

K-024 the Reality of the Christmas Story

by Art Katz

The Christmas story is a reminder of God's power and love, and it contains principles that are relevant to our lives today.

Duration: 1:13:09

Scripture: Luke 1:56-58, Luke 1:64, Luke 1:68-69, Luke 1:71

Topics: "Christmas"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker shares a story about three women who picked up a hitchhiker who turned out to be an angelic being. The women describe the encounter, noting the hitchhiker's immaculate appearance and lack of profound expression. The speaker then discusses the importance of waiting for the day of new beginnings and not rushing into action. He references a verse from the Bible (Luke 1:64) where a man's mouth is opened and he begins to speak blessings and praises to God. The speaker emphasizes the significance of God's deliverance and redemption for his people, as promised by the prophets. He also reflects on his own mother's struggle to accept the transformation in her son's life and urges the audience to recognize the power of encountering God.

Transcript

...holy God, how your heart must be delighted, Lord, if you look upon this congregation of your people. In a certain sense, bursting with pride for those called by your name, Lord. Increasingly growing into your stature and into your image.

We ask that you'll bless this night, Lord, and use this speaking to such an end that we might more deeply apprehend what is the high calling in Christ Jesus. What is the way of God? Now refresh this people by your word and by your spirit, mighty God. Cool us now and just fill this room with your fragrance, mighty God.

Bless, quiet our hearts and prepare them for the receiving of a holy word. Thank you for this night and this occasion, Lord, that you're making possible now. Now fulfill your heart's intent in it.

And to you be all glory and praise and acknowledgement forever and ever. In Jesus' holy name we pray. Amen.

Please be seated. I guess this weekend is a weekend for firsts. Everything I'm doing is a first for me.

This morning was a first in giving a scripture-by-scripture presentation, not usually my style. And tonight is a first for me in speaking about the Christmas story. I know now that I am converted.

If there ever was an arch-enemy of Christmas... Who's that character from the Christmas tale by the way? Humbug, I used to say. Humbug. You know you're converted when the things that you formerly celebrated as being sophisticated and amenable to your intellect now become, as old wives' tales, fables.

And the things which you denigrated as being myths, like heaven and hell, angels and demons, now become utter realities. Now the Lord enabled me to speak that in full in the debate with that professor. Hope you'll be praying for that occasion.

Well, I think the Lord wants me to give you a kind of a survey of the first couple of chapters of Luke in which the events of the birth of the Lord are described. I'll tell you the kind of tendency that I have. Whether it's Jewish or not, I don't know, but I think it's good.

And that is, I always seek to find principles in the Word of God. I never will believe that anything that's stated in the Scripture is only mere history. I'm grateful for the history.

It's enormous history. Great chronicles, accurate to the utmost degree. But isn't it like our God to take events like that, flesh and blood events, where the characters themselves are not aware that they are making manifest and unfolding and presenting to us God's endless eternal principles? Let's see how many of these we can find as we just peruse the Christmas story, which I know is going to suffer terrible onslaught in soon coming days.

The merchants have their sleeves rolled up and their feet have gone into the resin box and they're waiting for the first bell to ring. In fact, as we drove down here from Minnesota, we passed through a certain town. It was not yet Thanksgiving and the Christmas decorations were already out.

The itch is almost uncontrollable. I understand that they commemorate Christmas in Japan. Really, Buddhist country.

And that the workers receive an annual kind of a pay bonus so they can do their Christmas shopping. And Christmas trees are the rage, although there's no spiritual content whatsoever. So whether we're talking about circumcision, baptism, or any of the holy things of God, it does not take a wily Satan to make it so popular and hygienic and approved that it's robbed of its entire spiritual content.

So I guess I'm going to be guilty for a cliché tonight when I say, let's bring Christ back to Christmas. If I keep up like this, I'll be joining the Republican Party. Well, the story about the birth of Jesus begins with not Mary and Joseph, but yet another couple to whom Mary herself was related.

Insignificant couple, although the man was a priest and his name's Zachariah. I don't think that he had some elevated post in the priesthood. It sounds like he had a very ordinary position.

