

## **The World Has Turned Upside Down**

**Isaiah 7:10-14; Romans 1:1-7; Matthew 1:18-24**

### **Luke 1: 39-80**

Elizabeth was Mary's cousin and Zechariah, Elisabeth's husband, was a temple priest. He was thought of as a very holy and kind man who came from a small village. Both Zechariah and Elizabeth were up in age and would have (probably) been over 60 when their story took place. Not having any children was a big social problem and sometimes seen as a neglect of a religious duty!

Chosen as high priest one year, Zechariah's was on duty and was the one to go into the temple of the God and burn incense. He poured the incense on the altar but before he could leave, an angel appeared. Zechariah was startled and fearful. But the angel said to him: 'Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Now both Zechariah & Elisabeth had no children, because Elizabeth was barren; and they were both well along in years. The angel continued: "Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to give him the name John. He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, for he will be great in the sight of God."

Zechariah asked the angel, 'How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years.'

The angel answered, 'I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to tell you this good news.'

### **Luke 1:26-38**

**Next, the same angel Gabriel who visited Zechariah 6 months before, comes to Nazareth to give Mary her good news...**the next stage in the story, to involve a teenage girl, unmarried, but engaged to the village carpenter and to tell her that she will have a son and that He will be greatest king Israel ever knew and that He will make an impact on the whole world. We know that she is afraid – angels don't turn up on your doorstep every day! But not yet fully understanding what the angel's words mean, or what the consequences might be, she knows enough of God to trust and to be willing to serve God. Life is never going to be same again for Mary.

She had to face an enormous challenge to her faith and trust in God and to the faith of her family and Joseph, the man she chose to marry. She was asked to assume a burden of tremendous responsibility. It had never been heard of before that a child could be born without a natural father. Mary was asked to accept this miraculous exception to the laws of nature. That required faith and trust in God and in his promises. Second, Mary was not yet married. Pregnancy outside of wedlock was

not tolerated in those days. Mary was only espoused to Joseph, and such an engagement had to last for a whole year. She was asked to assume a great risk. She could have been rejected by Joseph, by her family, by all her own people. Mary knew that Joseph and her family would not understand without revelation from God. She nonetheless believed and trusted in God's promises.

God is turning the world upside down...announcing this news to – an unmarried young girl, engaged to the village carpenter, in an obscure village in Northern Israel called Nazareth. The greatest king the world has ever seen is going to be born to Mary from Nazareth, says God! The world has just been turned upside down.

Mary travels to visit Elisabeth after being told by the angel that she was in her 6<sup>th</sup> month of pregnancy, and we hear Mary's song in which she sings of ways in which God is turning the world upside down. She saw that the hopes of the world are to be found in the God who turns the world upside down by filling those who are hungry for grace and peace and food and sending the rich away empty. It is not wealth that will save them, but opening the door of their hearts to Jesus that will fill them and bless them. God is turning the world upside down.

And Mary said: 'My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me-- holy is his name. His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation. He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. e has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, even as he said to our fathers.'

Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months and then returned home. God has turned the world upside down.

### **Matthew 1:18-24**

**And now, we come to Joseph...**a man who found himself in a very difficult situation, promised to a woman in marriage, already legally bound, but now she was pregnant. If he divorced her, as he was entitled to do, then she would be shamed and he didn't want to do this. If he did not divorce her then he would be shamed as it would look like he had had sexual relations with her before they were fully married, which would have been quite a scandal at that time. This was of course Joseph and Mary. But then an angel appeared to him in a dream and told him to take Mary as his wife and it says that 'when he awoke he did exactly as he had been commanded to do.'

This man responded to a dream, prompting him to do the opposite of what he had intended to do, but look at what happened as a result. Because Joseph responded to his dream, Jesus was given the proper parents that God intended for him. No doubt the reason he responded to God in this particular way was because he was open to God. He wanted to do what was right and to live as God asked.

What God asks of us can be difficult, but it will always be the most worthwhile path. Standing up for what we believe in can be difficult, but sometimes God asks this of us. All of us have a role to play as fathers or mothers, single or married. We might be tempted to say, ‘yes, but God doesn’t speak to us like that.’ God is speaking to us all the time, through the Scriptures, through each other and God is still asking us to live by the commandments, even though it may mean being the minority.

How we live is so important, because it influences the world around us. Making our world a better place begins with each of us...where we live, how we deal with people around us. That’s what God calls us to do. The individual responses of Elisabeth & Zechariah, Joseph & Mary and so many others God’s call changed the course of history. Their responses at the time made all the difference in the world. It is always the few people in society who try to live as God asks that make the difference.

Do we listen for God’s voice and respond, as Joseph did, even when it seems very challenging; or do we cling to our own plans, which will likely bring us failure?

Matthew began his gospel with the assurance that God is with us, Emmanuel; and closes it with the promise of the Risen Lord to his disciples just before he ascends to God...“know that I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” In confidence then that God is with us, might we not be willing to risk loving each other as Jesus, Emmanuel, showed us is possible?

**‘When Joseph awoke from sleep he did exactly as the angel had told him to do.’**

That is also what God calls us to do – to live by the commandments, to do what is right and not to be afraid to stand for what we believe in - in faith, in trust and in humility – to do as the angel tells us to do!

Deacon Gregory J Cecere

December 18, 2016

(excerpts from Fr. Thomas Kalathil, Fr. Murchadh Ó Madagáin, Gregory Murphy O.P., Dcn Don Schwager, Pastor Aaron Christie)