

## A Message of Love – Luke 1:26-38

Max Lucado sat in the coffee shop with Ian, a University student who had one question for him: “I just want to know what counts.” He went on to say, “Don’t talk to me about religion, I’ve been down that road. Stay away from theology; I have a degree in that. Get to the heart of it – I want to know what really counts.”

Ian knew Mr. Lucado was a Christian and though Ian wanted to be a Christian as well, he was disenchanted. He grew up in the church, wanted to be a pastor, took the training, but quit – everything. School, church, faith. Now he had one question for Mr. Lucado, “What really matters?”

After wrestling with all the things he could say to the young man, Max Lucado concluded that the Apostle Paul said it best in 1 Corinthians 15:3-5:

**<sup>3</sup> For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, <sup>4</sup> that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, <sup>5</sup> and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve.**

Mr. Lucado would conclude: “There it is. Almost too simple. Jesus was killed, buried, and resurrected. Surprised? The part that matters is the cross. No more and no less.”<sup>1</sup>

You and I would agree. The heart of the Gospel message is the death and resurrection of Jesus, for it was in that act our salvation was secured for all eternity. Again we turn to the Apostle Paul who will say, “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” (Romans 5:8)

This dying and raising to life again of Jesus is part of the greatest love story ever told, and it is a story that includes you and me. It embraces the people who slept on the street last night and the billionaires who think they run the world. It includes the newest born baby and the oldest person on the planet. Of the 7.8 billion people on the earth today, this love is for 7.8 billion of them. In other words no one is excluded. “For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son...” (John 3:16)

And a crucial chapter in the story of God’s love for us is the story of Jesus coming to earth. Before time began, Jesus existed with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Jesus was there as the earth was created, and Jesus was there when Adam and Eve fell into sin. Jesus was there when the great flood covered the earth. Jesus was there when Abraham was called to be the father of a great nation, and Jesus was there when that nation needed rescuing from Egypt under the leadership of Moses. Jesus was there when the Davidic Kingdom was established and he was there when God’s people were taken into captivity and exiled from their home.

But what we read in Luke chapter 1 is how Jesus came to be wrapped up in human flesh and blood, how he became one of us for a time so he could redeem us from sin and death.

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<sup>1</sup> Max Lucado, “No Wonder They Call Him The Saviour”(Nashville: W. Publishing Co., 2004) xi-xiii.

John the apostle would write, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory of the one and only who came from the Father.” (John 1:14) How did the eternal Word take on flesh? This is what we read about in Luke 1.

**Turn with me to Luke 1:26-38. (READ)**

This passage takes us to a very intimate and history-changing moment when Mary is informed that she has been chosen for a very special task. She would bear a son who would be like no other. He would be the Son of God. But I get ahead of myself...

Let me take you to a sleepy little village of about three hundred people, a village that had been around for over three hundred years already and would continue to exist another 2000 and counting. This village is a mere seven kilometers from Sepphoris, the administrative capital of Galilee in Mary’s time. But there is no mention of Nazareth in Josephus’ list of 56 towns in Galilee, nor is it included in the 63 towns of Galilee listed in the Talmud. It was a village not worth mentioning... until an angel arrived one day to speak to a young maiden. Now who hasn’t heard of the town of Nazareth, the home of Mary and Joseph, and Jesus?

The angel went to the most distinguished family of that village.... Scratch that. All indications show that Mary and Joseph were quite poor, looking at the sacrifice they gave at Jesus’ dedication. Pigeons were the sacrifice a poor family gave to redeem their firstborn.

They do not come from a priestly family – like Mary’s relative Elizabeth did. Mary was young, engaged but not married. At least her fiancée came from the right family tree – he was a descendent of King David!

But they were not married yet, so Mary was still living at home waiting for Joseph to call her to come be his bride. Finding Mary would not be easy, for she was a nobody, in an unimportant family, living in a forgotten village.

But God knew exactly where she was, as he knows where each of us is. Our neighbourhood watch sends out every notice from the RCMP and recently it has included many missing people. Right away I pray these missing people will be found, for they are important to someone – someone is looking for them – and most of all, they are important to God. Thankfully, every person listed this month as missing has been found.

God still knows exactly where each of us is – all the time. There is no hiding from God. He sees you in your home, at work, wherever you might go. He also sees the person sleeping behind the dumpster, or in the city park, or under the awning of the local business. The reason God keeps an eye on each of us is because he loves us and wants us to have a relationship with Him. And just as the angel Gabriel, who was sent by God, knew the name of this young maiden, so God knows each of our names as well. You are important to God...

In verse 28 the angel says that Mary is highly favoured and God is with her.

