

To God Alone Be The Glory

For the last three weeks I have been urging you, on the basis of God's Word, to prepare your heart for Jesus' coming. Which of Jesus' comings? On a certain level it doesn't matter. If you're ready for Jesus' second coming, then you're ready to celebrate Jesus' first coming. If you're ready for Christmas (as God defines ready), then you're ready for Judgment Day.

And how have we been getting ready? Well, if we've been following the plan that John the Baptizer put forward as God's spokesman and Jesus' forerunner, we've been repenting. That's right. Since we know that Jesus came the first time to work out God's plan to save us from all sin, we aren't afraid to admit our sinful practices to the Lord. We know we're already forgiven. So, with the help of the Holy Spirit, we've been "preparing the way for the Lord." We've been looking through our lives for the areas where we've been spiritually lax. We've been having a change of mind about whatever it is that we've grown lax in. We've been throwing everything out of our heart that wants to compete with God for our love. We've set up a nice throne in our heart and asked the Lord to reign there without a rival. We're doing our best to act like people whom the Lord loves, because we don't want the season of Advent to be wasted on

us. So we've been making changes in the way we talk to others. We've been changing the way we act when no one else is around. We've been practicing self-control in an attempt to glorify the Savior who redeemed us.

Almost all of our joyful preparations for Christmas are done. But we haven't talked much about God's preparations for Jesus' first coming. Before the Savior can be born in Bethlehem, the clock needs to go back about nine months, let's just say to March 25. And then we need to go back a little more. Six months before this God sent his messenger, his angel Gabriel, to an elderly Jewish priest, Zechariah by name. Gabriel told the priest that he and his wife Elizabeth, also elderly, are going to have a son, whom they are to name John, who will grow up to be the forerunner of the long-promised Messiah.

But none of this is known in Nazareth, to where the angel is now speeding on his mission from the Lord. Gabriel appears to a young woman named Mary. She's a virgin, a quality that will be prized throughout the ages by young men and young women who love the Lord. Please notice that she's engaged to be married, and she's still a virgin. God didn't choose a young person "with experience" to be the mother of our Savior. 'What the Lord thinks about us' is more important than 'what

people think about us.’ If our love for the Lord brings some loneliness in the short run, it will be worthwhile in the long run. God has ways of blessing us for respecting what he respects.

But let’s get back to Mary. Both she and her fiancé, Joseph, are descendants of King David. They’ve been taught from little up that someday the Lord will cause the Messiah to be born from the family line of David. Little does Mary know: she is the one. But she’s about to find out.

There’s Gabriel now. Can you see him? He’s sneaking up behind Mary ...well, not really sneaking. He just not making any noise as he moves. Now she’s turning around. She sees him. She sees Gabriel’s mouth move. Can you hear what he’s saying? Wait, I’ll turn up the volume: ²⁸“*Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.*” Get a load of that look on her face! She looks like she’s seen a ghost, only there’s no such thing as ghosts. That’s how people typically look when they see one of the Lord’s angels. Look at her eyes—she’s afraid. *You can also see that she’s trying to figure out what kind of greeting this might be. Let’s listen in on her rapid thoughts. “Is this angel bringing good news or bad? Well it must be good news because he just called me ‘highly favored’ and said the

Lord is with me. The one true God is on my side! It doesn’t get any better than that. But still, the Lord doesn’t send angels at every trivial turn. God sends angels only when something really big is happening. What could it be? I don’t know. But I’m afraid.”

You can tell that Gabriel has figure out what’s running through Mary’s mind. Listen as he calms her: “*Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God.*” ‘Do not be afraid’!? She’s standing in front of a creature that is strong enough to hold back the east wind. Do not be afraid? Well, he is one of the Lord’s angels. And he did say she has found favor with God. She realizes: this means God’s favor and gracious attitude is shining down on her like the sun on a beautiful day. She senses that she hasn’t done anything to deserve God’s favor. But she has it anyway: God’s messenger just said so. *Look, fear is falling from her face. That’s good because she’s about to hear some news that will never have been spoken to anyone one else in all of human history.