And when I read something like that, somehow my heart lifts up. What is happening to me, I wonder. I love the things that are ordinary.

I love the things that are low profile. I love the things that are modest and inconspicuous. I more and more shrink from the things that are loud and compelling.

I like that which is hidden, obscure, quiet, sweet, serene, pure. Maybe I'm getting to be more like the Lord, but I think he likes it also. He seems to have a taste for choosing instruments that are not exceptionally conspicuous, like such a couple.

And so we read in the very first chapter of Luke, and I'm reading from the Amplified, and I'm going to probably be skipping back and forth from the Amplified to the King James, that in the days, in the fifth verse, in the days when Herod was king of Judea, there was a certain priest whose name was Zechariah of the daily service of Abiah, and his wife was also a descendant of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. And they both were righteous in the sight of God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and requirements of the Lord. But they had no child, for Elizabeth was barren, and both were far advanced in years.

I think in the King James, it's expressed in a little juicier fashion. It says they had no child because that Elizabeth was barren, and they both were now well stricken in years. Have you noticed the frequency of God's use of barren couples? Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca, was it? Barren, stricken in years.

This is an encouragement for many of us sitting here, and throughout all of Christendom, who have never appeared to be exceptionally fruitful. I don't want to make fruitlessness a principle, but it may be that God has reserved you for only one profound divine act, and it's not yet come. Although you have been righteous in all of the commandments of the Lord, walking pleasingly in His sight, He's reserved you for something special, and you have had all along to face the stigma of fruitlessness.

Hey, you should be bearing fruit! How many have you converted? I used to work for an organization where you had to give an account of how many tracts you distributed, and how many house calls you made. That's how much the numerical mentality has infected the children of God. But I tell you children, there's a mystery here, and I'm developing a taste for the mysteries of God.

A certain respect, I'll say a reverence, for something that God shows here, which has to do with the bringing forth of His Son. I spoke this morning about revealing the arm of God. To whom is the arm of the Lord revealed? How is the arm of the Lord made visible? How is it made manifest? And we know who that arm is.

So what we're reading here is a chapter that is not only a chronicle of an event, but I believe is for us a pattern of anticipation of how it is that God's end time and final Son shall be brought forth. Out of barrenness, stricken with years. I think by and large we've been a reproach in the world, right? I remember the kinds of things I used to say about you before I was a believer.

All your Sunday potluck suppers, and sitting in churches with your bonnets on, and your little clinics, and other kinds of harmless activity. I would politely yawn and clap my mouth, and look elsewhere for where the action is. You were reproach.

You were doing nothing distinctive. You weren't shaking the earth. No great things emanated from God's people.

But I believe that He reserves His best and deepest in the places that are obscure, in the couples that are barren and stricken with years, and from them He begins something that has to do with the final revelation of His Son, the light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of the people Israel. You know what I like about this guy, Zachariah? It says in the 8th verse, Now while on duty, serving as priest before God in the order

of the division, as was the custom of the priesthood, it fell to him by lot to enter the sanctuary of the temple of the Lord and burn incense. And in the 11th verse, And there appeared to him an angel of the Lord standing at the right side of the altar of incense.

I'll tell you what I like about this. I like the visitation of an angel when a man is on duty. I just had a long-distance phone call today from a young Jewish brother who's the head of a little flock in Brooklyn, sick to the teeth with his ups and downs and his risings and fallings and wanting to come to the cross and not knowing how.

And he wanted to ask me if I thought that it would be a good thing for him to take three weeks off and fast in some remote place in Vermont. I said, Why do you need that? Why can't you find the cross in Brooklyn in your own apartment? We're always looking for some romantic place where the exotic or the exceptional events of God are to take place. But I can tell you right now, if you receive it in the right spirit, some of the greatest words that God ever gave me I received in the bathroom of hotel rooms sitting on the toilet bowl.

Well, I lost a few there. I don't even know if the Republicans will have me now. I don't think this is an accidental visitation, children.