Did you know that message was not just for Mary? Did you know you are also favoured by God? God has drawn up the adoption papers, sealed in the blood of his Son, so that we could be a part of his family. He has drawn up the papers for every single person, and he waits patiently for your response to his call; “Come.” God knows we are lost and under the control of sin and Satan. But God does not want anyone to perish, but all to come to him in repentance.

God chose you to be a part of His family. This is because God is love, and he truly does love you. You are favoured by God...

And God is with you. This baby Mary would bear, this child who would be the Son of God, is also Emmanuel, God with us. God was not only with Mary, but soon would wrap himself in human flesh and be born as a baby and laid in a manger. He would grow up in that sleepy village of Nazareth until he turned thirty and then he revealed his true identity to twelve disciples and all who would pay attention. He was the creator God now walking among the people once again, as he once had done in a Garden so long ago. To look at Jesus was to see the Heavenly Father.

And when Jesus had completed his work of salvation and was ready to ascend back into heaven, Jesus said, “Lo I am with you always, even to the end of the ages.” (Matthew 28:20)

Jesus was Emmanuel and is Emmanuel even to this day. God is still with us, if only our eyes are open to see...

The angel must assure this young maiden that she does not need to fear him or God’s plans. God has seen your faith and he has a very special task for you, he says. God wants you to be the mother of the messiah – “He will be great and called the Son of the Most High, and he will be given the throne of his father David and he will reign forever...” (vss. 32-33) The name you will give him is Jesus, which means “Yahweh is Salvation.” Or “God saves.”

The contemporary Christmas song, “Mary Did you Know?” has these lines in it:

Mary, did you know  
that your Baby Boy would save our sons and daughters?  
Did you know  
that your Baby Boy has come to make you new?  
This Child that you delivered will soon deliver you.

How true that is. We all need a Saviour – even Mary, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. But Jesus came to save all of us – even Mary – because God so loved the world...

So how does God show up, how does he come to deliver his people from their sins? He comes as a baby, which is so ordinary, but through a virgin, something that is... impossible. Of course Mary quickly notes that, telling the angel that she is a virgin – she has not had sex – so how can she be pregnant? I can almost see a slight smile on the angel’s face as he says, “Nothing is impossible with God.” (vs. 37)

God cannot be put into a box and told, “You can only do things a certain way.” You cannot tell God, “A virgin cannot bear a child!” for he will simply say, “Watch!”

You cannot tell God, “You can’t make the shadow move backwards” because he will simply say, “Watch!” (as he did to Ahaz in Isaiah 38:8)

You can’t tell God, “People can’t walk on water”, for he will simply say, “Watch!”

You can’t tell God cancer can’t be stopped, for he will say, “Watch!”

God refuses to be put into a small little box of what we think he can or cannot do. God can do anything, even cause a virgin to bear a son. And so Mary would be encouraged to keep trusting, God let her in on a little secret – her relative Elizabeth, the elderly lady who was told she would never have children because she was too old, she is in her sixth month of pregnancy. The scripture is clear – a baby in his or her mother’s womb is a person. Read the next few verses to see how Elizabeth’s baby, still in the womb, reacted to the presence of Mary, the carrier of God’s son.

Mary leaves us with a wonderful response to the task God has called her to: “May your word to me be fulfilled” (v. 38). May we come to trust our loving Heavenly Father as she did. No doubt all the challenges she could and would face flashed before her – possible rejection by Joseph (he could even demand she be stoned to death), ostracized from her family and village, the shunning by the women of the town, the possibility of having to raise this child alone and maybe never being accepted by a man as his bride... Still she said “yes” to God...

So the story of the cross started with an announcement by an angel to a maiden of Nazareth. God was doing something amazing, miraculous and wonderful. God was sending not only the long awaited Messiah, He was coming to be our Saviour. His name would be called Jesus.

The story of Christmas is a message of love. God loved us and came down to us in Jesus so he could not only rescue us from sin, but so we could be adopted into his family. This offer is an offer of grace – something we do not earn or deserve, but is given freely out of the love of God. By the way, when it says Mary was “highly favoured” the literal translation of the Greek is “greatly graced.” We all live within the grace of God.

So Christmas is about God declaring to the world, “I am in love!” And who does God love? You! Me!

Over 100 years ago Rev. J.M. Driver wrote a simple hymn that goes like this:

Wonderful story of love! Tell it to me again.  
Wonderful story of love, wake the immortal strain!  
Angels with rapture announce it; shepherds with wonder receive it;  
Sinner O won’t you believe it? Wonderful story of love!

God has declared his love for you by sending you Jesus. How will you respond to Him today?