

An Angel, a Messiah, and a Teen Pregnancy

A Lay Commentary on Luke 1:26-38

By Gary C. Burger, Mdiv.

Introduction

Remember from 1:5-25 that John's whole purpose in life was to tell the people of Israel that their Messiah was coming. He was to go before Him and prepare the way spiritually for this reality. Gabriel announced John's birth first in order to begin that mission of going before Jesus to prepare the way for Him. However, this birth announcement about Jesus is the more important one. The two announcements share striking similarities, and you will see them but the striking dissimilarities will provide the most help in the end.

Just as Luke introduces the time and place and characters of the first story he lays that groundwork here as well.

26

Now in the sixth month

This refers to the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy. This story follows the previous one about the announcement and miraculous conception of John the Baptist. This introduction tips us off immediately to the fact that God interweaves these two stories and the lives of these two mothers and their sons. They belong to one story.

the angel Gabriel was sent from God

This time, Gabriel does not identify himself or give his credentials as he does to Zechariah. We only know it is Gabriel because Luke tells us.

Scripture only mentions Gabriel by name four times. The other two references to Gabriel are in Daniel 8:16 where he interprets Daniel's vision for him and in 9:21 gives Daniel another prophecy. We see from these four instances that Gabriel's role is to deliver God's eschatological prophecies. These prophecies relate information about themes like the Messiah and Israel's restoration. Gabriel last appeared to Daniel 600 years before Zechariah. He just appeared to Zechariah 6 months ago. Now he's back so soon. What more will he reveal?

to a city of Galilee named Nazareth,

The announcement of John's birth occurred in the Temple in Jerusalem and Zechariah went home to Elizabeth. Now the geographical focus of this story moves about 60 miles due north to Nazareth. This would be about the same distance as from here to Raleigh. Nazareth was located in the province of Galilee.

That Jesus' parents live in Galilee is very significant. About 700 years before this, Isaiah prophesied that the Messiah would come from Galilee. Is. 9:1-7:

(T)here will be no more gloom for those who were in distress.... but in the future he (God) will honor Galilee of the Gentiles....

For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given,
and the government will be on his shoulders.

And he will be called
Wonderful Counselor,
Mighty God,
Everlasting Father,
Prince of Peace.

Of the increase of his government and peace
there will be no end.

He will reign on David's throne
and over his kingdom,
establishing and upholding it
with justice and righteousness
from that time on and forever.

The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this.

All of this is to say that the Messiah will come from Galilee.

Nazareth

Today, Nazareth is a thriving city of about 60,000 people—a little less than High Point's 85,000 and about a fourth of Greensboro's population. In ancient times, however, it was so small and insignificant that the OT and other ancient writings that scholars knew about until 1962 never mentioned it. Because of this, liberal scholars, who were looking for reasons to say that the Gospels are merely legends, claimed that Nazareth was just a fictional town. However, in 1962 archaeologists discovered an inscription with Nazareth written on it that proved it existed in Jesus' day. This kind of thing has happened many times repeatedly proving the Bible is a reliable record of what really happened.

The announcement of John's birth occurred at the center of the Jewish world, the Temple in Jerusalem, in the Holy Place. Only a curtain separated Zechariah from the presence of God's glory. By contrast, Gabriel visits Mary in a small, insignificant town where people and their houses are unclean both hygienically and ceremonially.

So far removed was Nazareth in status from Jerusalem that when Philip told Nathanael "We have found the One ... about whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph" Nathanael scoffed, "Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" (Jn 1:45-46)

(the angel Gabriel was sent from God)

to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the house of David,

While we are talking about Nazareth let's talk about Joseph because they go together. Then we'll move on to Mary, who is the main character of the story. Luke carefully notes and emphasizes that Joseph was a descendant of the royal line of David, from which God's anointed king (Messiah) was expected. Joseph's sons, even if adopted would share this heritage. But wait! King David was from the town of Bethlehem to the south in Judah. How did Joseph's ancestors settle to the north in Nazareth? The Jews lost Galilee when Assyria took them into captivity around 700 BC. They reconquered Galilee around 100 BC and many Jews resettled there. Some scholars think that Joseph's ancestors were among them. By Jesus' time, Nazareth held a significant number of the descendants of King David and Joseph and Mary were among them.

Matthew tells us in 2:23 that Jesus "went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets: 'He will be called a Nazarene.'"

and the name of the virgin was Mary.

