

How Can This Be?

Advent 2013

Luke 1:26-38 Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by 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. The virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸ And having come in, the angel said to her, "Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!" ²⁹ But when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and considered what manner of greeting this was. ³⁰ Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹ And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name JESUS. ³² He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give 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." ³⁴ Then Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I do not know a man?" ³⁵ And the angel answered and said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God. ³⁶ Now indeed, Elizabeth your relative has also conceived a son in her old age; and this is now the sixth month for her who was called barren. ³⁷ For with God nothing will be impossible." ³⁸ Then Mary said, "Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her. (NKJ)

REVIEW

- Choosing Mary demonstrates that God came to save a lowly people.
- Israel anticipated the Messiah but were surprised by how He came.
- Mary was troubled by Gabriel's sudden appearance and his words.
- Gabriel told Mary, "Do not be afraid," a common phrase accompanying divine visitations.
 - Divine visitations announcing difficult callings come with assurance: *The Lord is with you.*
 - While Mary was being favored by God her calling would bring much pain and suffering.



THE NATURE OF THE CALLING

After Gabriel reassures Mary, he defines the nature of her calling. He explains what is meant when he says she has been graced by God and is blessed among women.

- Behold is an exclamation for calling one's attention to something new and extraordinary.
- Gabriel's words are intentionally reminiscent of the Messianic prophecy in Isaiah 7:14.
- The name "Jesus" was common as an expression of hope. Christ is so named because He is the fulfillment of Yahweh's promise of salvation.
- Gabriel describes Jesus as great, the Son of the Highest and the eternal Davidic king.

THE MIRACLE OF JESUS' BIRTH

While Mary believes, she is confused about how this can be. She understands the conception to be immediate and she is not yet married.

- Gabriel's explanation is given in Hebrew parallelism.
- Mary is told that God will bypass the usual secondary means of procreation. The humanity of the child will be created *ex nihilo*, by direct, divine intervention.
- Just as in creation the Holy Spirit hovered over the earth and brought forth life, so will it be with Mary's womb. Jesus will be the first fruits of a new humanity, fit for God's presence.

<i>The Holy Spirit</i>	<i>Come upon you</i>
<i>Power of the Highest</i>	<i>Over shadow you</i>

Concerning our salvation, we might also ask "How can this be?" The miracle of the incarnation provides the answer. We too experience the Spirit's life giving miracle.