

By way of introduction to today's class, you might reflect back on the messages we gave at the last Kingdom of God Bible seminar. The first of those two messages focused on how, when Jesus first came on the scene, the conditions had now come to pass so that the time was right for the appearance of the Messiah. God's plan was beginning to fall into place now. The time was finally right.

The Roman empire, even though the Jews hated it, had established peace throughout the Mediterranean region, a peace that would enable the Church to begin and grow and for the gospel to be spread. The Romans established a highway system which enabled people to travel relatively quickly and safely for that day, which is what we see reflected in the books of the New Testament. The Romans cleared the Mediterranean Sea of pirates, which would enable the apostle Paul and others to travel by sea and spreading the gospel.

The Romans established a mail system, and is a byproduct of that we have the letters that make up the bulk of the books of the New Testament. And the Greek language was spoken widely throughout the Roman Empire, so that enable the gospel to be spread in a common language throughout the empire, and also gave us the language in which the books of the New Testament were recorded and preserved for us today.

So a lot of pieces had to fall in place for these of this that were reading about now to begin to come to pass. It wasn't just a random time in human history that all of this began to happen. As we saw last time with the example of Zechariah, our God is a God of planning and purpose and perfection in everything He does. And now the time is ripe for the next phase of His plan, and that's where we begin today.

Let's talk about Nazareth briefly, because this is where our story begins today and this will be the town where Jesus grew up. Nazareth was located in the Galilee region about 15 miles west of the Sea of Galilee. This is an artist's conception of what Nazareth looked like in first century. Nazareth was not anything to write home about. It wasn't very large and its population was at best only several hundred people. Here's a painting of Nazareth as it looked around 1880 and you can see that it's quite small. Here's a photograph of Nazareth and around 1900 and then you can see it's still a fairly small village.

In biblical times Nazareth was viewed as a kind of backwater town where nothing important ever happened. You might remember the comment that even one of Jesus' own disciples made about Nazareth, when Nathaniel said, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" (John 1:46).

So what does the name "Nazareth" mean? If you looked it up as one of the study questions, what did you find out? You probably didn't find out anything, because most sources I checked didn't say anything about where the name came from. They didn't know. But keep in mind that many if not most of these place names we'll encounter have a Hebrew word at their root. So what's at the root of the word Nazareth? Let's turn to **Isaiah 11:1** —

**Isaiah 11:1** **There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots.**

Branch = Hebrew *netser*, meaning branch, shoot or sprout.

Nazareth comes from *netser*—Netser-eth gives us Nazareth translated into Greek.

So Jesus, the prophesied “Branch,” would grow up in a town that we would call in English “Branchtown” or “Branchville.”

So this is where our story begins today.

**Luke 1:26** Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth,

This is the same angel who had appeared to Zechariah in the Temple as we talked about last time, who told Zechariah that he and his elderly wife Elizabeth would give birth to the one who would prepare the way for the coming of the Lord, John the Baptist.

When it refers to the sixth month, this isn't referring to the sixth month of the year, it's referring to the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy. We see this from **verse 36**, where the angel Gabriel tells Mary:

**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.**

So we see that in the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, Mary is told that she will become pregnant by the Holy Spirit and will give birth to the Messiah. And as we mentioned in the background messages on the Gospels, Luke is very specific and gives a lot of detail in what he writes.

**26** Now 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.

Her name was *Miriam* in Hebrew, which again was the name of the sister of Moses and Aaron back in the book of Exodus, one of the most famous women in Israelite history. This was the most common Hebrew women's name in the first century, which is why we see six different Marys mentioned in the New Testament.

In that time, a betrothal period lasted about a year. It wasn't technically a marriage yet because the marriage had not been consummated, but it was a binding legal agreement that could be broken only by a divorce. If something happened during that betrothal period that caused one of the parties to break it off, they would actually have to get a divorce from the other person even though they had not been technically married yet.

I might also mention that from what I've studied about the culture of that time, men would typically marry at about age 20 after they had been grounded in the study of the Hebrew Scriptures and had learned a trade and were able to support a wife and family. Girls typically married at about age 13 once they started menstruating and could become mothers. Why is that? What's the first command given in the Bible? “Be fruitful and multiply.” So as soon as a girl was physically equipped for motherhood, she was considered eligible for marriage and her family would begin looking for a husband for her. And most marriages were arranged in those days, which is still the typical way it's done in much of the Middle East to this day.

