

## Luke 1:46–55

### Introduction

We're a people who really like to think we're "something" – especially as citizens of the "greatest" nation on earth. We're rich, and powerful, and proud. Even if we wouldn't personally consider ourselves to be rich and powerful, we can still aspire to these things. The pursuit of wealth, the pursuit of "security," the pursuit of independent living and being "in control" can all be the signs of a proud and haughty *heart*. We're a people who naturally want things our way – who want God to do things our way, and to be a God who fits our way of thinking. *In and of ourselves*, we are *all* either the rich and the powerful, or those who aspire to be the rich and powerful. In and of ourselves, we are all pursuing the illusion of being "in control" and "calling the shots." In and of ourselves, we are all proud and haughty in the thoughts of our hearts.

So what does Christmas mean for those aspiring to be in control – who want God to "be" and "do" according to our own way of thinking? What does Christmas mean for the proud and the haughty? On the other hand, we could also ask: What might Christmas mean for the humble – for those who not only are not seeking great things for themselves but who know that far from being "something," they are "nothing"? What might Christmas mean for those who know and gladly confess that they are not now, and never will be the ones "calling the shots"?

The Gospel of Luke begins with an angel announcing to a man named Zechariah that his wife Elizabeth, who has been barren all her life, will conceive and bear a son in her old age. They were to name this son, "John." Here's what the angel said to Zechariah about this son who was to be born:

**I. Luke 1:17 — He will go before [the Lord God] 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.**

So... some way, somehow, the Lord God Himself was **coming**, and the role of this child to be born was to **make ready for the Lord a people prepared**. Listen to these words from the very last verses of the Old Testament – from the prophet Malachi:

- Malachi 4:1–2, 5 — Behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the **arrogant** and all evildoers will be stubble. The day that is coming shall set them ablaze, says the LORD of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch. But for you who **fear my name**, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall... Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before [that] great and awesome day of the LORD comes.

Whatever it might look like in the end, the **coming** of the Lord would be both **bad** news and **good** news – bad news for the proud and the haughty who aspire to independence and being in control, but good news for the humble who fear God's name. And now, here in Luke chapter one, Elizabeth is to be pregnant with the child who will go *before* the Lord to *make ready* for the

Lord a people prepared. Seven hundred years before John was born, and two hundred years before Malachi, the prophet Isaiah also spoke of a voice that would one day cry out:

- Isaiah 40:3–5 — “In the wilderness **prepare the way of the LORD**; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.”

How does one **prepare** for the coming of the Lord? And when, and how will He come?

We don’t live under the rule of kings today. But in the Old Testament, God ruled over His special, chosen people in and through a royal line of kings descended from king David. What this means is that the triumphs of the king in battle were really just the triumphs of God in and through the king. The blessings of the king’s rule from the royal city of Jerusalem were really just the blessings of God poured out on the people in and through the king. This helps us to understand the special relationship that God set up between Himself and the line of David. He said about each one of David’s sons who would come to the throne after him:

- 2 Samuel 7:14 — I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son.

So, by means of this “adoption” the king was uniquely the “**son**” of the **Most High** – the *son* of *God*. To speak about the deeds of the royal and earthly “son” (the king in Jerusalem) was to be nothing less than to speak about the deeds of his royal and heavenly “Father” (The Lord God Himself). It was God who **came** in the rule of the **king** to save and bless His people.

Only by the time of Zechariah and Elizabeth, and Joseph and Mary, there had been no king in Jerusalem for almost six hundred years. The kings had become proud and haughty. They did not rule for God as true “sons of God.” And the people followed them in their pride and rebellion. *In and of ourselves*, we are *all* aspiring to be rich and powerful. In and of ourselves, we are all pursuing the illusion of being “in control” and “calling the shots.” In and of ourselves, we are all proud and haughty in the innermost thoughts of our hearts. And so God’s special, chosen people were ruled by foreign kings. Over the years, this became the question: “Where was God – the one who used to **come** in the rule of the king to save and bless His people?” “When would He **come** again?” Listen to the prophet Isaiah:

- Isaiah 11:1–5 — There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse [David’s father], and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit. And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. And his delight shall be in the fear of the LORD. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide disputes by what his ears hear, but with righteousness **he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth**; and he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips **he shall kill the wicked**. Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist, and faithfulness the belt of his loins.

One day, from out of the ashes of David's line, God would raise up another king – a Messiah **in whom He would come to His people** once more. And once again, the “coming” of God is both *bad* news and *good* news – bad news for the proud and those aspiring to be “in control,” but good news for the poor and the meek and those who have learned the fear of the Lord. So now, can we already begin to guess “how” the Lord will **come**? Can we already begin to guess **for whom** this John is to make ready a people prepared? Isn't it for the coming of the king?