I think it was the perfect timing of God for the revelation for an angelic messenger to come while a man was on duty. I have a great respect for men. Now you're going beyond anything I intended.

Have you noticed how much there is in the walk with God that is monotonous, everyday, routine, unexciting, drab? There are a lot of us who are waiting and living for those peaks from excitement to excitement. But I'll tell you what God is doing to us in Minnesota. He's cutting us off at the path and blocking every escape route.

Amen. And we're learning to live with each other in everyday circumstances that are completely ordinary and in that, to find the glory of God in each other. Hallelujah.

We're getting closed in, people. And I'll tell you, when the oil crisis came, I was one who shouted hallelujah. If for no other reason than this, it'll put an end to our charismatic ballgames.

The frequency of our conventions and conferences and clinics is a universal scandal. And we've scraped the bottom of the barrel so to find a speaker every month for every meeting and bright personalities that will draw the crowd that it's become almost showbiz. I'd rather that we lived tighter and closer to the vest, that we would have such exceptions rarely and God himself would be the one to invoke it.

There wouldn't be conferences and conventions, there would be holy convocations. And God would establish them where he will and bring his mouthpieces and his audience. And I believe that that day is coming when we're going to be cut off at the path.

And a lot of us who have lived from entertainment to entertainment and diversion to diversion and distraction to distraction, even within the things that are Christian and charismatic, are going to find ourselves bored to the point of insanity. There are young people sitting around here who've grown up in the transistor generation and don't even know what it is to walk in the street without our transistor radio clapped to their ear. And if there's anything that'll drive them up the walls, it's silence.

Well, I have an appetite for silence. Be silent and know that I am God. I have an increasing desire for the things that are ordinary, commonplace, routine, and I'm seeking in those places for the glory of God.

And I'm thrilled beyond speaking that it pleased God to send an angelic messenger to a priest who was doing his ordinary job while he was on duty. Look at the detail that the Lord gives. In the 11th verse, there appeared to him an angel of the Lord standing at the right side of the altar of incense.

Now listen, children, let me ask you a question. You think that there's a word in this book that's out of place? Is there a piece of punctuation? Why did God go to the lengths to give us the information that the angel stood at the right side of the altar of incense? You know why? Because God saw the end from the beginning and saw that in the 20th century there'd be a whole world of skeptics who would deprecate angels and demons alike, but he was utterly specific and even gave the location at which the angel stood. Lest we have some airy notions about angels and we would likely say, as some are saying, well, that's just a construct.

That's biblical rhetoric. This wasn't actually an event. This is just the way they expressed themselves in that generation.

Well, I'm telling you, Berkeley graduates that I am, that a priest by the name of Zachariah had an angelic visitor. I believe in angels. Somebody sent me a tape of an angelic being who was supposed to have attended a meeting of mine in Louisiana.

And three women were interviewed on that tape. And what a remarkable day they described. And at first I was skeptical.

I thought, well, you know, women and... probably an exaggeration. But, you know, when I finished listening I was persuaded that they were right. They picked him up as a hitchhiker and they said his clothes were very ordinary but immaculate, pressed, neat.

And they noted that although he did not express himself profoundly and lay heavy things upon them, isn't that the way we are? Like, I mean, if we stopped for a cup of coffee or invited me for dinner, wouldn't you expect something heavy? And if we just discussed the ball game or the weather or some other lesser thing, wouldn't you be grossly disappointed? This is flesh children, you know that? And God wants us to come to a place where we're going to delight ourselves in each other without having to drop heavy spiritual asides. Just because Christ is in us. Just because we love Him who is in each other, we can enjoy each other as we enjoy Him without having to have a high point expressed in every conversation.

I don't know how I got on that. In fact, I don't know how I'm getting on a lot of things that I'm saying. But if I keep it up at this rate, I'm not going to finish tonight.

Are we on the third floor? Anybody sitting by the window still? So I listened to that tape about the angel and it went on to say that that man spoke with utmost simplicity and yet great authority. There was a kind of luster to his personality. There was no halo over his head, but he was an impressive being.

