

Three Reasons to Celebrate Christmas

Luke 1:26-38

Introduction

Christmas is a season and a day that is marked by giving. We give greetings to one another that we don't normally give. Some of us (who plan well enough in advance) give cards to those we know and love. We give gifts to one another. All of this is a reflection of the nature of God himself, who is the greatest gift-giver of all.

This passage of Scripture reveals that God gives at least three wonderful gifts to mankind. Thus, we have *three reasons to celebrate Christmas*.

First, he gives thought and attention to us. What a gift it is that God in heaven gives thought and attention to man on earth. Second, God gives grace and mercy to those who fear him. Third, he gives the greatest gift of all, his only Son, to be our Savior. Thus, we have several sweet reasons to celebrate Christmas.



God Gives Thought and Concern to Man

The first reason to celebrate Christmas is because God gives thought and concern to man. God in heaven is concerned with the cities of man on earth, and the families and individuals who live in those cities. The first two verses move us from heaven to earth to Nazareth to Mary.

Luke 1:26-27 (ESV) ²⁶ In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, ²⁷ to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary.

The Creator Gives Attention to Mankind

The action begins with the authoritative command of God in heaven. The almighty word of God sets everything in motion. The God who dwells in heaven is the God who created the world and everything in it.¹ He is the highest of all in high positions. He is the worthiest of all

¹ Acts 17:24; Isaiah 42:5.

who are worthy. He is the greatest ruler of all rulers. He is King of kings and Lord of lords.² He is the sovereign Creator of all that exists. And yet, he gives thought to mankind. God, from his throne room in heaven, commanded the angel Gabriel to go from heaven to earth. Almighty God in heaven issues commands concerning mankind on earth. God is concerned with man.

From Heaven to a Particular Couple

God's thought and concern for mankind extends to particular individuals. God's attention and concern zooms in from heaven to earth; we go from the throne room to a house in Nazareth.

God commands Gabriel, out of all the nations on earth, to go Israel. Then, out of all the cities in Israel, to go to Nazareth. Then, out of all the clans living in Nazareth, to go to "the house of David." Then, out of all the families in the house of David, to go to two particular individuals, Joseph and his betrothed wife, Mary. Luke tells us that Mary was "*a virgin betrothed*" (v.27). Since betrothal very often took place not long after puberty, it is likely that Mary is in her early teens.³

These first two verses tell us that God, though he is mighty, marvelous, high, and lifted up, gives attention to cares for, and sometimes supernaturally intervenes in the lives of particular individuals. This is what happened that night to Mary as she was at home in Nazareth. God gave thought, attention, and concern to one young girl.

From 'One' to 'Mary'

This truth is exemplified even in the way that the angel speaks. His first words to the young virgin were, "*Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you*" (Lk. 1:28). This is a very general greeting. However, it quickly moves to a very personal address. "*Do not be afraid Mary, for you have found favor with God*" (Lk. 1:30). The angel speaks her name. "Mary." He moves from addressing her as "*favored one*" to "*Mary, don't be afraid.*" This is a movement from the impersonal to the personal. How sweet it must have been for Mary to hear her name being spoken. This mighty angel knows her name. If her name was known by this angel, then her name was most certainly known by God.

God is a very personal God. True, he is unique and absolutely unlike us, different from us, and so high above us. Yet it is also true that He who is greatly exalted has humbled himself to dwell with us. God sent Gabriel to tell Mary and Joseph, "*the Lord is with you!*" (v.28) God is in heaven, but his providential care, concern, and attention is with you on earth! The creator of all things and Lord of this universe knows the names—and all of the smallest details—of each of his children. And he is with you!

² 1 Timothy 6:15.

³ Walter L. Liefeld, "Luke," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 830.

If you are a child of God, then Christmas reminds us that God is concerned about us and cares for us. Celebrate Christmas knowing that God not only knows your name, but also knows your country, your city; your clan, your family, your house and who you'll one day marry. God is a personal God who knows the details of your life. God is concerned for all mankind, but he gives particular concern for his own people, his own children.

God Gives Grace and Mercy to Those Who Fear Him

The second reason to celebrate Christmas is because God gives grace and mercy to those who fear him. We learn this from the words of Gabriel to Mary. The angel said to her,

Luke 1:28-30 (ESV) ²⁸ And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" ²⁹ But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰ And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.

Gabriel twice tells Mary that she is "*favored*." First, he calls her "*O favored one*" (v.28). Then, in v.30, he says to her, "*You have found favor with God.*" These are two different words in the original Greek. Both of these words are rooted in grace (Greek *charis*).