Now let's talk about Mary. The contrast between Mary and Zechariah could hardly be greater. Zechariah is an old man. He is a priest who is descended from the very first high priest, Aaron. His life was confined to and dictated by a lifestyle rulebook consisting of hundreds of commands, laws and regulations he had to live by. It dictated his life 24 hours a day 365 days a year. He believed that this perfect lifestyle would make him blameless in the sight of God. He enjoyed the highest of social status and privilege. He was a leader and teacher. He epitomized the spiritual state of many Jews at the time who lost site of God and His plan to restore them and offer salvation to all of humanity.

In total contrast, Mary is a peasant girl of about 12 years of age. She has probably seen the Temple when her family made the annual pilgrimage to offer sacrifices there, but only from a distance. Even as a grown woman she will not be able to come anywhere close to the Holy Place that Zechariah was allowed and chosen to go into. As a peasant girl, she had no authority, no social status, and no formal education. Her sole purpose in life was to serve her husband, make babies, raise them to adulthood and help them raise their children. While Zechariah's life was legally, ethically and ritualistically demanding, her life will be physically demanding until she dies. Zechariah believed that he could attain ethical perfection and righteousness before God. He had little concept of God's grace. He believed he could earn God's salvation. In contrast, Mary knew she could never measure up to God's standards. She knew she needed God's grace in everyway. The final contrast I want to draw for now is that while Zechariah, through Elizabeth, is too old to have a child, and daily laments missing the blessing of God, Mary eagerly anticipates the blessing of having many children.

Mary is the English form of Miriam, which was a common name, as it is now. Its popularity in that day probably came from the fact that Moses sister's name was Miriam and the wives of

some famous rulers were also named Miriam. Scholars are not certain what the original name meant, so in this story, we don't know if her name has any significance.

The then current Roman emperor Augustus set the minimum age for betrothal at 10 years of age. Jewish girls were often married before reaching 12 and a half. This was for three reasons. The father could receive the "bride-price" or dowry as soon as she reached puberty, the husband could have her service for longer and the father could more easily guarantee his daughter's virginity.

A deed of betrothal and the bride-price were exchanged at the betrothal, after which bride and groom were legally joined and could be separated only by death or divorce. During this 12-month betrothal period, the daughter remained in her father's house and under his control. Mary's father betrothed her to Joseph sometime in the past 12 months. At the end of this time, the bride and groom moved into their own digs if they had the means. The marriage itself was consummated by intercourse at the end of this time. (Green, p. 86) Sexual intercourse before the permitted time was a violation of the marriage customs. (Nolland, p. 49) This betrothal between Joseph and Mary fulfilled the typical and legal requirement. Therefore, it affirms Mary's virginity.

Luke mentions two times that Mary is a virgin and she affirms it later. All this emphasizes that Jesus did not have a biological father; God was His Father. There is a strong echo of Isaiah 7:14:

Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: **The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.**" Remember that in Matthew 1, an angel of the Lord (possibly Gabriel) appeared to Joseph in a dream to tell him that Mary will miraculously conceive and to go ahead and marry her. He quotes this verse from Is. 7:14. Then Matthew gives the meaning of the name Immanuel as "God with us."

Luke is emphasizing how what God promised centuries before is now coming true. God is working, sovereignly aligning events and people to unfold His plan.

Luke does not tell us anything about Mary's family or anything that would entitle her to special favor from God. Her family ancestry is not important. Only Joseph's royal ancestry is important.

28

**I And entering to her he said:
Rejoice, favored one,**

The NIV rather blandly says, "Greetings." A more appropriate translation is "Rejoice." This is because of the similarity to other announcements that talk about rejoicing over good news. "Favored one" here means that God has given his favor to one who had no claim to worthy status, raised her up from a position of lowliness, and has chosen her to have a central role in salvation history. (Fuller in Green, 87)

the Lord is with you.

What do we mean when we tell a person, “May the Lord be with you.”? We mean that we would like that person to experience God’s presence and His power to do what they need to do. That is what it means here. However, when *we* say it we can only hope and pray for it. When Gabriel said this to Mary, it wasn’t just wishful thinking. It was a statement of fact. Literally, God really is with her and she will be supernaturally empowered to do what He wants her to do. We’ll come back to this in a minute. God promised His presence repeatedly throughout OT history when He was calling a person to a specific task. We’ll look at some of these in a moment too.

