

Sunday, December 21, 2025 – Fourth Sunday of Advent

The Christmas Story in Luke 1 and Matthew 1

Appearance of the angel Gabriel to Mary – Luke 1

In the sixth month (of Elizabeth's pregnancy) (26)

"Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." (28)

"Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God." (30)

Angel Gabriel to Zechariah – Luke 1: 13 – "Do not be afraid, for your prayer has been heard."

Angel to Joseph – Matthew 1: 20 – "Do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife."

Angel to shepherds – Luke 2: 10 – "Do not be afraid; for see – I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people."

The difficult circumstances of Jesus' birth, the flight to Egypt, the probable early death of Joseph, division within the family, and ultimately watching her beloved son die – Mary's being favored was not going to mean that her life was going to be easy. But it did mean that she would play a most important role in the plan of God. Luke 2: 35 – Simeon to Mary – "And a sword will pierce your own soul also."

"How can this be, since I am a virgin?" (34)

"Your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God." (36-37)

"Here I am, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." (38)

Hebrews 11: 11-12 - By faith (Abraham) received the power of procreation, even though he was too old – and Sarah herself was barren – because he considered him faithful who had promised. Therefore from one person, and this one as good as dead, descendants were born.

Mary visits her relative Elizabeth

Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country. (39)

When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. (41)

Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb." (41-42)

"As soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy." (44)

"Blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord." (45)

The Magnificat – cf. Song of Hannah in 1 Samuel 2

"My soul magnifies the Lord." (47)

"Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed." (48)

"He has brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty." (52-53)

Mary remained with her about three months and then returned to her home. (56)

I believe that it was during those three months that Joseph, to whom she was engaged and who was living in Bethlehem, came to visit her.

How excited he must have been to be able to see her, but how devastated he must have been to find out that she was pregnant.

His journey back to Bethlehem must have been the worst time of his entire life.

But while he was thinking the worst, God was bringing about His best.

I believe it was after he returned to Bethlehem that the angel appeared to him.

Has there been a time in your life when you were thinking the worst but God was bringing about something very good?

Appearance of the angel to Joseph – Matthew 1

When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. (18)

Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. (19)

But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. (20)

"Do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." (20-21)

All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

"Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel," which means, "God is with us." (22-23)

When Joseph awoke from sleep he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus. (24-25)

Matthew takes a verse from Isaiah 7, which speaks of a young woman's bearing a son and naming him Immanuel, narrows the meaning from "young woman" to "virgin," and defines Emmanuel/Immanuel as meaning "God is with us."

King Ahaz was to find his hope and confidence in God's being with him, not in his military alliances.

I believe that at this point Joseph goes from Bethlehem to Nazareth and spends the next several months with Mary. But the prophet Micah said (5: 2) that the one who would rule Israel would be born in Bethlehem not Nazareth. How did that come about?