So Gabriel appears to 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!”**

And Mary was highly favored. I’ve read that it was the dream of every Israelite woman to give birth to the Messiah, and now Mary is told that she will have that honor.

**29 But when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and considered what manner of greeting this was.**

Mary has the same reaction Zechariah had when the angel Gabriel appeared to him. They were both “troubled,” from a Greek word meaning greatly upset, filled with fear, agitated, and so on. **Here’s a depiction of what that might have looked like** when Gabriel appeared to Mary. You might think of some of the reactions of other individuals in the Bible who encountered angels. Some fell on their faces. Some fainted dead away. Some were terrified. I think some part of this is that these angelic appearances are like a window opening into another dimension and people must feel some of this power and energy pulsing and emanating through, and it disorients and terrifies people who experience that. And the angel tells Mary the same thing he’d told Zechariah six months earlier:

**30 Then the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.**

It was a frightening experience, and the first thing the angle told her was, “*Don’t be afraid!*” He comforted and encouraged her.

**31 “And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name JESUS.**

As we talked about earlier in the sermon on the meaning of the words “Jesus Christ,” the name Jesus is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew Joshua, or *Yeshua*, meaning “God saves.” So the angel tells Mary that she is to name her son “God saves.” And “Christ,” as we talked about in the same sermon, is from the Greek word *Christos*, which means “anointed” or “anointed one,” which has the same meaning as the Hebrew word *Messiah*.

The angel goes on to say—

**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.**

As we covered in the genealogies in Matthew and Luke, Jesus was a descendent of David through both the lineage of Mary and Joseph. So he is a descendent of David as was prophesied to be the case for the Messiah.

**33 “And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end.”**

Let’s look at a few Scriptures here that tie in with this prophecy that “**of his kingdom there will be no end.**” The first one that would come to mind for many of us is **Isaiah 9:7**—

**Isaiah 9:7 Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.**

This tells us that the kingdom of Jesus Christ is not something temporary, but something that will continue forward forever. This prophecy also tells us that He will sit on the throne of David as ruler of the kingdom, and that it will be a kingdom of judgment and justice and peace with no end. And of course this is something we celebrate every year at the Feast of

Tabernacles, anticipating the time when the entire world will be filled with this kingdom and the knowledge of God will cover the earth is the waters cover the sea.

We find another similar prophecy of this kingdom in Daniel 2:44, which tells us—

**Daniel 2:44 “And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever.”**

The kingdom that Jesus Christ will institute will break in pieces and supersede all of the governments of this world, and a new kingdom will be built on a right foundation for the first time, and as it tells us here, it will stand forever. All of these prophecies are telling us what Jesus would start in his first coming and will finish at his second coming.

Let's look at one more prophecy in Revelation 11:15—

**Revelation 11:15 Then the seventh angel sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, “The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!”**

Here again this tells us that Jesus Christ will reign forever in this kingdom, as announced at the seventh trumpet. And of course, it's from this verse that we get the words to the chorus of Handel's *Messiah*, one of the most magnificent pieces of music ever created.

Picking up the story back in Luke 1:34—

**Luke 1:34 Then Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I do not know a man?”**

So Mary was a young virgin who had never been intimate with a man. And the angel then tells her how she will become pregnant to give birth to the Messiah.

**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.”**

Here we see the Holy Spirit clearly connected with the power of God, not is a separate being that is part of a Trinity. In Hebrew it's quite common to say the same thing two slightly different ways. We see this all the time in the book of Proverbs especially, but also in the Psalms and other Old Testament writings. It's commonly called a couplet. And that's what we see here—the same thing said two slightly different ways: **“The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you.”** It is equating the Holy Spirit with the power of God, and the power of God with the Holy Spirit.

And of course, Jesus only refers to God the father as His father, and He never refers to the Holy Spirit as His father. This is another proof that there are not three beings, but only God the father and God the Son, and the Holy Spirit which is the power 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.”**

Regarding “Elizabeth your relative,” the King James Version says “cousin,” but the Greek isn't specific. It just means someone who is kin or related by blood.