29

II And she was greatly disturbed at the saying,

The verb form translated “she was greatly disturbed” is similar but more intense than the verb used for Zechariah when Gabriel appeared to him. She was even more disturbed than Zechariah was.

and considered what kind of greeting this might be.

Her response, like Zechariah’s to this point, was silence. She silently “considered what kind of greeting this might be.” I guess when an angel appears to us we should just keep quiet and listen to what he has to say. That would be the proper protocol.

What follows is Gabriel’s song, part 2. Like John’s birth announcement, it is also a poem. I’ve used Roman numerals to signpost the stanzas.

30

And the angel said to her:

III Fear not, Mary:

This is the same first line Gabriel used when he addressed Zechariah. He will say the same thing to the shepherds in chapter 2. OT passages that relate divine visitations often use this phrase. Notice the reason for not fearing is the same in each case: “I am with you.”

Gen. 26:24

That night the Lord appeared to him (Isaac) and said. “I am the God of your father Abraham. Do not be afraid, for I am with you;...”

Gen. 28:12-15

He (Jacob) had a dream ... the Lord ... said: “I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac.... I will be with you.”

Jeremiah 1:7, 8

But the Lord said to me (Jeremiah)...”Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you,” declares the Lord.

The very last verse of Matthew’s Gospel relates Jesus telling His disciples and, by extension, us, “And surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age.” Since, as Christians, the Holy Spirit dwells within us permanently, He is always with us. And that’s a good reason to not fear.

At key times in Israel’s history, God or his representative appeared to key individuals whom He selected to do very important things. Mary heard about these heroes from of old. When Gabriel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary,” I wonder if any of these great men came to mind? She might think, “Why would an angel appear to me? What do I have to do with these great men to whom God appeared in the past? What have I done? What is this angel going to do to me? Why is he here?

for you did find favor with God.

Gabriel repeats to Mary that she has found favor with God to emphasize the great privilege it is to be an object of God’s grace.

Gen. 6:8 is very similar: “But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord.”

Like Noah, God chose Mary for a very distinguished role. Luke does not tell us why. We could try to speculate, but we would miss the point, which is that God chose her for His own perfectly wise reasons. God chose her and chose us, not because of her and our abilities but because of His grace. It is interesting to note, that Gabriel came to Zechariah in response to his prayer. Here he isn’t responding but initiating. God has a plan. It involves her, and now it is time to tell her.

31

**IV Behold you will conceive in womb
and (you) will bear a son,
and you shall call his name Jesus.**

Here is the complication or obstacle in Mary’s life and in the story that Mary, with God’s help, must overcome. The complication is implied because Luke already told us that she is a virgin and God and everyone else expects her to remain a virgin throughout her betrothal time. This might be up to 12 more months. Elizabeth could not bear the messenger the Messiah needed because she was barren. Mary cannot bear the child that will be that Messiah because she is not in the position to have sex with a man. Elizabeth had a need that she knew she had. Mary has a need that she didn’t know she had, until this moment.

The OT passage that comes closest to both the announcements about John and Jesus is Gen 16:11

The angel of the Lord also said to (Hagar):

You are now with child
and you will have a son.
You shall name him Ishmael,
for the Lord has heard of your misery.

Let's look very quickly at two other examples of God telling the parent what name to give their child.

Isaiah 8:3

Then I went to the prophetess, and she conceived and gave birth to a son. And the Lord said to me, "Name him Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz." What a name! It has an ominous meaning: "speeding to the plunder, hurrying to the spoil."

Hosea 1:3, 4

So he (Hosea) married Gomer daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son. Then the Lord said to Hosea, "Call him Jezreel, because I will soon punish the house of Jehu for the massacre at Jezreel...."

Including these three examples in the OT, God tells the parent the name they are to give to the child on six occasions. In each case, the meaning of the name is significant to what they will accomplish. As we saw last week, in the case of John the Baptist, John means "God has been gracious." This is significant in that God graciously provided a son for Zechariah and Elizabeth past their childbearing years and he graciously provided a messenger to tell the people of Israel their Messiah is coming. This Messiah would save people by His grace. Finally, here in Luke 1:31, Gabriel tells Mary to name this Messiah Jesus, which means "God saves."

32

V He will be great

Gabriel told Zechariah that John would be great in the sight of the Lord. Therefore, God is the one who measures John's greatness against His standards. His greatness is, then, conditional. By contrast, Jesus is great in His own right. His greatness is unconditional.¹ The significance of this contrast is clear. Only God is unconditionally great. Only God doesn't need anyone else to judge Him as great.