And somehow they persuaded him to come to the meeting at which I was speaking and he sat in the back of the room and to my great relief it said on the tape that he was nodding his head in approval as I spoke. Laughter But you know what I thought when I finished hearing that tape? I believe with all my heart that indeed they had encountered an angel. And doesn't God indeed tell us beware lest we entertain an angel unaware? You know what I thought to myself? The way those Christian women reacted to the encounter with this angel.

They said they'll never forget it. He didn't say any heavy things. He didn't make profound observations.

He didn't speak some prophecy of future events. He was sociable and gentle and authoritative and impeccable. And they'll never forget him.

He was an experience. You know what I thought when I heard that? So should the world describe its encounter with any one of us. We ought to be to them angels.

And in fact what does the word indeed mean? Messenger sent from God. Anyone who encounters us ought to have an experience. Not because we brought some exceptionally heavy and profound thing.

Just because we are. There's a peace and a poise and an authority and a certain quality of life and character that should stun and arrest the attention of anyone in the world. How you doing tonight angels? It's interesting Zachariah's response when the angel appeared.

When Zachariah saw him it says he was troubled and fear took possession of him. But the angel said unto him do not be afraid Zachariah because your petition was heard and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son and you must call his name John meaning God is favorable. It's interesting that the same phrase that Zachariah was troubled is exactly the phrase that's used when an angel makes his appearance to Mary.

She was troubled it says and she wondered what manner of communication this was. That the angel should say to her thou hast found favor with God. I think that what this really means is that both Zachariah and Mary were so startled felt themselves so undeserving of an angelic visitation that they were absolutely dismayed and thrown for loss.

There are a lot of us who think we deserve such visitations and when is it that God's going to get with us and give us that revelation which should have come long ago. But you know I think to whom it comes to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed to whom do angelic visitations come to those who don't have the slightest suspicion that they have any basis for deserving such a thing at all. Troubled, startled, taken by surprise Me? Your petition was heard it says in the 13th verse how does it say that in King James Fear not Zacharias for thy prayer is heard and my wife Elizabeth shall bear thee a son and I shall call to his name John.

You know what children to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed How is God's son brought forth? Through those who pray without ceasing those stricken in years still expecting one day that there'll be answer. What a couple this is. No wonder that they were select and chosen of God to have part in the great drama which is now going to be celebrated and not too happily in the world.

And he goes on to describe after his name shall be called John thou shall have joy and gladness and many shall rejoice at his birth for he shall be great in the sight of the Lord and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost even from his mother's womb. And many of the children of Israel shall return to the Lord their God and he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just to make ready a people prepared for the Lord. Let me ask you something would you like to be barren all your life long that you might just have something to do with the production of one such as this? I wish that God would call a moratorium on all my speaking all my activity even perhaps the evangelical world and put aside the dozens of crusades and things that go on lots of commotion and sound and fury signifying I'm not too sure what on most times.

There would be a moratorium on a lot of activity that we might be held in reserve for just the prize choice and holy events of God.

I've always somehow been a little bit freaked out that after some of the most choice speaking of God's servants at full gospel events for example that rather than let people take the word home dwelling richly in their hearts that somehow before the end of the speaking and the time of leaving they're required to do charismatic calisthenics up, down, sideways leap, jump and all the rest of that and we just don't know how to dismiss an audience and let them go and take the word with them too much activity, too much commotion not enough rest, not enough quiet I want to wait for the thing that is perfect and choice and has its origin in God only, because when that one comes he'll turn the heart of the fathers back to the children, he'll make way make straight the way of the Lord he'll be a man

for his generation that shall call a people to repentance oh for one such voice and one such man who can invoke fire from heaven and bring an apostate people on their face a pox on our ten thousand Christian program and productions that we might have one such well, that's how it began according to the word of God with a couple that were not conspicuous an ordinary worker in the temple of the Lord and in the 26th verse we read of the visitation to another inconspicuous individual by the name of Mary in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin, a spouse to a man whose name was Joseph of the house of David and the virgin's name was Mary and the angel came in unto her and said, Hail, thou art highly favored, the Lord is with thee,

