

I. Introduction

- A. October 18: official start to the Christmas season. Why? Because that was the date the first hallmark Christmas movie debuted.
- B. Pre-Christmas
 - 1. Christmas, in execution, began about 15 months before the birth of Christ
 - 2. The fulfillment of what we see as the Christmas prophecy began when the angel Gabriel visited Zechariah in the Temple

II. A tale of two women

A. Elizabeth and Zechariah

In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, of the division of Abijah. And he had a wife from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. And they were both righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord. But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were advanced in years. Now while he was serving as priest before God when his division was on duty, according to the custom of the priesthood, he was chosen by lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense. And the whole multitude of the people were praying outside at the hour of incense. And there appeared to him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. And Zechariah was troubled when he saw him, and fear fell upon him. But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great before the Lord. And he must not drink wine or strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared." 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. I stand 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 take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time." And the people were waiting for Zechariah, and they were wondering at his delay in the temple. And when he came out, he was unable to speak to them, and they realized that he had seen a vision in the temple. And he kept making signs to them and remained mute. And when his time of service was ended, he went to his home. After these days his wife Elizabeth conceived, and for five months she kept herself hidden, saying, "Thus the Lord has done for me in the days when he looked on me, to take away my reproach among people." (Luke 1:5-25)

- 1. Priestly family: both priestly lines in Israel
 - a. Elizabeth=daughters of Aaron
 - b. Zechariah=Abidjan, serving in the Temple
- 2. Description (v6)

- a. Righteous, blameless, obedient
- b. See Genesis 17:1 and 1 Kings 9:4

When Abram was ninety-nine years old the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am God Almighty; walk before Me, and be blameless, that I may make My covenant between Me and you, and may multiply you greatly." (Genesis 17:1-2) And as for you, if you will walk before Me, as David your father walked, with integrity of heart and uprightness, doing according to all that I have commanded you, and keeping My statutes and My rules, then I will establish your royal throne over Israel forever, as I promised David your father, saying, "You shall not lack a man on the throne of Israel." (1 Kings 9:4-5)

3. Zechariah in the Temple

- a. Met by Gabriel
- b. Message: prayer has been answered
 - 1) What prayer? Son or Messiah?
 - a) *Prayer for a son, but as God does so consistently, answered in a more profound way!
 - b) Devoutly prayed for the redemption of Israel through the promised Messiah. Their son would prepare the way!
 - 2) Of note: Filled with Holy Spirit from the womb
 - 3) Did not believe and the sign was that he became mute

4. Elizabeth became pregnant

- 5. *After 400 years of God's perceived silence, Gabriel's visit to Zechariah marks the breaking in of the Messianic age.

B. Mary

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to Him the throne of His father David, and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His Kingdom there will be no end." And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?" And the angel answered her, "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 called holy—the Son of God. And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. For nothing will be impossible with God." And Mary said, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her. (Luke 1:26-38)

1. Gabriel visits Mary

- a. Description
 - 1) You are favored, God is with you; not, you are righteous, blameless, and faithful.

- 2) Doesn't mean she wasn't but the point I believe Scripture is making is that Mary is chosen by grace alone, not because she had some kind of special worthiness.
- b. She will have a son, the Messiah and this will be the work of the Holy Spirit.
- c. Mary responded in belief, gratitude, and humility.
2. ****Comparison:**
 - a. Same messenger: Gabriel
 - b. Troubled, told not to fear
 - c. Would have son, gave names, and that the Holy Spirit would be the agent
 - d. Primary roles in God's plan of reversing the curse
 - e. Distinct: One a prophet and one the Son of the Most High
- C. Walking together (v39-45)

In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah, and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, and she exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord." (Luke 1:39-45)

 1. Eagerly went to Elizabeth (six months pregnant)
 - a. Evidence of Holy Spirit filling
 - b. Blessed is Mary because of Who she is carrying.
 2. Why did Mary go and stay with Elizabeth for three months?
 - a. Mary had faith that Elizabeth would welcome her
 - 1) One person who could understand
 - 2) Vulnerable and needed someone to come alongside her
 - b. Elizabeth had faith that there was a reason God sent Mary to her.
 - 1) Recognized that God uses whom He chooses - gratitude
 - 2) Elizabeth was in tune with the Holy Spirit and her response confirms it.
 - c. Mary's visit confirms God's plans
 - 1) Movement of the Spirit
 - 2) Physical reality of Gabriel's message
 - d. Common bond of submission and faith
 - e. *No hint of jealousy or hesitation on Elizabeth's part even though her son was second to Mary's
 3. Prayer and praises = full of godly character and Spirit-fulled confidence

And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for He has looked on the humble estate of His servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for He Who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is His name. And His mercy is for those who fear Him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with His arm; He has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts; He has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate; He has filled the hungry with good things, and the

rich He has sent away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of His mercy, as He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever.” And Mary remained with her about three months and returned to her home. (Luke 1:46-56)

III. Reflections

A. Discipleship

1. At the outset of the Christmas story, God gives us a powerful picture of how He has designed us to experience His gift of grace and love.
2. When we hear God's voice, whether it is through the written Word of God or the Holy Spirit living within us (or an angelic messenger as in this case), we are called to obedience.
3. But our obedience is rarely in isolation.
 - a. We are called to believe God and His Word no matter how impossible it seems.
 - b. We have been placed within a family to confide in and counsel with.
 - c. *What Elizabeth and Mary model is the intentional pursuit of discipleship as God works out His plans in our lives. Mary could have stayed hidden to avoid shame - but she didn't.

B. Moment we live in/personal realization

1. Elizabeth and Zechariah/Mary
 - a. Elizabeth and Zechariah were late in their years and had been longing for God to fulfill his promise of redemption and salvation for Israel. They had prayed and faithfully waited - all their hopes and dreams were in the work that God promised he would do - the advent of Messiah
 - b. Mary was a teenage girl who was open and willing to be used in whatever way God wanted to use her. She was available and obedient even though no one would likely understand.
 - c. *Elizabeth and Zechariah had been faithful and perseverant for decades in hope for what God would do. Mary was just a girl who was faithful simply by being available and willing to believe what God said. And God brought them together for the greatest story ever told.
2. Elizabeth and Mary moment
 - a. I believe we are in an Elizabeth and Mary moment right now
 - b. God is doing an extraordinary work in our world—believe it or not. Jesus is coming back, don't know the day or hour, but it seems we are in the season (dreams, visions, and visitations that all Hell is fighting against. Ever thought ... Kingdom advancing, not defending?)
 - c. *There is a remnant of those in the church who have lived the greater part of their lives (like Elizabeth & Zechariah) faithfully and persevered, placing all their hope in the coming of Christ. There is also a remnant of young people (teens and young adults like Mary) who don't care about the things the world deems of value, but they are available to whatever God asks and they believe what He says.
 - d. *And God is calling them together, the older faithful, surrendered generation to love and walk with and celebrate the new birth/old new work that is within them.