

God's Mysterious Plan

Luke 1.26-38

In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a village in Galilee, ²⁷ to a virgin named Mary. She was engaged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of King David. ²⁸ Gabriel appeared to her and said, "Greetings, favored woman! The Lord is with you!"

²⁹ Confused and disturbed, Mary tried to think what the angel could mean. ³⁰ "Don't be afraid, Mary," the angel told her, "for you have found favor with God! ³¹ You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. ³² 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. ³³ And he will reign over Israel forever; his Kingdom will never end!"

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

³⁵ 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. ³⁶ What's more, your relative Elizabeth has become pregnant in her old age! People used to say she was barren, but she has conceived a son and is now in her sixth month. ³⁷ For the word of God will never fail."

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

(New Living Translation)

Mystery: something not understood or beyond understanding. Inexplicable; baffling; contrary to logic and reasonable deduction. Such are the ways of God and the mystery that is "Christ."

"My thoughts are nothing like your thoughts," says the LORD.

"And my ways are far beyond anything you could imagine.

For just as the heavens are higher than the earth,

so my ways are higher than your ways

and my thoughts higher than your thoughts." (Isaiah 55.8-9)

God's mysteries can only be understood by **revelation**: "understanding imparted in response to faith through the enabling tutoring of the Holy Spirit" (John 14.26; 16.13). In other words, we can't comprehend God and his ways on our own or through our own deductive reasoning. To those who are physically alive but spiritually dead, "it all sounds foolish to them and they can't understand it, for only those who are spiritual can understand what the Spirit means" (1 Corinthians 2.14). Additionally, there is no understanding without faith: "By faith we understand that the entire universe was formed at God's command, that what we now see did not come from anything that can be seen (Hebrews 11.3).

God's ultimate mystery is Christ. Concerning the purpose of his strenuous efforts of prayer and teaching, the Apostle Paul wrote: "I want them to have complete confidence that they understand God's mysterious plan, which is Christ himself" (Colossians 2.2).

Mysterious: exciting wonder, curiosity, or surprise while baffling efforts to comprehend or identify.

God's plan of redemption and reconciliation for sinful humanity brought wonder to all who received it by faith (Mary, the shepherds, Simeon, the Magi). God's mysterious plan: the virgin birth and the incarnation of Deity— without which there would be no effective salvation from sin.

A Most Unlikely Place—

Nazareth was a most unlikely place to initiate the coming of the Messiah and the redemption of humanity. It was a “non-place” – never mentioned in the Old Testament, rabbinical writings, or by noted historians such as Josephus. The Jews had a contemptuous attitude about Nazareth: “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Galilee was known as “Galilee of the Gentiles” (Isaiah 9.1; Matthew 3.15) – an ethnically and spiritually compromised area of Israel. In sending His Son, God bypassed the most likely places, Jerusalem and Judea, for the most unlikely, “Nazareth, a village in Galilee.”

A Most Unlikely Choice—

Poor, illiterate, and 13 years old! Would anyone have considered Mary to be highly favored by God among all women of all time? Or the one who should be chosen by God to be the human partner through whom “the Word that was God from the beginning would become flesh and make His dwelling among humanity” (John 1.1; 14)? Humanly speaking, she had zero qualifications for anything noteworthy, and yet God found qualities in Mary that affirmed her as His perfect choice.

A Most Unlikely Birth—

Mary had every reason to be baffled by the angel’s announcement; it wasn’t logical that she should or could give birth to *any* child, especially the “Son of the Most High” who would “reign over Israel forever” because she was a virgin! But the nature of her son was exactly why it required a most unlikely birth:

“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.”

Fully God and fully human. The Word became flesh. ¹ A sinless Savior who is Christ the Lord. ² The image of the invisible God. ³ The Fullness of Deity in bodily form. ⁴ Infinite righteousness in the One who came as the Lamb of God to take away the sin of the world. ⁵ No human conception could accomplish this; it required a supernatural conception to unite the infinite nature of Holy God with physical form, resulting in One who would take that holy, sinless perfection to the cross, and through His substitutionary death, provide the only payment sufficient to exceed the debt of each person’s sin. Anything or anyone less would not have been sufficient to reconcile sinful humanity to the Most High and Most Holy God. (¹ John 1.14 ² Luke 2.11 ³ Colossians 1.15; Hebrews 1.3 ⁴ Colossians 2.9 ⁵ John 1.29-30; 1 Peter 1.19)

For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in [Christ], and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through [Christ’s] blood, shed on the cross. Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ’s physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation— if you continue in your faith, established and firm, and do not move from the hope held out in the gospel. (Colossians 1.19-23 NIV)

A Most Unlikely Faith—

Mary could not have imagined what God’s “favor” would require of her: giving birth in an animal pen, fleeing with her son to Egypt as refugees, watching her son crucified and dying on the cross. Yet her response was immediate and without reservation: “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.” God’s supernatural plan required the willing and obedient surrender of a human partner. Mary revealed that she possessed the heart and mind of her Son who set aside His divine position and prerogatives to take the nature of a servant and become obedient, even to death on the cross (Philippians 2.5-7)— “not my will but Yours be done.” What does your faith reveal about you?