blessed art thou among women, and when she saw him she was troubled at his saying the exact same response of Zechariah and cast in her mind what manner of salutation it should be and I can just see this girl saying, do you mean me? she wasn't just a virgin physically children she was a virgin spiritually and I like that reference to virgins in the 14th chapter of Revelation where God says he's going to put his mark in the forehead of those virgins who are undefiled with women the bearers of the everlasting gospel a lot of us were whacked up in the world and were anything but virgin but there's something precious which comes from God that has to do with his blood and his power to transform, that can make of the most defiled to have submitted themselves to the Holy One of Israel a virgin

undefiled with women a virgin in the spirit unspoiled, unsullied who have never given themselves to anything that has not their origin in God and such a one is always startled and surprised when God would choose to put his finger upon him or her and say, you mean me? such a one always feels despicable, such a one always feels lowly and mean like the least of the saints and as Paul said the chief of the sinners I often wondered about Paul, did he really mean that or did he say that with tongue in cheek when he called himself the chief of the sinners, and I'm persuaded that that was not a piece of rhetoric, that Paul was convinced in his own heart that he of all men was the chief of sinners, do you know why? because the deeper that you grow in God the more acute your spiritual sensitivity

the more you're aware of the subtle violations and trespasses against God I'll tell you children, if you knew my condition last night you wouldn't have allowed me to come to this microphone I felt myself in such a condition despicable, piece of dust, clay sullied where do you presume to think that God is going to speak out of your mouth and I'll tell you what I always kind of like to be in that spirit and mood and demeanor and if anything good shall come out of me let it come as a kind of surprise, say, who me? she was troubled at the saying to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed who shall be party to the revelation or the coming forth of the manifestation of the Son of God but one who is utterly taken by surprise when an angel shall say you have found favor with God who me? it says in

the Amplified when she saw him she was greatly troubled and disturbed and confused at what he said and kept revolving her mind what such a greeting might mean such an unsophisticated one she never thought herself to be anything conspicuous or that God even had her in his eyes and the angel said do not be afraid Mary for you have found grace, free, spontaneous absolute favor and loving kindness with God whew! what is the qualification for finding such favor in him we're getting the strangest kinds of correspondence I was afraid about this message tonight because I don't want to insert anything biographical lest you think that cats is getting inflated but we're getting a strange kind of mail of late where people tell me that when they begin to pray for us that they experience the love of

God in such an unusual measure that they can just feel the love exuding out of them and through them toward us however tired or distressed or disconcerted they are when they begin to raise us in prayer we never had letters like that before people are coming in and saying you don't know how God loves you we never had people talk like that before and I think it's something like coming into increasing favor with God something to do with a Jewish heart that's tenacious for God that will not allow itself to be compromised that will not allow itself to be sullied that will not involve itself in any kind of evangelistic thing because it sounds groovy waiting, willing to be inconspicuous unseen, unheard except God open the mouth and do the speaking wanting only thing that's pure that comes from

heaven God's wanting a people in whom he can find increasing favor because from such a people as that he's going to bring forth a son listen, you'll become pregnant and you'll give birth to a son and you shall call his name Jesus how many of you would have leaped and clicked your heels at that announcement when you're a maiden of Israel and you know that the penalty of being found pregnant out of wedlock is death by stoning and I'll tell you it'd be a lot less fornicating in our generation if we were still following the Old Testament biblical practices of taking that one found not to be a virgin and bringing her to the doorstep of her father's house why his house? because he had the responsibility for providing the spiritual atmosphere in which chastity could be retained and there all the

men of the community would participate in stoning to death the malefactor how would you like an angel to tell you in such a generation and in such a context oh, you're going to be pregnant let me ask you a question tonight ladies, how many of you would have volunteered to be substitute in Mary's place the stigma the reproach and even to this day filthy tongues are still continuing to wag to accuse Mary of having fornicated with a centurion thousands of years after her passing her reputation is still being dragged through mud and on certain occasions when you get a Jewish person vexed they'll call Jesus a mamzer which means in straight and unrefined language bastard would you have leaped and clicked your heels at the announcement of an angel and you shall become pregnant to whom is the arm