God Gives Grace

The word translated 'favor' (*χαριτω* *charitoō*) in v.28 means, "to show kindness to someone, [because] of graciousness on the part of the one showing such kindness."⁴ In other words, God has favored Mary because he has chosen to be gracious to her, not because she has earned such favor. The angel might have said it this way, "you have been favored with grace."⁵

The word in v.30 is the word *charis* (*χάρις*), which the vast majority of the time in the Bible is translated 'grace' (131 times out of a total 160). Again we see the primary import of Gabriel's words is that God is being gracious toward Mary. He is giving her grace, which is undeserved favor. She is receiving kindness and goodness of which she is not worthy.

Mary's own response and personal testimony affirms this understanding. After Gabriel said, "*Greetings, O favored one...*" Her response is confusion (see v.29). She is "*greatly troubled*" by his words and struggled to "*discern*" the meaning. She does not understand what he is saying. Mary does not view herself as one "*favored*" by the Lord. Thus, she struggles to comprehend the meaning of these words. She views herself as simply "*a humble servant of the Lord*" (see v.38). This is how she describes herself in what we now know as the *Magnificat*.

⁴ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 748.

⁵ James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Luke*, ed. D. A. Carson, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; Apollos, 2015), 45.

Luke 1:46-50 (ESV) ⁴⁶ And Mary said,
"My soul magnifies the Lord,
⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
⁴⁸ for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant.
For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed;
⁴⁹ for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name.
⁵⁰ And his mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation."

Mary rejoices so strongly in the Lord because of the greatness of God's grace toward her. "**God has looked upon the humble estate his servant...**" The sweet blessings with which she has been blessed are so disproportionate to what she would expect to receive, that her soul leaps up in joy as she magnified, in her words, "*God my Savior.*" She sees nothing in herself that is deserving of this great blessing with which God has blessed her. In her humility she views herself as a simple servant. God's has graciously chosen her for a great blessing.

God Gave Mary Mercy

In fact, she views God's grace toward her as an act of *mercy*. "**His mercy is for those who fear him...**" (v.50). Mercy means withholding punishment from one whom deserves to receive it. Mary knows God is being merciful toward her. He is not treating her according to what she truly deserves. That is what mercy means. The "sweet psalmist of Israel"⁶ explains this best.

Psalms 103:10 (ESV) He does not deal with us according to our sins,
nor repay us according to our iniquities.

This is mercy; "not dealing with us according to our sins." Mary is not sinless. Thus, she is declaring that God has been merciful to her, by not giving her what she does deserve. God has also been gracious toward her, by giving her great blessings which she did not deserve. Praise God for he gives both *grace* and *mercy*!

But to whom does he give these great gifts?

Mary Feared God

According to Mary, in v.50, God gives grace and mercy to those who **fear** him. By including this truth in her song of praise to God, Mary is declaring that she is a young lady who fears God. When God's people speak about fearing God, they mean holding him in appropriate awe, respect, and worship. Fearing God means obeying him. Fearing God means understanding who he is and who we are. Fearing God means believing that his commands are good and that there is great blessing in obeying him and his word.

⁶ 2 Samuel 23:1.

And in the particular area of sexuality, both Mary and Joseph have demonstrated their commitment to obedience to God's command that sex is only to be experienced within marriage. Mary is a virgin. She and Joseph have kept themselves sexually pure. They have not sinned in this way. Thus, they have made themselves available to receive the great blessing of being the future parents of the promised messiah.

This topic needs to be addressed because it is almost nowhere addressed in our culture. It is clear from God's word that his will for his children is for us, all of us, male or female, to keep ourselves sexually pure before marriage and sexually faithful to our opposite sex spouse alone after marriage.

1 Thessalonians 4:3-5 (ESV) ³ For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; ⁴ that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, ⁵ not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God;

Virginity is despised in our land, but it is highly "favored" by God. People "*who do not know God*" are the people who allow themselves to be controlled by their own bodily desires. However, the people who *do* know God are the ones who "*know how to control their own bodies in holiness and honor.*"

I can't help but wonder, if God had delayed sending the messiah until today, which enraged couples among us would qualify as candidates for future parents of messiah? Would you qualify?

If not, then you should celebrate Christmas today with very deep and profound praise, because God is a God who gives *grace* (undeserved favor) and *mercy* (withheld punishment for sin) to those who *fear him*? Our sin is not the end of the story. His grace is greater than all our sin!⁷ This leads us to the third reason to celebrate Christmas. God's grace leads us to Jesus.

