

Gabriel must have scratched his head at this one. He wasn't one to question his God-given missions. Sending fire and dividing seas were all in an eternity's work for this angel. When God sent, Gabriel went. And when word got out that God was to become man, Gabriel was enthused. He could envision the moment: The Messiah in a blazing chariot. The King descending on a fiery cloud. An explosion of light from which the Messiah would emerge.

That's what he expected. What he never expected, however, was what he got: a slip of paper with a Nazarene address. "God will become a baby," it read. "Tell the mother to name the child Jesus. And tell her not to be afraid." Gabriel was never one to question, but truly he was amazed at this message he was to carry.

*God will become a baby?* Gabriel had seen babies before. He had been platoon leader on the bulrush operation. He remembered what little Moses looked like. *That's okay for humans*, he thought to himself. *But God?*

The heavens can't contain him; how could a body? Besides, have you seen what comes out of those babies? Hardly befitting for the Creator of the universe. Babies must be carried and fed, bounced and bathed. To imagine some mother burping God on her shoulder—that was beyond what even an angel could imagine. And what of this name—what was it—*Jesus*? Such a common name. There's a Jesus in every cul-de-sac. Come on, even *Gabriel* has more punch to it than *Jesus*. Call the baby *Eminence* or *Majesty* or *Heaven-sent*. Anything but *Jesus*.

This was not the normal mission. What happened to the good ol' days? The Sodom and Gomorrah stuff. Flooding the globe. Flaming swords. That's the action he was used too. But Gabriel had his orders. Take the message to Mary. *Must be a special girl*, he assumed as he traveled. But Gabriel was in for another shock. One peek told him Mary was no queen. The mother-to-be of God was not regal. She was a Jewish peasant who'd barely outgrown acne and was engaged to a man named Joseph.

And speaking of Joseph—what does this fellow know? Might as well be a weaver in Spain or a cobbler in Greece. He's a carpenter. Look at him over there, sawdust in his beard and nail apron around his waist. You're telling me God is going to have dinner every night with him? You're telling me the source of wisdom is going to call this man "Dad?" You're telling me a common laborer is going to be charged with giving food to the Son of God? It was all Gabriel could do to keep from turning back. "This is an amazing idea you have, God," he must have thought to himself. Are God's guardians given to such musings? Are we? Are we still stunned by God's coming? Still staggered by the event? Does Christmas still spawn the same speechless wonder it did two thousand years ago? It should. Let's Find Out how "We Are Highly Favored By God!"

Isn't it amazing how the Lord sent the angel Gabriel to tell her she was chosen to be the mother of our Savior? "In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriel, to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph." Here is Mary, living in her little box, thinking every day about living a new life with her future husband Joseph. Suddenly an angel appears to her and brings a message into her life that totally changes her plans." The Lord chose Mary to be the mother of Jesus, not because she was better than other people, but only because of his grace and mercy, just as he has chosen you to believe in Jesus only because of his grace and mercy and nothing in you.

How does Mary react to the message? At first she is troubled and afraid. "Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting his might be." If an angel suddenly appeared to us here in this church service, we would be afraid at first because we would

feel a deep sense of our sinfulness and unworthiness in the presence of one of God's holy and pure angels who reflect his glory. But then the angel speaks to Mary and calms her fears with the words, "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God." Think of all the times God has spoken to you here in his word and brought peace and comfort into your life. Do you ever feel trapped and even overwhelmed by the problems in this life, the way things are going in the world today, or even by the struggles you have daily against your sinful flesh and Satan's temptations? But then God's Word breaks into your life and tells you that you are highly favored.

I think of those 33 Chilean miners some years ago who were trapped underground. At first, there seemed to be no hope. They were totally surrounded by rock with no way to escape. But then the rescue teams were able to drill a shaft into the place where they were staying and provide them with food, and water and soap and toothpaste and medicine, and MP3 players with the Bible recorded on them which they listen to daily. The Word of God changed their lives and brought them close to Jesus their Savior. The best moments in your life and mine have come when our God comes to us here in his Word and tells us not to be afraid and not to worry. The best moments of this Christmas season will be the times when you hear the message of Jesus' birth, or read it, or have some Christmas carol bring you close to the miracle of Jesus' birth.