of the Lord revealed that one to whom God can speak such things who instantly will be aware of the consequence of its fulfillment and yet rejoice to be chosen to suffer reproach and misunderstanding and slander and possibly death for being a chosen one oh, I know that the Catholics have made a lot of Mary in the wrong kind of way but I don't think that we Bible believers have made enough of her she's an exceptional Jewish girl would to God this was the kind my mother was talking about when I used to be told for years now go and marry a nice Jewish girl there's nice and nice but a Mary is more than nice she's found favor with God because God saw a heart that would be able to receive such a communication without so much as a whimper what she received in the hearing from that angel was

nothing less in its possibilities than a death sentence have you ever thought of that? the consequence of Mary's obedience might have been stoning and as we'll go on to read the entire conversation you'll note

there's not one word about the practical consequences of this pregnancy who is going to marry her whether she would still have Joseph for a husband how is she going to explain this? nor did she think to ask to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed and who is the instrument for the bringing forth the manifestation of God's true son such a one as this without guile, without thought of the consequence surprised that God should have chosen her and willing altogether to suffer reproach even death should it be required you'll become pregnant and will give birth to a son, you'll call his

name Jesus and 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 forefather David and he will reign over the house of Jacob throughout the ages and of his reign there will be no end and Mary said to the angel, how can this be seen I have no intimacy with any man as a husband then the angel said to her the Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High God will overshadow you as a shining cloud and so the holy pure sinless thing which shall be born of you will be called the Son of God how do you like them apples?

I'll tell you why I like it because it's not only a statement of what happens when the Holy Spirit overshadows flesh to bring forth a pure and sinless son but it's exactly a description of every holy thing that God brings forth from flesh by exactly the same process children, there's a pattern here the Holy Spirit is waiting to overcome us to come upon us to overshadow us as a shining cloud that the holy pure and sinless thing which shall be born of us shall be holy is that true of your witnessing? is that true of your ministry? is it true of your church activity? of your organ playing and guitar strumming?

I'll tell you that there shouldn't be a single thing undertaken that is born out of these bodies except first that the Holy Spirit has overshadowed us and the thing which is born from us is pure and sinless oh hallelujah what a people would we be then and what then our works and our acts fit to be included in the catalog of the holy acts which follow the gospels and not just a bunch of junk nonsense and noise and commotion and men promoting careers and their names and their faces this is a picture of the only way that God ever produces anything it comes upon a virgin it's born by the Holy Spirit and the thing that is produced out of the flesh is pure and sinless I underlined in my bible that thing which shall be born of you because I don't want you to forget that you're involved some

brother said to me the other night something like well I don't have any respect for you or you're nothing it's just what comes out of you that I respect and I kind of nodded my head and yet not happily he was right and yet not right because we're co-participants with God that which shall be born of you Mary was involved her personality her character her standing before God her condition are elements not to be put aside as inconsequential there's something required from us born of you it's not an automatic thing we're just paper mache mannequins who are submitting to some kind of divine process and have no thought, no involvement or participation we're flesh and blood it's born of you and that's the glory of God isn't that fantastic something holy born of me yes, because the Holy Spirit

overshadowed you in your virginity and that which came out of you is pure and sinless and listen your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son and this is now the six months with her who was called barren there's something to be said for the timing of God this isn't just some accidental jumbling together of events there's a precise timing and correlation between the pregnancies of Elizabeth and Mary and yet both women are involved something's required from them for with God nothing is ever impossible and no word from God shall be without power or impossible of fulfillment then Mary said behold I am the handmaiden of the Lord let it be done to me according to thy word and the angel left her would we have allowed the angel to go without taking up a few other questions hey

