

# WHAT HE SAID

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The First Christmas Story is an ancient story, now more than two thousand years old. Still it is told again, year after year, with fresh appeal.

It is a story full of wonder, and intrigue, and danger, and explosive joy, centered in God's Great Cause to redeem humanity and restore His creation.

Its cast of characters are down-to-earth—young and old, male and female, rich and poor, known and unknown.

Its plot is fantastic, stretching from the pre-historical past to the unending future, and weaving together the disparate stories of kings and paupers, priests and sinners.

At the human level, battles have been waged (some won, some lost) with more battles still to come, and God's Great Cause has been advanced, if not steadily, at least surely.

We are most familiar with the stories of Mary and Joseph and the Bethlehem shepherds and the wise men from the East. But the central figure of the story is the One whose name we first discover here, who was not an actor at all from the standpoint of initiative, or decision-making, or bravado. Just an infant, helpless and dependent and endangered.

It is the story of a mother's enduring love, and a father's unusual courage, and of persistent faith and joyous wonder, as God unfolds His glorious plan.

We will read the Story together next Sunday, as we celebrate the God of grace and salvation.

But today, we'll dive right into the heart of the account, just as the angel Gabriel announced Jesus' birth to His mother, Mary.

Mary's cousin, Elizabeth, was married to a Jewish priest, named Zechariah. They had been unable to conceive a child, and were now advanced in age. But God...

In spite of their age and infertility, God chose them to become the parents of a son, whom they would name John. He would become the Baptizer who introduced Jesus as Messiah to the Jewish nation.

This miraculous pregnancy was revealed to Mary by Gabriel:

Luke 1:26-56 (NLT)

<sup>26</sup> In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a village in Galilee, <sup>27</sup> to a virgin named Mary. She was engaged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of King David.

<sup>28</sup> Gabriel appeared to her and said, "Greetings, favored woman! The Lord is with you!"

<sup>29</sup> Confused and disturbed, Mary tried to think what the angel could mean.

<sup>30</sup> "Don't be afraid, Mary," the angel told her, "for you have found favor with God!

<sup>31</sup> You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. <sup>32</sup> He will be very great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David. <sup>33</sup> And he will reign over Israel forever; his Kingdom will never end!"

<sup>34</sup> Mary asked the angel, "But how can this happen? I am a virgin."

<sup>35</sup> The angel replied, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the baby to be born will be holy, and he will be called the Son of God.

<sup>36</sup> What's more, your relative Elizabeth has become pregnant in her old age! People used to say she was barren, but she's now in her sixth month. <sup>37</sup> For nothing is impossible with God."

<sup>38</sup> Mary responded, "I am the Lord's servant. May everything You have said about me come true." And then the angel left her.

<sup>39</sup> A few days later Mary hurried to the hill country of Judea, to the town <sup>40</sup> where Zechariah lived. She entered the house and greeted Elizabeth.

<sup>41</sup> At the sound of Mary's greeting, Elizabeth's child leaped within her, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. <sup>42</sup> Elizabeth gave a glad cry and exclaimed to Mary, "God has blessed you above all women, and your child is blessed. <sup>43</sup> Why am I so honored, that the mother of my Lord should visit me? <sup>44</sup> When I heard your greeting, the baby in my womb jumped for joy. <sup>45</sup> You are blessed because you believed that the Lord would do what he said."

<sup>46</sup> Mary responded, "Oh, how my soul praises the Lord. <sup>47</sup> How my spirit rejoices in God my Savior! <sup>48</sup> For he took notice of his lowly servant girl, and from now on all generations will call me blessed.

<sup>49</sup> For the Mighty One is holy, and he has done great things for me.

<sup>50</sup> He shows mercy from generation to generation to all who fear him.

<sup>51</sup> His mighty arm has done tremendous things! He has scattered the proud and haughty ones. <sup>52</sup> He has brought down princes from their thrones and exalted the humble. <sup>53</sup> He has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away with empty hands.

<sup>54</sup> He has helped his servant Israel and remembered to be merciful. <sup>55</sup> For he made this promise to our ancestors, to Abraham and his children forever."

<sup>56</sup> Mary stayed with Elizabeth about three months and then went back to her own home.

So, Elizabeth also became an illustration to Mary of God's sovereign power to accomplish His purpose—sovereign, on the one hand, to do what is humanly impossible, but on the other hand, dependent on the cooperation of people whom He chooses to use. If we trust and obey, we will become participants in miracles.

In spite of her youth and inexperience, God chose Mary to become the mother of a Son, whose name would be Jesus. He would rescue God's people from their sins and reunite humanity in the love of God. This is what God said He would do.

That's not a small thing; that's a HUGE thing! Many brilliant and earnest people have tried on their own (and continue to try) to produce a similar result—unsuccessfully—for as long as people have populated the planet.

But no amount of human intelligence, wisdom, riches, technology, or might can accomplish what God has said He would do. At best, we may mimic God's predicted purpose—on an inferior, limited, temporary, and shallow scale.

## **Everything You Have Said**

Somehow, Mary, a modest teenager, understood this. She was apprehensive of an angel's presence, but she took his words to heart. She responded, *"I am the Lord's servant. May everything You have said about me come true."*

Are you a *servant* of the Lord? (Not by accident, but on purpose?)

Is your life centered in *His* purpose, or your own? Do you pursue the future *you* want, or the future *He* wants for you?

Do you want everything He has said about you to come true?

If you do, then you must study to know what He has said about you. And you must give yourself to think often about what He has said about you. If you practice this, you will be able to say, as Mary did, when faced with an enormous, unfamiliar, and uncomfortable prospect, *"I am the Lord's servant. May everything You have said about me come true."*

## **Blessed Because**

Elizabeth was overwhelmed by the Holy Spirit when Mary arrived to her home. The infant she carried in her womb, leaped at the sound of Mary's voice! And the Holy Spirit came upon Elizabeth in wonderful power! She prophesied to Mary, proclaiming the goodness of God's plan for her life, and declaring how (or, on what account) it would come to pass: *"You are blessed because you believed that the Lord would do what he said."*

We all want to be blessed. We all want the blessings of God in our lives. But if I can be straight with you, we often confuse the things we want in life with the blessings of God. God does not bless our desires; He blesses His purpose. What was it that Mary believed? She believed what the Lord has said about her and to her.

If you want to receive and experience the blessings of God in your life, you must begin by discovering what God has said about you and what He has purposed for you. Believe what He has said, not what you wish were true.

For God will stand by His stated, or revealed, purpose, no matter what comes against it, no matter what seems to be lacking, no matter what seems to be blocking it. God will stand by His Word, and it will not return to Him fruitless or ineffective. He will do what He said, if you will believe what He said and do what He asks of you.

## **He Remembers**

His promise to Abraham was sure, though its fulfillment took thousands of years (dependent as it was on the cooperative faith of God's people).

*“He has helped his servant Israel and remembered to be merciful. For he made this promise to our ancestors, to Abraham and his children forever.”*

God helps His people! In mercy, He forgives our many sins, looking past our faults to see our needs.

He remembers what He has said, and keeps His word, because He made a promise. He promised our ancestors—those who believed what He had said—Abraham, the 1<sup>st</sup> Century Apostles, the 16<sup>th</sup> Century Reformers, the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Pentecostals of Azusa Street, Edith Erickson who planted this local church, the pastors and praying people who came before us. You and I are here today because of thousands of Christ-followers who led the way and paid the price in persistent faith and prayerful obedience. (What legacy will you leave for those who will come after us?)

God will not forget His people. And God will not forget His words.

So that you may say, as Mary did, “I am the Lord's servant. May everything You have said about me come true.”