**II. Luke 1:26–33** — In the sixth month [of Elizabeth's pregnancy] 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** [“**God saves**”]. 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.”

Christmas really *is* about the birth of a *king*. A king in whose rule and reign we see the **coming** of God Himself to save and bless His special, chosen people. Good news for some; but as we've seen already, it's also bad news for others. A good and righteous king is like a shepherd who leads, and protects, and cares for His flock. And yet a good and righteous king is still a king – one who requires full submission, and obedience, and faithful service and devotion. The haughty and the proud, and those who would call the shots for themselves always find the king to be their *enemy*. But the humble and the meek and those who never aspire after great things for themselves are those who find the king to be their *shepherd*.

Only what does a Jewish baby born two thousand years ago from the royal line of David have to do with us Americans who are all sitting here in this room today? And where is he, after all? Where is the throne on which this son of David sits?

When the angel was sent from God to Zechariah, he came with a birth announcement for a married woman who had been barren all her life. When this same angel was sent from God to Mary, he came with a birth announcement to one who was still only betrothed to her husband, and so to one who had never had relations with a man. Mary had to wonder: Was this baby to be born only after she had come together with Joseph?

**III. Luke 1:34–38** — 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.”

The Christmas story is not just some pleasant, sentimental tale. It's a story full of “foolishness.” It's a story full of “impossibility.” Let's be clear about what the Bible teaches and what this angelic messenger from God is actually saying. Jesus was conceived in Mary's womb from an entirely “normal” ovum “naturally” produced by Mary's body – Mary, who was herself

conceived by the union of her father and mother. Jesus is in every way a *true* and *real* human being – in every way just like us. But there was no male sperm that fertilized this egg inside of Mary. There was no sperm **at all**. Instead, what the Bible says and what this angel announces is that even as the powerful, life-giving **Spirit of God hovered** over the waters at the beginning of creation, so now the **Holy Spirit will come upon Mary**, and the power of the Most High will **overshadow her**, and so *therefore* the child to be born will be called “holy”—the Son of God.

Not only is he to be the “adopted” **son of the Most High** as the royal Davidic king, but He is also to be the “one and only” holy **Son of God**. He is to be in every way the only true **God**, the eternal Son of the eternal Father conceived now in time by the eternal power of the Holy Spirit. It was King David himself who wrote these words in the book of Psalms:

- Psalm 110:1 — The LORD [God] says to my Lord: “Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.”

One thousand years later, Jesus asked this question:

- Matthew 22:43, 45 — “How is it then that David, in the Spirit, calls [his future son] Lord... If then David calls him Lord, how is he his son?”

The prophet Isaiah had answered that question without being able to fully understanding his own words seven hundred years before it all happened. This is what he said to God’s special, chosen people:

- Isaiah 9:6 — For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called **Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace**.

Indeed, as the angel said to Mary, “**nothing** will be impossible with **God**.”

What does a Jewish baby born two thousand years ago from the royal line of David have to do with **us** who are all sitting here in this room today? **Everything**. His sovereign right to rule is not limited to Jews only, but extends to every language and nation—to every individual man, woman, and child—on the face of the earth. Now, of course, this is either utterly insane, or it’s true, and we are all accountable and answerable to Him. There is no middle ground. In the days before the kings failed, God would come to save and bless His people *through the rule and reign* of the king. But with the birth of Jesus, God was coming to save and bless His people even in the very **person** of the King – **God** in the **flesh**. Listen again to Isaiah:

- Isaiah 7:14 — The Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel [God with us].

Remember what the angel said to Zechariah about the son soon to be born to him and to his wife Elizabeth:

- Luke 1:17 — **He will go before [the Lord God]** 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.**

Have you been made ready for the Lord as a people prepared? The Gospel writers all tell us that John was “The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘**Prepare** the way of the Lord; make his paths straight.’” (Mat. 3:3) But how does one **prepare** for the coming of the Lord? How beautiful it is that Mary, the first to know of the Lord’s coming, should also be the one that Luke gives to us as an example of one *prepared*.

**IV. Luke 1:38** — And Mary said, “Behold, I am the bond-servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.” And the angel departed from her.

What? No more questions? No objections? No inward doubts and skepticism? Instead, just this childlike expression of simple faith: “Let it be to me according to your word.” Let *what* be to me according to your word? The virgin conception and birth of the eternal King and Savior of all God’s chosen people. Should we call this gullibility? Or, should we call this faith?