33

**and (he) will be called Son of the Most High,
and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father,
and he will reign over the house of Jacob unto the ages,
and of his kingdom there will not be an end.**

Gabriel tells Zechariah his son will be great because he will be the messenger to tell Israel their Messiah is coming. Gabriel tells Mary her son will be great because her son will be the Messiah. Gabriel tells Mary that her son will be the Son of the Most High, a king who is a descendant of King David, a descendant of Jacob, who was the father of the 12 tribes of Israel, and He will rule forever. There is a rich history of prophecies going back 2000 years before Gabriel's announcement to Mary. Perhaps in a future class we can take the time to go through a lot of these. They are truly amazing.

34

And Mary said to the angel:

**VI How will this be,
since I do not know a man?**

How is Mary's question different in motivation than Zechariah's? Last week, we looked at how Zechariah responded to Gabriel's announcement about John the Baptist's birth. He asked, "How can I be sure of this?" We learn later from Gabriel that he is motivated by doubt. He doubts Gabriel is really telling the truth. Whereas Zechariah asks for a sign to prove Gabriel's words will come true, Mary merely asks for an explanation. Another way of translating her question is "How can I do this?"

She seems to interpret Gabriel's words as a command, concluding she is supposed to somehow conceive this child by her own plan and action. Mary gives the reason for her needing an explanation. She says, "since I do not know a man?" This expression was widely used throughout Jewish history as well as in the surrounding Greek culture to mean sexual intercourse. Mary needs an explanation as to how she is supposed to conceive this child when she is not supposed to have sex with a man, even Joseph, until their betrothal time is over. Gabriel might as well be telling her to build a rocket ship and fly to Pluto. To produce a child without having sex with a man is just as impossible.

When offered God's gift of a gracious answer to his prayer for a son Zechariah responds with arrogant doubt, demanding a sign from Gabriel to prove he is telling the truth. In contrast, Mary responds in humble faith and obedience, not needing a sign but only an explanation. Zechariah asks how he will know the impossible will be done for him, while Mary asks how she can do the impossible for God.

Here is the crisis in the story. Mary is supposed to bear this child, but she is not in a position to have sex with a man to conceive this child. The crisis is where trust in human ability is in greatest tension with trust in God's ability. The crisis demands a decision about which to trust. Zechariah's crisis was a crisis of doubt. He could not trust in either his wife's human ability to conceive past her childbearing years, nor could he trust in God to supernaturally make her fertile for just once. Mary handled her crisis very differently.

35

(Then in verses 15-20, he gives the good news that they will one day be restored to a right relationship with God and their land.)

till the Spirit is poured upon us from on high,
and the desert becomes a fertile field,
and the fertile field seems like a forest.

The key phrase here, of course, is “till the Spirit is poured upon us from on high.” It may be difficult to see it from this small portion of the whole passage, but this special outpouring of the Holy Spirit will be a very important part of God’s plans involving His Messiah and restoring His people. The announcement we studied last week said that John the Baptist will be filled with the Holy Spirit. Now the Holy Spirit will work a powerful miracle to create a baby with no biological father in Mary’s womb. This is part of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in this very way to restore Israel and offer salvation to the Jews and to all of humankind.

This outpouring of the Holy Spirit was not upon John and Mary alone. Luke also quotes Jesus in Acts 1:8 as telling his Disciples, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” God’s goal is not just to provide a Messianic king for the Jews but also to offer salvation to all of humanity including the Jews. The Holy Spirit plays a key role in empowering us to be witnesses for Jesus.

consequently also the one being born will be called holy, the Son of God.

People will call Jesus holy. This is very significant. Only God or that which He declares holy is holy. Twelve passages in the NT describe Jesus Christ as holy, and we are going to look at every single one of them. No, I’m just kidding. We don’t have time for that, but we will look at two from the Gospels:

Mark 1:23, 24 / Luke 4:33, 34

Just then a man in their synagogue who was possessed by an evil spirit cried out, “What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!”

The demon knew exactly who Jesus was even if most people did not.

John 6:68, 69

Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.”

Notice he says, “We believe and know.” Apparently, they had discussed Jesus’ many miracles, teachings and character in light of the OT prophecies and had come to this conclusion together.

