

Merry Christmas



From Freedom Ministries

Dear Friends and Loved Ones,

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As you read the account of Zechariah's response to Gabriel's announcement that he would have a son, and Mary's response to the news that she would have a son, notice the connection between the two.

"During the reign of Herod king of Judea, there lived a priest named Zechariah ... But they did not have a child, because Elizabeth was barren, and they were both very old. ... he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to enter the holy place of the Lord and burn incense. And there appeared to him an angel of the Lord ... The angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer is heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. ... And Zechariah said to the angel, "How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years." And the angel answered him, "I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God; and I was sent to speak to you, and to bring you this good news. And behold, you will be silent and unable to speak until the day that these things come to pass, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time."

In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town of Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, a descendant of David, and the virgin's name was Mary. So the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God! Listen: You will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and his kingdom will never end." Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I have not had sexual relations with a man?" The angel replied, "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 holy; he will be called the Son of God. "And look, your relative Elizabeth has also become pregnant with a son in her old age—although she was called barren, she is now in her sixth month! For nothing will be impossible with God." So Mary said, "Yes, I am a servant of the Lord; let this happen to me according to your word." (Luke 1)

If you were the Virgin Mary, how would you respond to the news from an angel that you would give birth to the savior of the world? If you were the aged Zechariah, how would you respond to the news, from that same angel, that you and your wife would have a son who would be the forerunner of that savior? Would you be shocked? Would you be afraid? Would you question? Would you believe?

Zacharias and Elizabeth prayed for a child, but year after year, that prayer went unfulfilled. So, they gave up on the dream. Oh, they were faithful to God, and as a priest of Israel, Zachariah served at the temple. But when he was confronted by the angel with the news that he and Elizabeth would have a son, he couldn't believe it. He was too old! Of course he believed the Bible stories of Sarah and Hannah and Rebekah and Rachel. But, when it came down to him, it was impossible. Not for God, but Zachariah refused to believe his wife Elizabeth could bear a child.

He did something we often do. We believe in the big things of God—sending a son to be our Savior, creation, Heaven—but when it comes to our own miracles, we limit Him. It's as if we say, *Yes, God can create the earth in six days, be born of a baby, and send us to Heaven, but He can't possibly change me, fix a relationship, get me a job, etc.*

In contrast, after Mary's visit from the angel, when she goes to visit Elizabeth, Elizabeth says to her, "Blessed is she who has believed." Here is the heart of our response to God, to trust his Word to be true and live in light of that belief. We are blessed because God has touched our life. God pours out his benefits on those who trust him and his promises. To enjoy his blessings and to share his benefits, we must be confident that God does what he says. The first sign of such faith in Mary was her willingness to let God use her. The second was her immediate visit to Elizabeth, who herself served as a sign that God keeps his word and can give life.

This Christmas, let's trust God and believe that he can even use you and me, in our family, with our neighbors, with our employer and fellow workers, with whomever he brings into our lives, to accomplish his divine purposes.

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