Listen to Gabriel. ³¹“*You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus.*” Well, ‘Jesus’ is how **we** would pronounce it. Gabriel actually said that Mary should name her baby Yehoshuah, from which we derive the

name Joshua. What a great name for any boy! Do you know what “Joshua” means? It literally means “Yahweh is salvation” but English wants to put it across as “The Lord saves.” He sure does! We get to go to heaven because of what this Yehoshuah will accomplish on a cross someday.

But wait. Gabriel is telling Mary more about her future son. ³²“*He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High.*” People in our day like to be told, “You’re the greatest.” We like giving and receiving t-shirts that say, “World’s greatest dad” or “You’re a great aunt.” That’s what people will say about Mary’s son... no, not “you’re a great aunt”! They will say Mary’s son is great in the sense that he is the true and unique Son of God Most High.

But wait. Gabriel is telling Mary more about her future son. “*The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, ³³and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.*” That sounds an awful lot like what the Lord told King David in today’s Old Testament lesson (2 Samuel 7:8-16). Mary gets to be something that no other woman on earth will get to be: the mother of the world’s Savior.

Now if it were I who just received this

message, I’d be asking for clarification: “Gabriel, sir, do you mean to say that my child will be great David’s greater Son, the long-promised Messiah, the Redeemer who buys back the world from sin?”

But apparently Mary understands all this. She prefers to ask a Biology 101 question. ³⁴“*How will this be since I am a virgin?*” They’ve studied pregnancy, and they now know what causes it. And I haven’t been engaging in any behaviors which can lead to conceiving a child.” *Did you notice that Mary’s not saying, “Oh, come on! Virgins can’t have babies!” She’s asking a legitimate question: “Gabriel, would you please explain how God is going to accomplish this? I believe he can, and I’d love to understand how.”

Dear friends, let’s always be like Mary. When God tells us things in his Word that are difficult to understand or hard to carry out, let’s not ask why. Let’s not insinuate that God doesn’t know what he’s talking about. Let’s be like Mary and humbly accept whatever God’s Word says as the truth, no matter who brings God’s Word to us.

Want to hear Gabriel’s answer to Mary’s question? “*The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.*”

So the holy one to be born [from you] will be called the Son of God.” For me Gabriel’s answer opens up a lot of other questions, such as, “What do you mean by ‘come upon’ and ‘overshadow’?” and “How can God take an ovum with only half a set of chromosomes and make a whole human out of it?” and “How did God keep Mary’s sinful flesh from being passed on to Jesus?” So many questions, so few answers revealed in the Bible. It’s like the other mysteries of God: he tells us only so much, just enough to let us know that he’s in charge and that he’s working things out for our salvation. And in faith we get to be satisfied for now with limited knowledge.

But Gabriel has more to say in order to help Mary’s faith stand firm. ³⁶“*Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month.*” ³⁷*For nothing is impossible with God.*” That’s right! He can do anything he wants. If he wants to save us sinners from hell by causing a virgin to conceive the second person of the Trinity as a real human being, he can do that. In fact, he did. That’s why you’re going to heaven when you die. Everyone who believes in Jesus gets eternal life.

Now if the Lord had come to you and said, “You are going to be the mother

of the Savior,” or “You will serve as step father to the Savior,” how would you have responded? Would you be like Moses? He tried to get out of rescuing Israel from Egypt. That’s not faith. Do you ever do the opposite of what God’s commands, especially after recently hearing what he commands? Do you ever hear one of God’s promises and not believe it? None of this comes from faith. Mary’s answer—now that’s faith! “*I am the Lord’s servant,*” Mary answered. “*May it be to me as you have said.*”

Let’s be like Mary. Let’s always submit ourselves to God’s will. Let’s believe what he teaches and do what he commands. Sooner or later God is going to get his will accomplished, whether we go along with it or not. He wanted a Savior for us. He produced a Savior for us, the exact kind of Savior we needed.

The world has never wanted a Savior like Jesus. I can make this accusation because all the religions man has ever come up with tell people they have to do something to get right with God. God’s religion, as defined in the Bible, is the only one that tells people: God has done it all through our Lord Jesus. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary because God wants you to spend eternity with him.