**37 “For with God nothing will be impossible.”**

So as evidence that this will come to pass for Mary, the angel Gabriel tells Mary that her elderly relative Elizabeth is now in her sixth month of pregnancy—so if this woman who was past childbearing age can miraculously have a baby, then Mary, who has never been intimate with a man, can also miraculously conceive and have a baby. And Gabriel says, “with God

nothing is impossible.” So if God said it, it will happen. You will miraculously have a son and you will name him Jesus, or “God saves.”

This might be a good to discuss the timing of the conception and birth of John the Baptist and Jesus the Messiah as indicated by the timing of the **course of Abijah**. So let's discuss this briefly.

As we saw in the last class, the priest Zechariah was over the course of Abijah, and he was serving in the Temple in Jerusalem according to the timing of his course. In that year, as **calculated in the Companion Bible**, his course served its two courses from June 13-19 and Dec. 6-12. Assuming Elizabeth conceived sometime the week after Zechariah returned to his home—after all, at their age they couldn't afford to wait very long to try to make this happen—then **we probably have John being conceived around June 23, 24 or 25.**

Now from what we've read here in Luke 1:36, **Elizabeth is in her sixth month of pregnancy** when the angel Gabriel tells Mary that she will conceive by the Holy Spirit. So if Elizabeth is six months pregnant, six months from late June brings us to late December when the angel Gabriel appears to Mary. So if Mary then conceives in late December, nine months from late December brings us to **late September or early October for the birth of Jesus Christ.**

And of course, what happens in the late September-early October time frame every year? That's when the fall Holy Days take place. Luke's account isn't specific enough to nail it down to the exact day, but with this evidence and the fact that Bethlehem is packed with people at the time of Jesus's birth, it's pretty obvious that that birth took place at the time of the fall Holy Days when everyone was traveling to Jerusalem for the Feast as they were commanded.

I think you could make a good argument for Jesus being born on either the Feast of Trumpets or the first day of the Feast of Tabernacles. Why those two? Because what does the Feast of Trumpets symbolize? We know that the trumpets represent the blowing of the last trumpet at which time Jesus Christ will return as King of kings and Lord of lords to establish His kingdom on earth. So it's perfectly consistent that Jesus would come into the world the first time on the Feast of Trumpets, and that he will come to the world a second time on the Feast of Trumpets.

You can also make a good argument for Him being born on the first day of the Feast of Tabernacles. Because what does the feast of Tabernacles represent? It represents the establishment of the kingdom of God on earth with Jesus Christ as its head. An interesting Scripture you might write down is John 1:14, which says—

**John 1:14 “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us . . .”**

This word translated **“dwelt among us”** literally means **“lived in a tent or tabernacle among us.”** So the Word was made flesh—made flesh at His birth—and **John says He “tabernacled among us.”** Some scholars take this to mean, and I wouldn't disagree with them, that this means that Jesus entered the world during the Feast of Tabernacles and thus He “tabernacled among us.” Again, I think you could make a good argument for either date as the date of Christ's birth.

And of course, equally obvious is the fact that these passages show He was born nowhere near December 25. We'll cover this a little more when we get to the census and the shepherds tending the sheep outdoors at night at the time Jesus is born. Any questions?

Continuing with the story in **Luke 1:38**—

**38 Then Mary said, “Behold the maidservant of the Lord!** [or, “I am the Lord’s servant.”] **Let it be to me according to your word.”** [or, “Whatever you say, Gabriel.”] **And the angel departed from her.**

**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.**

So there was this response, and the unborn child understood that someone important was coming.

**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 [referring to Mary, who believed Gabriel’s message], for there will be a fulfillment of those things which were told her from the Lord.”**

**Here’s an artist’s conception** of Mary and Elizabeth meeting each other. What do these few verses tell us about the life of those who are in the womb and not born yet? This passage clearly tells us they are alive and are individuals apart from their mother. It's been proven that babies in the womb can hear voices and music and things like that and some have even encouraged fathers-to-be to speak to and talk to the baby in the womb so once it's born the baby will recognize its father's voice.

So what does this tell us about abortion? It tells us that abortion is a process that kills an individual human being in the womb. Find it appalling our federal government helps fund Planned Parenthood, which is the biggest abortion provider in the nation, and that it appears determined to force religious organizations such as hospitals and schools to provide contraceptives—including drugs that induce abortions—in the health care plans they provide to employees. The bottom line is that this policy grossly violates the First Amendment’s freedom of religion by forcing religious institutions to violate their beliefs and teachings by funding practices that they consider abhorrent and murder. And to be blunt, that's what abortion is. It is murder of the unborn. Since abortion was legalized in this country, about 70 to 80,000,000 babies have been aborted.

