

CHRIST'S BIRTH ANNOUNCED TO MARY

- Merry Christmas! Christmas day is just tomorrow!

Greeting: The Savior is born

Response: He is born in a manger, He is born to reign eternally

- I hope that the shopping spree didn't suck life out of you.

- My heart goes out to those who may be hurting for various reasons, that God would heal you inwardly.

- A lot of Ugandans felt let down by the house, given the way the debate and voting were conducted. We had some heart rending scenes on the floor of parliament. Everything was done in haste! Our elders had advised that the nation goes for a referendum, but their voice was ignored, like Paul's idea was in Acts 27:9-11. Assurance: The Lord, Emmanuel, the King of Kings is still in charge!

- I thank God for bringing us this far, it's with a purpose and we thank Him.

SETTING THE SCENE

- Mary had been visited by angel Gabriel, when she had been going about her way of life. Angels are ministering spirits. Arch angel Gabriel appeared not only to Zechariah and to Mary but also to the prophet Daniel more than 500

years earlier (Daniel 8:15-17; 9:21). Mary was preparing for her give away! She had been engaged to a young man called Joseph. In the days of Mary and Joseph, engagement was a very serious matter. It typically lasted about a year and was as binding as marriage. Unfaithfulness was therefore considered adultery and was punishable by death.

- The fact that Mary was to get pregnant before their marriage, she risked being killed. Pregnancy during courtship was a shameful thing in her own culture. So she naturally swung between excitement, anxiety and shame. She was therefore at the crossroads if you want, and it is no wonder that she later goes to meet her sister Elizabeth for encouragement.

- Elizabeth actually helps Mary to understand what she is going through. This speaks into the value of family, it's one place you feel secure to run to in times of difficulty, and often helps us to overcome hardship in life.

- It is only after that visit that she is released to sing her famous song of praise to the Lord, often referred to as the Magnificat (Luke 1:46-56).

- The angel said to Mary, "Rejoice, highly favoured one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women! (Luke 1:28). Beloved, there is such a thing as God's favour, and it is a

precious thing. There are people who step into a room and everybody seems to notice their presence, that is often times a sign that God's favour is upon their lives.

- On noticing that Mary was troubled on receiving the news, the angel reaffirms her again, saying, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God" (1:30).

- Application: I sense in my spirit, these same words striking a cord in the spirit of someone here, who probably has a huge assignment on their shoulders, and is still doubting whether they were the right choice for the task. The Lord says, don't be afraid, for you have found favour with Him! Alleluyah!

- Mary was favoured due to God's sovereign choice to allow her to receive God incarnate into her womb. God's favour also rested on:

1. the Apostles: "And with great power the Apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all"(Acts 4:33),

2. And Joseph: "And the Patriarchs, becoming envious, sold Joseph into Egypt. But God was with him and delivered him out of all his troubles, and gave him favour and wisdom in the presence of Pharaoh, King of Egypt, and he made him governor over Egypt and all his house."(Acts 7:9,10).

3. It also rested on King David, who was the last of all Jesse's children, when he was anointed the next King of Israel after Saul.

JESUS (Luke 1: 31-33)

- The angel said to Mary, "You will be with child and give birth to a Son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. 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 the house of Jacob forever, his Kingdom will never end." (Luke 1:31-33). NIV

- Jesus, a Greek form of the Hebrew name Joshua, was a common name meaning "the Lord saves." And just as Joshua had led Israel into the promised land (Joshua 1:1,2), so Jesus would lead his people into eternal life.

- The symbolism of his name was not lost on the people of his day, who took names seriously and saw them as a source of power. In Jesus' Name people were and still are healed, demons are cast out, and sins are forgiven.

THE VIRGIN BIRTH - AN OVERVIEW

- The angel said to Mary, "You will be with child and give birth to a Son, and you are to give him the name JESUS.

"(1:31). (NIV)

Mary then raises a very important, legitimate question, "How can this be, since I do not know a man?" (1:34) (NKJ)... "since I am a virgin?" (NIV)

- The angel's response is so significant for understanding what theologians call the Virgin birth, he says, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the Holy one to be born will be called the Son of God." (1:35).

- I must confess that dealing with our Lord's birth is a complex matter to the natural mind. This explains why there are objections to the Virgin birth:

1. It is not well founded in scripture - only referred to in Luke and Matthew. Legendary character is evident, for the two accounts are different. No where else in the NT is any direct reference made to the Virgin birth.

2. Matthew sees the Virgin birth as a fulfilment of prophecy (Matt. 1:23, cp Isaiah 7:14). These argue that the Virgin birth is a pre-Christian development, but the word used doesn't necessarily mean Virgin, but rather a young girl. Therefore it is not a statement of historical fact.

3. The Virgin birth is scientifically impossible: It is not physiologically possible for conception to occur without a man or male. They argue that it would probably be more possible for a woman to give birth to a girl and not a male. How would one also deal with the challenge of genetic composition.

4. There is also the likely danger of falling into the trap of Docetism - a 19th century invention to deal with heretics, which results into what is called monophysitism, referring to one nature of Christ. They are simply saying that the Virgin birth removes Christ from the human race. Why doesn't he have an earthly father? How can we then recognize His human nature?