In both of these cases, the Holy One of God is a messianic title. Along with Gabriel's announcement to Mary calling Jesus holy, they mean that he has the closest possible intimacy with God, and participates in God's deepest and most essential being. (Morris, p. 345)

The Holy Spirit filled John; the Holy Spirit will create Jesus in Mary's womb."²

36

VIII And behold Elizabeth your relative also conceived a son in her old age,

This ties this story into the previous one about Zechariah and Elizabeth, intertwining the lives of John the Baptist and Jesus and their mothers.

and this sixth month is with her the one called barren;

1:24 tells us that Elizabeth had remained in seclusion for the first five months of her pregnancy. Now, she is going public.

37

because no word will be impossible with God.

Luke and Gabriel leave us with the impression that Gabriel is the one that breaks the news of Elizabeth's pregnancy to Mary. Elizabeth was in seclusion and apparently did not tell her relatives. God withholds the good news until Gabriel can tell Mary so that it will be a positive sign to her to believe Gabriel's words will come true.

This stanza is the climax or high point of the story. It is the conclusion of all that came before it. The climax to Zechariah and Elizabeth's story was when he went home to her and God made her fertile and she became pregnant. Mary's story reaches its climax when she learns of this from Gabriel. It assures her that God will do the impossible in her life as He did the impossible in Elizabeth's life.

38

And Mary said:

**IX Behold, the handmaid of the Lord;
may it be to me according to your word.**

The resolution to Zechariah and Elizabeth's story was her openhearted acceptance of God's grace. She said, "The Lord has done this for me. In these days he has shown his favor and taken away my disgrace among the people." Mary's resolution is her humble, submissive, openhearted acceptance of God's grace. However, she is accepting the grace she will need from God to live with the social disgrace she will soon have because of her perceived illegitimate pregnancy. As with the statement by Elizabeth, it is remarkable that we even have this story of Mary. In those days, men typically did not value a woman's experience, thoughts and feelings. So much for the assertion that the earliest Christian leaders were chauvinists.

X And the angel went away from her.

Before Gabriel appeared to Mary and announced these mind numbing things would happen her life was probably as happy as it could be, given her culture and position in it. Her father had laid out her life for her. She probably felt secure in this. She would follow the expected pattern of life for all the girls in her family and town. She was betrothed to be married. She would get married and begin raising a family with all the help she needed from her own and extended family. Her community was a closely-knit community that looked out for and helped each other. They would go to Synagogue every Saturday for Sabbath service. They would celebrate together on the festival days. She would just continue to follow the routines of life. All of a sudden, everything would be forever different from those expectations. The angel's announcement just turned her world upside down.

I wonder what she thought after Gabriel left her. Now she was all alone to think about all he told her. What impact would it have on her life? How would it affect her betrothal to Joseph? Would he understand? Would he accept her word or think she was crazy? When she showed signs of being pregnant, would he think she was unfaithful? What kind of mother would she have to be to raise the child who would become Israel's Messianic king, the Son of the Most High God?

Application

There are some important contrasts I'd like to point out, because they will in turn point out how we can apply all of this to our lives.

The first contrast shows us the kind of people who will be most open to Jesus. The announcement of John's birth occurred at the center of the Jewish world, the Temple in Jerusalem, in the Holy Place. By contrast, Gabriel visits Mary in a small, insignificant town where people and their houses are unclean both hygienically and religiously. The Jews knew the prophecies said the Messiah would be a great king, but they could not imagine in their wildest dreams that that king would be born to a peasant girl in an insignificant little town. He did not pass their King Aptitude Test (KAT) because they wanted a very different kind of king.

Jesus knew before He came that the super-religious people, like Zechariah, would reject Him. They strove for ethical and moral perfection hoping it would earn God's salvation, national restoration and blessings. He did not pass their Religious Aptitude Test (RAT) for legal and religious perfection because they rejected an inward and humble relationship with God. Even living by hundreds of commandments and regulations can be less demanding than a personal relationship.

Knowing he would not fit in with the lifestyles of the kings and super-religious, he came to the poor in wallet and the poor in spirit. Whether rich or poor or somewhere in between Jesus will only come to us through the poorness of our spirit.

The second contrast shows us how we must respond to God when we feel the tension between trusting in human ability and trusting in God's ability.

