus can give.

Amen