**V. Luke 1:39–45** — 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.**”

It is pride that disbelieves. It is haughtiness and arrogance that doubts the word of God – no matter how “impossible” it may seem to us. And so a “people prepared” is first of all a people who *believe* the word of God – a people especially who believe that He Himself has come down to us in the person of the **King**, Jesus Christ.

Mary’s belief was not gullible, and neither was it some blind faith. She had already **believed** in the God of Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob. She knew His **promises** to them and to their offspring. She had already **believed** in the God of David, and she knew the **promise** that God had made to David. She had already **believed** in the God of the prophets. She knew the salvation and the blessings that they had foretold. And so when the word of God came to her, announcing the virgin birth of her Lord and Messiah, she believed. She believed with a humble, meek, and childlike faith.

Have you believed the word of God? Have you believed that He Himself has come down to us in the person of the **King**, Jesus Christ?

- John 6:29 — Jesus [said], “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.”

And the Apostle John writes:

- 1 John 3:23 — And this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ.

The “belief” of the world is proud and haughty. The “faith” of the world is self-serving and self-promoting. But the faith that pleases God—the faith that believes that He Himself has come down to us in the person of the **King**, Jesus Christ—this faith is always humble, and lowly, and self-abasing, and surrendered. What did Mary say?—“Behold, **I am the bond-servant of the Lord**; let it be to me according to your word.” Sometimes a person might say he’s a servant of the Lord as though it were some kind of status marker. But what Mary says is that she is the Lord’s bond-servant. She is, as it were, His slave. She is nothing, and no one, apart from the underserved expression of His love and favor.

**VI. Luke 1:46–50** — And Mary said, “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked on the LOWLY ESTATE of his **bond-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.”

What is Mary saying? – That she’s something special? That from now on she has a special place of status and prestige? Far, *far* from it. That Mary should be pregnant with the Son of God is only the ultimate sign of God’s undeserved favor to her – a favor that is *also* for *all* those who fear the Lord from generation to generation.

There is only one who was pregnant with the Messiah. But the blessings of that Messiah are for *all* those who are of lowly estate – who see themselves as nothing, and no one, apart from His undeserved love and mercy. This is not just Mary’s song. This is the song of all who have ever been made ready for the Lord as a people prepared. Mary sees in herself the same lowly estate of *all* God’s true people. Mary sees in the great things done for her the same great things that the mighty God does for *all* who count themselves as nothing more than the “bondslaves” of the Lord.

**VII. Luke 1:51–55** — “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 LOWLY 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.”

Who are the “proud,” and the “mighty,” and the “rich”? In the Bible, these are the people who aspire to be in control, and to call their own shots. These are the people who believe in God only so far as they think it might serve their own self-interest. And so these are the people for whom the coming of the **King**, born of Mary, can only be **bad** news. These are the people who will ultimately be “scattered,” and “brought down,” and “sent away empty” because they didn’t *truly* believe the word of the Lord.

But then who are the “hungry” and those of “lowly estate”? In the Bible, these are all the people, **just like Mary**, who know that they are nothing, and no one, apart from the undeserved favor and love of the Lord. These are the people, **just like Mary**, who see themselves as nothing more than **bondservants** of the Lord – and so those whose **belief in His word** is really an expression of **absolute surrender** to the **King** who has come into the world. These are the people for whom the coming of the **King**, born of Mary, is in every way **GOOD NEWS** – who will ultimately be “helped,” and “exalted,” and “filled with good things.”

But where is the King, now? Where is the throne on which the son of David sits? The Apostle Paul writes about the Messiah, Jesus:

- Philippians 2:6–11 — Though he was **in the form of God**, [He] did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, **being born in the likeness of men**. And being found **in human form**, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Jesus suffered the curse of God’s holy wrath against sinners like us so that He might purchase for Himself a people – a people forgiven and cleansed from sin, a people lowly and humble, a people who would rejoice to live their lives always for **His glory**. On the third day, God raised Him from the dead and highly exalted Him, bestowing on Him the name that is above every name. Remember what King David wrote:

- Psalms 110:1 — The LORD [God] says to my Lord: “**Sit at my right hand**, until I make your enemies your footstool.”

Jesus Himself commanded the Apostles to “to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead.” (Acts 10:42) One day, the God who came to us in the birth of a baby will come to us again on the clouds of heaven. On that day, every knee will bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” And so the message of John the Baptist is just as relevant for us today as it ever was:

- Matthew 3:3 — “**Prepare** the way of the Lord; make his paths straight.”

Who are the people prepared and made ready for the Lord? They’re the people who sing, today, the very **same** song that Mary sang two thousand years ago.

***Luke 1:46–55*** — ***And Mary said, “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked on the lowly estate of his bond-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 lowly 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.”*