Mary's life was never the same after she heard the angel tell her about the child that would be born through her. "You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name of Jesus." Babies are born every day in the hospitals here in the United States. Every baby is a miracle in its own way as it develops in the womb from the time of conception and then comes into the world with its body parts functioning. Mary's baby was to have the name Jesus, a common name in those days similar to the name Joshua. The name Jesus comes from the Hebrew word, "Yishua" the Deliverer.

Gabriel gives Mary more information about Jesus. Gabriel says, "He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High." Every time Mary felt the baby Jesus kicking in her womb, she believed that this was the Son of the Most High, the very Son of God because the angel told her this. When the shepherds came to see the baby Jesus lying in the manger, they worshiped him as their Lord and God because the angel had told them that he was Christ the Lord. When the wise men found Jesus in Bethlehem when he was close to 2 years of age, they knelt down and worshipped him as their Lord and God. The name given to Jesus by the prophet Isaiah was Immanuel which means, "God with us."

He who had been spirit became pierceable. He who was larger than the universe became an embryo. And he who sustains the world with a word, chose to be dependent upon the nourishment of a young girl. God as a fetus. Holiness sleeping in a womb. The creator of life being created. God was given eyebrows, elbows, two kidneys, and a spleen. He stretched against the walls and floated in the amniotic fluids of his mother. God had come near. He came not as a flash of light or unapproachable conqueror, but as one whose cries were heard by a peasant girl and a sleepy carpenter. In John chapter 1 it says, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." Mary, did you know That your baby boy will give sight to a blind man? Did you know That your baby boy will calm a storm with his hand? Did you know That your baby boy has walked where angels trod? And when you kiss your little boy You've kissed the face of god."

Mary wants to know how she can give birth to a child, who is a baby and God, without knowing a man intimately. "Gabriel says, The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God."

As further proof the angel points Mary to the example of her cousin Elizabeth who had conceived a child in her old age after she had been barren all her life. And to dispel all doubt the angel reminds her, "For nothing is impossible without God."

Someone asked Larry King, who is Jewish, whom he would interview if he could interview any person from the past. King said he would want to interview Jesus Christ, and the first question he would ask was, "Were you really born of a virgin?" Be thankful the Holy Spirit has led you to believe that nothing is impossible with God. You have the faith of Mary who said, "May it be to me as you have said."

Because of this miraculous conception, Jesus did not receive Adam's sin passed down to him as we did. We are conceived and born in Adam's sin. "Surely, I was sinful from birth, sinful from time my mother conceived me." Then we look at Jesus. He lies in a manger in Bethlehem. Mary holds him in her arms. She would experience first-hand the joy of raising a child that was not corrupted in her womb, a child who lived a perfect life for us, so he could credit us with his righteousness. Nothing is impossible with God.

Would you not agree with me that the ordinary things of life inside this box we call life are in desperate need of this amazing, extraordinary miracle of Jesus coming into this world as one of us yet remaining our Lord and God? It is tough to put up with the challenges life brings our way. There are the struggles with your health, struggles with family, and the struggles with putting up with what is going on in the world. Then there is the daily struggle of the sinful flesh or sinful nature that leads us to sinful thoughts of anger, greed, lack of faith and trust, and lack of love for people.

But then we hear the good news that this Jesus, God's Son, one of us, who is going to establish the kingdom of David forever. "The Lord will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever." Can you not hear the strains of the Hallelujah Chorus, "And he shall reign forever, and ever..." There in Bethlehem's manger lies the King who comes into your life, this miserable little box we call life, and rescues you from your sin and eternal death and destruction. He kneels before you and offers you the treasures of his eternal love that he earned for you by his perfect life lived on this earth and perfect sacrifice at the cross.

Don't you want a "Mary" Christmas, with a faith given to us to believe what Mary believed about the child in her womb? May the Lord give you a "Mary" Christmas so that you can have a genuine and real "Merry Christmas!"