So is there Scriptural support to consider abortion as murder? We see from this passage that there clearly is.

**Let's notice a few other things in this passage.** First of all, in **verse 38**, notice Mary's humble and completely submissive attitude regarding what she’s been told. Her response is, “I am your servant, let it be according to your word.” It’s a marvelous attitude we can all learn from. Notice also in **verse 39** that it says that she “arose in those days and went into the hill

country with haste.” So this indicates there was not much of a time lag between the message from Gabriel and her conceiving and her going to visit her relative Elizabeth. This helps support the timeframe that we talked about earlier of a late December conception and Jesus being born nine months later in late September or early October. God has set His plan in motion and it's not going to be delayed.

I might mention here a little bit about the worship of Mary in Catholicism. In that belief system, Mary is viewed as herself having been divinely conceived. She is also viewed as having been a perpetual virgin—meaning she was a virgin when she conceived, she gave birth to Jesus as a virgin, and she remained a virgin the rest of her life. Of course, we know that's not true, because the Gospels record that she had at least four other sons and at least two daughters. And in Catholicism Jesus Christ is not the intercessor as the Bible teaches, *Mary* is the intercessor. Maybe at some point I'll give a sermon on that whole subject if people are interested.

Next we come to what is called the Magnificat of Mary in 46 through 56. You might call it a prayer or you might call it simply an outburst of praise to God. Regardless of how you view it, it shows that Mary was well versed in the Hebrew Scriptures. These were thoughts that were in her mind that reflect her thinking about what she had been told by Gabriel. One of the questions I asked was, how did Luke know all this? Was he present? No, Luke wouldn't come along for another 30 to 50 years. So how did he know what Mary said? I think the logical conclusion is that Luke met and talked with Mary later in her life and that's where the information came from. No one else was there, and Elizabeth is long dead by the time Luke comes on the scene.

**46 And Mary said: “My soul magnifies the Lord,**

And what happens for the next 11 verses is Mary is quoting and paraphrasing various verses from the Old Testament scriptures. I'll just show you where she's quoting from.

**1 Samuel 2:1 And Hannah prayed and said: “My heart rejoices in the LORD . . .”**

**Psalm 34:2 “My soul shall make its boast in the LORD . . .”**

**47 And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior.**

**Psalm 35:9 “And my soul shall be joyful in the LORD; it shall rejoice in His salvation.”**

**Habakkuk 3:18 “Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation.”**

**48 For He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant; for behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed.**

**Psalm 138:6 “Though the LORD is on high, yet He regards the lowly . . .”**

**49 For He who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is His name.**

**Psalm 111:9 “Holy and awesome is His name.”**

**50 And His mercy is on those who fear Him From generation to generation.**

**Psalm 103:17** “But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear Him, and His righteousness to children’s children.”

What we’re seeing here is that Mary clearly knew Scripture. She knew her Bible well.

**51 He has shown strength with His arm;** He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.

**Psalm 98:1** “Oh, sing to the LORD a new song! For He has done marvelous things; His right hand and His holy arm have gained Him the victory.”

**52 He has put down the mighty** from their thrones, and exalted the lowly.

**Job 5:11** “He sets on high those who are lowly, and those who mourn are lifted to safety.”

She might have also been thinking about Nebuchadnezzar, whom we read about in **Daniel 5:21** “Then he was driven from the sons of men, his heart was made like the beasts, and his dwelling was with the wild donkeys. They fed him with grass like oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till he knew that the Most High God rules in the kingdom of men, and appoints over it whomever He chooses.

**53 He has filled the hungry with good things,** and the rich He has sent away empty.

**Psalm 107:9** “For He satisfies the longing soul, and fills the hungry soul with goodness.”

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

**Genesis 17:7** “And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you.”

**Psalm 132:11** “The LORD has sworn in truth to David; He will not turn from it: “I will set upon your throne the fruit of your body.”

**56 And Mary remained with her about three months,** and returned to her house.

So Mary visited her relative Elizabeth, and both were carrying children who were going to play a very special role in God’s purpose and plan for mankind.

We’ll conclude here. Any questions?



