

WHO WAS MARY'S CHILD?

Luke 1:26-38 Text: 32-33 *"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, and He will reign over Jacob's descendants forever. His kingdom will never end."*

It was the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy when God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth. Gabriel was God's messenger to deliver important messages on His behalf. And Gabriel appeared to at least three people in the Bible. First was to the prophet Daniel who had been praying for understanding. In Daniel 10, Daniel was praying to understand the future for his people after their captivity in Babylon. He had a vision that had left him weak and trembling. God sent the angel Gabriel immediately to give him strength and comfort. Gabriel told Daniel, *"Don't be afraid."*

Then Gabriel appeared to Zechariah the priest to announce the miraculous birth of John the Baptist. You learned about that last week. (Luke 1:19)

Then, Gabriel was sent to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin named Mary who was pledged to be married to Joseph, a descendant of King David. He said to her, *"Greetings. You are highly favored! The Lord is with you."* Gabriel told Mary she would conceive and bear a son. (Luke 1:26-38). Now, the name Gabriel means *"God is great"* and he was the one who revealed that the Savior was to be named *"Jesus."* (Luke 1:31) which makes Gabriel the *angel of the annunciation*.

This prophecy about Jesus being the Son of God, who was to be born of the Virgin Mary, is a powerful reminder of who Mary's child was. He was the Son of God. And He was to be given the throne of David, which means Jesus was the promised Messiah. And that Jesus would reign forever over Jacob's descendants, the twelve tribes of Israel. His kingdom would never end because Jesus wasn't just a *"king for a day."* He is the King of Kings. The Lord of Lords who will reign forever and ever. So, what does all that mean to you? It means you should have hope. It means you have a Savior who loves you. Who will never leave you. Or forsake you. It means you have a King who is just and righteous. Who will rule with love and compassion.

So, as we again celebrate the birth of Jesus this Christmas Season, remember the words of Gabriel's prophecy. *"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. And He will reign over Jacob's descendants forever. His kingdom will never end."*

Back in 2000, the television commentator Peter Jennings produced an "investigative report" about the *Historical Jesus*. It was surprising how many so-called "scholars" had dismissed the claim of a virgin birth. What's even more surprising was how many of those scholars were theologians! And statistics show that 56% of Seminary students at that time did *not* believe in the Virgin Birth. But not everyone believes in the Virgin birth of Jesus even today! The Pew Research Center says *most* Americans do believe Jesus was born to a virgin. That He was visited by three wise men from the east. That His birth was announced to shepherds by an angel of the Lord. That the baby Jesus was laid in a manger as an infant. But those who believe all those parts of the Christmas story are fewer today than in 2014, nine years ago. Belief in a supernatural virgin birth has declined from 30 percent in 2014 to just 17 percent today. You might expect *nonbelievers* to doubt the Christmas story told in the Bible.

But new research says there are signs of growing doubts, even from *Christian* groups. Especially among religious "nones". Currently, about three-in-ten U.S. adults (29%) are religious "nones" - those when asked about their religious identity describe themselves as atheists, agnostics or "nothing in particular". Those who identify as Christians, which includes Protestants, Catholics, members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and Orthodox Christians make up 63% of the adult population.

So, Christians now outnumber religious "nones" by a ratio of a little more than two-to-one. But the recent decrease within Christianity is mostly among Protestants. Today, 40% of U.S. adults are Protestants. That broadly defines non-denominational Christians and people who describe themselves as "just Christian" along with Baptists, Methodists, Lutherans, Presbyterians, and members of many other denominational families. The Protestant share of the population is down 4 percent over the last five years. And has dropped ten points in 10 years.

It's not surprising that many believe the religious features of Christmas are being highlighted less today than in the past. Many are not bothered by this. Only 31 percent of adults say they are bothered by less emphasis on religion in Christmas. 52% of Americans, over half, say it doesn't matter to them if they're not greeted with a "Merry Christmas" or "Happy Holidays" when they visit stores during the holiday season.

But I sure hope it matters to you! And that's why you're here today, to celebrate the virgin birth of Jesus Christ. Celebrating the birth of Jesus is a significant event for Christians around the world. Christmas Day, tomorrow, is a day marked with traditions. Attending church services. Singing carols. Exchanging gifts with Christmas greetings. Spending time with family and friends. Christmas turkey dinner. Christmas is the time to remember the precious gift of the birth of Jesus Christ.

So, honor and respect it. Follow His example. Seek ways to become a gift to your community by bringing hope, love, and joy to it. What other event throughout all time is more significant than the birth of our Savior Jesus Christ? Christmas is the arrival of Immanuel, God with us, when God's Word became Flesh. The Savior of the World is the most

significant birth *ever*. It's the central event in all of history. Time moves backward and forward from that moment. It's where we get BC and AD. A way of counting years based on the birth of Jesus Christ. BC stands for *Before Christ* and is a way of counting years *before* the birth of Jesus Christ. AD stands for *Anno Domini*, Latin for *in the year of the Lord* and *starts with year 1* continuing to this present day in 2023. How can we fail to remember this day? How can we not celebrate Christmas?

George Whitefield, Anglican minister, and one of the founders of Methodism, offered this for how believers should celebrate Christmas: *"It's God's love that brought the Lord Jesus Christ into our world. Shall we not remember the birth of our Jesus? Shall we celebrate the birth of earthly kings, and not that of the King of kings? Shall it be forgotten? God forbid! No, let us celebrate and keep this festival of our church. With joy in our hearts let the birth of a Redeemer who redeemed us from sin, from wrath, from death, and from hell, be always remembered. May this Savior's love never be forgotten!"*

Now, that's Christmas! But it seems that every year the Christmas season seems to fuel a frenzy of *consumerism* rather than a chance to celebrate the birth of Christ. Decorations and other Christmas items are put on display even before Halloween is over. Black Friday sales started earlier this year. We need to resist this trend and show children, and others, the real reason we celebrate Christmas. And to have lived in a way that honors Him. As we celebrate the birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, we need to remember, Jesus is the perfect gift that God gave to all of us. Giving gifts at Christmas is fine. But no better gift can be given than Jesus. You need to have Jesus in your heart and living for Him. He *will* return as King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

So, as we go through Christmas and the New Year, always be reminded of the sacrifice Jesus made for you. He was, and still is, your Lord and Savior. Surely, this should be a time of great celebration! Billy Graham said we should never celebrate Jesus' birth at Christmastime—and then forget Him the rest of the year. After all, just because we celebrate our children's birthdays doesn't mean we forget them, or ignore them, the rest of the year! They are an important part of our lives. And our relationship with them should continue to grow every day. To ignore children is unimaginable. And yet, this is what we often do with Jesus.

Hopefully, Christmas this year will be more than presents and parties for you. That you will have taken time to concentrate on Jesus. But shouldn't Jesus be part of your life every day? Of course, He should! He loves you so much that He gave His life for your salvation. Have you responded to His love by giving your life to Him? Let the wonder of that first Christmas in Bethlehem fill your life today in Everglades City, or wherever you are. Take time each day to draw strength from His Word, the Bible. To pray. And to have fellowship with other believers here in Everglades Community Church, or the church of your choice. The Bible says, *"Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ"* (2 Peter 3:18). That's what we should be doing, knowing who Mary's child was! And who our Savior is! And may your spirit rejoice in the wonder of His birth.

. . . . Millie and I Wish each of you a joy-filled Christmas. Merry Christmas!