5. It is open to abuse: Particularly in form of a developed Mary ology. The problem is further aggravated by the wrong attitude lots of people have towards sex, often seen as a means of transmitting of sin. How could Christ then escape this, or be 'safe'? Hence the need for an explanation - the Virgin birth.

Note: it is important to note that science has its limitations, because it is DESCRIPTIVE - it explains what has already happened, but is not PREDESCRIPTIVE - It doesn't explain what is going to happen and what has not happened.

We need to remember as we grapple with all these arguments, that the act of the Virgin birth was unique and supernatural, and hence we do not expect science to have any reasonable explanation.

WHY CHRISTIANS BELIEVE THE VIRGIN BIRTH.

The birth of Jesus to a Virgin is a miracle that many people find hard to believe. These three facts can aid our faith:

1. Luke was a medical doctor, and he knew perfectly well how babies are made. It would have been just as hard for him to believe in the Virgin birth as it is for us, and yet he reports it as a fact.
2. Luke was a painstaking researcher who based his gospel on eye witness accounts. Tradition holds that he talked with Mary about the events he recorded in the first two chapters. This is Mary's story, not a fictional invention.
3. Christians who worship God as the Creator of the universe, should believe that God has the power to create a child in a Virgin's womb.

IT'S SIGNIFICANCE

- Jesus was born without the sin that entered the world through Adam. He was born holy, just as Adam was created

sinless. In contrast to Adam, who disobeyed God, Jesus obeyed God and was thus able to face sin's consequences in our place and make us acceptable to God.

- As Paul once wrote, "Nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam, who was a pattern of the one to come. But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many!.." (Romans 5:14-19).

LESSONS FROM THIS NARRATIVE

1. We should never limit God's choices. He can use you if you trust Him.

Mary was young, poor, female, - all characteristics that to the people of her day, would make her seem unusable by God for any major task. But God chose Mary for one of the most important acts of obedience he has ever demanded of any one.

- You may feel that your ability, experience, age or education makes you an unlikely candidate for God's service. You should never limit God's choices.

2. God's favour does not automatically bring instant success or fame. His blessing on Mary, the honour of being the mother of the Messiah, would lead to much pain; her son would be rejected and murdered. But through her Son would come the world's only hope, and this is why Mary has been praised by countless generations as the young girl who found favor with God. Her submission was part of God's plan to bring about our salvation. If sorrow weighs you down and dims your hope, think of Mary and wait patiently for God to finish working out his plan.

-Note: Christian theology is not preoccupied with what else God could have done to redeem us, e.g it doesn't address itself to questions like why couldn't God use other means to redeem us? What we theologians do is to explain and defend what God has done. Ours is to expound on what the Lord has done for His church.

3. The virgin birth helps us to understand the role of the Holy Spirit in the salvation history. He acted as the agent of conception in Mary's womb, for lack of a proper word. Here, Jesus is not filled with the Holy Spirit, but conceived by the Holy Spirit. Let us be careful, however, not to reduce Christ our Saviour to our own person - He became person purposely, a human experience that was required to make possible his redemptive mission.

4. The Virgin birth is unique, Mary who was a Virgin received the gift of life in her womb. The Son was a human being like any of us. And Mary did not have a unique nature, but God gave her a very special assignment to redeem us through her Son - Our Risen and Living Lord Jesus Christ. Many even believers often times doubt this, but the good news is doubt is not the same as denial! Doubt is part of the Christian experience.

- Note: In many ways and under several circumstances we find ourselves doubting. But to go beyond doubting and deliberately deny the Virgin birth is a dangerous position, that is likely to lead to over rationalising. The best thing to do is to challenge people to accept Christ and experience a walk with him. Has he made any significant difference in your life, then like the man born blind in John 9, you should testify, "I was once blind but now I see!"

HE BECAME WHAT WE ARE TO MAKE US WHAT HE IS! That is the good news!

Have you tried Him, if you have what does He mean to your life?

- God's plans involve exreordinary events in ordinary people's lives

5. God has a history of intervening in human affairs, right from the time of creation. He stepped in to cover up Adam and Eve's nakedness. He rescued the nation of Israel from slavery and oppression, rescued Ugandans from a situation of extreme human rights abuse, because no body knew that Amin would be uprooted. When ended apartheid in South Africa. The Kony war in Northern Uganda. Recently in Zimbabwe, he said my children have had enough share of the suffering; although it's too early to judge what the situation is going the like. How about at the personal level? Many of us would remember situations, where the Lord literally walked in and things changed for the better. It is the reason we celebrate Christ's birth, when he stepped here, heaven kissed the earth, and we are who we are because of his coming.

6. Our response to God's demands should not be laughter or doubt, but willing acceptance. God's announcement of a child to be born was met with various responses throughout scripture. Sarah, Abraham's wife, laughed (Gen. 18:9-15), Zechariah doubted (Luke 1:18). By contrast Mary submitted. She believed the angel's words and agreed to bear the child, even under humanly impossible circumstances. She simply responded thus, "Behold I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your Word." And the angel departed.

- I hope that when I give you an opportunity to invite Christ into your life, you won't just laugh at the preacher, saying does he even know my plans for this holiday! Probably, like the Jews of the biblical times, your heart is already crowded, and the Saviour can't be born afresh in your life.

- Merry Christmas and a blessed 2018.

- Let's celebrate responsibly.

- May God bless you