

The Birth of Jesus Foretold

²⁶ In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, ²⁷ to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸ The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you."

²⁹ Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. ³⁰ But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. ³¹ You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. ³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, ³³ and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end."

³⁴ "How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"

³⁵ The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called^[a] the Son of God. ³⁶ Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. ³⁷ For no word from God will ever fail."

³⁸ "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled." Then the angel left her.

Luke 1:26-38

The Lord left many clues scattered throughout the Old Testament. The Messiah would be human, not divine, in Genesis. It would be born in Bethlehem, in Micah. He would come from the patriarchy of the Old Testament, from Abraham, in Genesis. More clearly said, he would be Jewish. He would be of the House of David. This was puzzling, there was no downstream lineage of David. But wait, it also said, "from the stump of Jesse". Jesse was David's father and had descendants.

Only in hindsight could we see this, and it is not surprising that Mary was unconvinced from Elizabeth's message. But wait (again). It said that the child would be born of a virgin (Is 7:14). How can that be?

A common expectation, from the rabbinic commentary derived from Daniel, was that God would descend with an army of angels to redeem the faithful and the righteous and punish the unworthy. Instead, they got a tiny baby from a confused mom, in an obscure village, from the most insignificant of the twelve tribes. In baseball terms, God, if a pitcher, would throw curve balls and changeups.

During Advent, improbably, we find ourselves anticipating something that has already happened. The infant would come into adulthood, teach, heal, and promise forgiveness, the acceptance of our human failing. He would proclaim that God's Spirit was within us and commission us to be healers, to feed others, and to always seek justice, The infant, now adult would unjustly be killed. But the feeding, healing, forgiving and seeking justice would continue. It would be made real in another curve ball and change up of God's enduring presence, you and me.

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