Zechariah knew he could not trust in human ability because it was physically impossible for Elizabeth to conceive the messenger Gabriel promised. Mary knew she could not trust in human ability because she could not have sex with a man in order to conceive the Messiah Gabriel was promising her. When there is a crisis in our lives, we come to the point where we realize that we can't trust in human ability to solve it. Zechariah would not trust in God's ability and so he was at a stalemate. God sovereignly circumvented this and carried out his plan. Mary chose to trust in God's ability no matter what was involved. We must also chose to trust in God's ability. But how? What is the process?

The process begins by rejecting the kinds of attempts of a Zechariah to make ourselves perfect in God's sight or in our own sight. Then, we must do what we are doing now to study and get the facts about the real Jesus. Then, as we get the facts straight, we must look at our current image of Jesus and admit any ways that image is a distortion of the real Jesus. Then, we must correct that image. When we see Jesus as He really was and is we realize that He is far superior to our distorted Jesus. One of the reasons we have difficulty trusting in Jesus is that we have wrong or inadequate ideas about Him. The Jesus we have in mind and His ways of working are often just not worthy of our trust. When I find it difficult to trust God I examine my concept of Jesus or the Father or the Holy Spirit or my concept of how they work. I remind myself of the facts and find it a whole lot easier to trust and obey God. I won't claim that I do that everytime, for then I would be lying, but when I do that it works.

When we have the right view of Jesus, it is easier to trust Him and we can, like Mary, say, "I am the Lord's servant. May it be to me as you have said." We know that He will do His will through us even if it seems as impossible as conceiving a king without a biological father.

I think Mary's crisis was that she knew she could not produce the savior she thought Gabriel was telling her to produce on her own. There are parallels to this. Israel could not produce the savior on its own to save itself. We cannot produce the savior on our own to save ourselves. Still we try to produce the savior we think we need on our own. When people don't know about Jesus or reject Him when they do know about Him either they come up with a different, counterfeit savior or they buy into another religion or philosophy that convinces them they are their own god—their own savior.

The first example of this was when Israel rejected their Savior; they continued to wait for the different kind of Messiah they were expecting. They rejected the kind of Messiah Jesus was. They wanted the kind of Messiah that would lead them to military victory over the Romans and restore them to international greatness. They wanted to rule the world instead of watching the Romans or anyone else rule the world. Just for starters, the Jewish leaders of Jesus' day could not accept a Messiah that was born by a peasant girl from an insignificant little town in Galilee. Jesus' coming was predicted, but once He came, He turned out to be a very unpredictable Messiah. Jesus failed to pass their Messiah Aptitude Test (that's MAT). They were still bent on political freedom 70 years later. They rebelled against the Roman Empire who then destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple in 70 AD and spread the survivors around the Empire so they wouldn't be able to rise up together again.

The second example of how people come up with their own Messiah is the current views about the Messiah the Jews have. Today, Orthodox and Conservative Jews still wait for a man who will come as Messiah and bring about worldwide peace. Kabbalah Judaism is a mystical form of Judaism. Its followers believe that the Messiah is not a physical man but an eternal spiritual power that saves the soul from its self-centeredness. Reform Jews believe that we will achieve world peace, not through a man but through our collective efforts of bringing about social justice.³ That explains why so many Jews vote for liberal politicians even though many of them don't support Israel.

A third example is how many people today are buying the New Age counterfeit Christs. These Christs are not saviors but gurus who are supposed to enlighten us to believe that we are gods who don't need saving.

A fourth example is that it is more fashionable to invent your own savior than to use someone else's off the shelf Christ. Christmas and Easter are the most important and meaningful remembrances of Christianity. Many people in our culture increasingly substitute the real Jesus for empty sentimentality, plastic Santa Clauses and chocolate Easter Bunnies. All of this comes from a rejection of the real Jesus or the caricatures of Jesus in the media and movies. What about a person like you or me who claims to follow the real Jesus? We are constantly tempted to ignore the real Jesus. We are tempted to twist and distort the image we have of Jesus into one that is more tolerant of our sinful passions. Again, we need to do just what we are doing now, learn about the real Jesus so that we can put our trust in God's ability rather than our own.

Where does Mary go from here? Along with her trust in God she will need empathy and support. It probably won't come from immediate family. Where can she turn? She turns to her older relative Elizabeth. In the next passage (1:39-56), we'll follow along with her as she visits Elizabeth. We'll see how she continues to respond to this incredible challenge through faith and obedience.

¹ Bock, Darrel. *Jesus According to Scripture*. p. 59.

² Green and McKnight, eds. *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, p. 343.

³ Messiah. Wikipedia