God Gives His Only Son as Savior

The third reason to celebrate Christmas is because God has given his only Son as our Savior from our sin. Jesus is the greatest gift of all. Gabriel's words to Mary highlight three facets of the Savior/Son. Jesus is son of woman, Son of God, and son of David.

Luke 1:31-35 (ESV) ³¹ And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. ³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, ³³ and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

⁷ James 4:6; Romans 5:15, 17.

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

³⁵ And the angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God.

Son of Woman

Gabriel begins by telling Mary that she "*will conceive in her [virgin] womb and bear a son...*" This is highly irregular, of course, for virgin conception is not the normal course of human affairs. However, the notion of "woman bearing a son," takes us back to the first place in the Bible where we find that phrase. We go back to the Garden of Eden when everything went wrong and sin entered our world. The first time God spoke of a woman bearing a son, or "*a son of woman*," was to the serpent in the Garden of Eden (Gn. 3:15), when He promised to send a "son of woman" who would bruise the Satan's⁸ head under his foot. Now, here stands Gabriel before Mary saying that God was giving her a son through miraculous means.

Could it be that this son would be the son who would fulfill that ancient promise of God? If it is, then that would be a reason to celebrate!

The answer is found in his name.

Jesus, Son of God

Gabriel also told Mary that she was to call the name of her son, **Jesus** and that he would also be called "*the Son of God*." The meaning of Jesus's name is an expression of the meaning of his life. God chose the name of this son, *his* son. The name Jesus means "Yahweh saves." Yahweh is God's personal name.⁹ Thus, God has sent Jesus out of his desire and purpose to provide salvation. **God gives Jesus as Savior.**

But to save from what? To save us from the punishment of our sin.

Matthew tells us that when the angel (almost certainly Gabriel) spoke to Joseph and told him to name the son Jesus, he explained why. He said,

"Your [betrothed] wife... will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins" (Matthew 1:20-21).

Thus, if all the world's problems began with sin in the Garden of Eden and God promised a "son of woman"¹⁰ to solve that problem, and Jesus' name means 'Yahweh saves,' then it would seem that Jesus came to save us from our greatest problem. Jesus was born to save us from our sins. **God gave Jesus as a Savior from sin!**

⁸ See Revelation 12:9.

⁹ Exodus 33:15.

¹⁰ Galatians 4:4.

We can celebrate Christmas because it means salvation from sin has been given by God!!

Victory Through Full Human Holiness

How will this salvation be accomplished? It will be accomplished through *holiness*. The only savior who can save from sin, is the one who never sins, but rather is completely holy. This is what Gabriel says about Jesus. *Jesus will be completely holy because God, who is holy, is his Father.* When Mary expresses her confusion about how she as a virgin will conceive, Gabriel answered by explaining,

Luke 1:35 (ESV) And the angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God."

This *overshadowing power of the Holy Spirit* also takes us back to the beginning of creation, where we are told that the Holy "*Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters*" (Gn. 1:1). Then, when God spoke a command, the power of the Holy Spirit was present giving life. In the same way, when God gives a command that a virgin conceive in her womb, then the Holy Spirit powerfully carries out God's command. The result is the virgin conception of a fully human baby who is also fully holy. The child to be born is both son of woman and Son of God. For this reason, he will be called the Holy Son of God.

How can Jesus be fully human without an earthly father? The same way that Adam and Eve could be fully human when they did not have earthly fathers. God, through the powerful working of his Holy Spirit, created them fully human. And just as Adam and Eve, in the beginning were without sin, so this Son conceived in Mary's womb, is also without sin.

We can celebrate Christmas because Jesus lived his whole life without sin and he died without sin. The Roman centurion who stood beside Jesus and watched him die, said, "*Truly this man was the Son of God*" (Mt. 27:54). The soldier had no doubt watched hundreds of crucifixions, but when he watched Jesus, he saw in him something absolutely unique. He watched a man die that to him was sinless.

Herein is the great mystery and wonder of Jesus. He is both fully human and fully divine. He is son of woman and Son of God. He lived and died fully free from sin. He rose again to life on the third day after his death to prove that he was fully free from sin and fully victorious over death. Thus, let's celebrate the coming of Jesus.

Celebrate that God in heaven gives thought and attention to his individual children on earth.

Celebrate that God gives grace and mercy to those who fear him.

Celebrate that God gave his only Son to be the Savior from sin. Jesus came to live a holy life and wholly crush the head of Satan.