but before you go how about my marital status haven't you forgotten something how shall I explain this to mother or what shall I tell Joe I'm not making funny and I'm not trying to be cute I'm just trying to underline something here's a woman so without guile and so without self concern so without any consideration of what shall be the consequence for her that the angel left her and there's no attempt to call him back because she said let it be done to me according to thy word oh I tell you that the angels in heaven rejoice and God's heart palpitated for the hearing of that simple statement from a Jewish girl let it be unto me according to thy word how he yearns to hear the exact same statement from many of us Lord whatever it is you ask wherever it is you'll have me to go whatever it is

that you shall require whatever the reproach the suffering the misunderstanding the slander the death may not be physical it may be of embarrassment let it be unto me according to thy word to whom shall the arm of the Lord be revealed to such a one as that oh you've wondered why it is you've had no visitation of God that's why come back to a virginal state and come away from your own self-consideration and fear of consequence and be to God as this maiden and you'll be amazed at the kinds of visitations that shall be forthcoming not a single question about her own status or future how shall I be provided for what does this mean for me let it be to me according to thy word and so we read that Mary arose in the 39th verse and went with haste to the hill country to the town of Judah and she

went to the house of Zechariah and entering it saluted Elizabeth and it occurred that when Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting the baby leaped in her womb and Elizabeth was filled with and controlled by the Holy Spirit now what do you think that was just a coincidence or was something ignited in the womb and in the life of this elderly woman stricken with years when this young virgin came in who was barely pregnant with the Holy One of Israel you know what I think children we have a pattern here far beyond our understanding you know what I'll tell you what I hunger for I want to come into a room and not say a word and just something that's in me a presence so dominant so sacred so unspeakably holy that something is going to happen to that other person in the room with me it shall not even

require a speaking and the only historical thing that I can think of that in any way resembles this was that incident when Finney in his tours of New England came into a textile mill and he was shown about the place and as he approached the woman who was working at a machine she looked at him and as he came closer she began to tremble and as he came even closer her tremblings were violent he had not yet said a word and she came even closer she collapsed and sagged like a sack of potatoes and fell at the base of the machine and cried out to God for repentance and was saved not so much as a word came out of a holy man's mouth but a presence when I think of our slap-dash techniques and methodologies our accepting Jesus and our pleading with multitudes and talking about the benefit that will

be derived if you'll only do so much as do him a favor I get sick to my gut and the answer is plain and is forthcoming where are the Finneys of our generation in the absence of holy men who can bring a woman to her knees by the presence of God in them we have no alternative but condescend to methodologies and techniques oh pitiful people woe is us, God forgive us and enable us so to walk and to be such a one as this that the mere coming into a womb makes an unborn thing leap up by the power of the Holy Spirit and a woman enter into the fullness of God's glory I'll tell you when I think of my own Jewish people and the job that Satan has done talk about a job two thousand years of fiendish and diabolical twisting of facts poisoning of the name of Jesus persecution and reproach forced

conversions and exiles that I could not so much as speak the name of Jesus it would sew the bone in my throat to the day of my conversion such a job has Satan done and now when I meet my own kinsmen how

many times must I stand before them in university experiences and just be for them a dart board and let them discharge their venom their anger, their bitterness the things that are congested and built up that are generations and centuries old that need to be relieved and exuded before there can be any godly transaction with them I don't even begin to talk let them look at me as arch enemy and foe let them say I'm worse than Hitler let them see me as a paid missionary and spew and vent all of their bile and when it's discharged then maybe we can talk about the things of God but I know that

no clever device is going to do it no technique, no skilled reasoning but you know what I want to see and with my own mother especially why has it taken so long eleven years and yet she has not given up her ghost still struggling to avoid the implications of what has happened to her son still unwilling to recognize that that one who cursed who smoked like a chimney who pursued the opposite sex who railed and raved and poured forth every kind of incitement to revolution that somehow that that son who no longer smokes, no longer raves who prays fast is in the Lord's service has somehow met the God of her father she's not yet persuaded but I'm waiting and patiently seeking that God shall be, Christ so formed in me that the day will come when my mother shall see me next and I'll not have to

hawk her I'll not have to harangue her with scriptures but something is going to leap up and be born unto salvation I want to ask you a question tonight children are you so pregnant with him that your bringing his presence with you into a room will elicit the same kind of response with what are you pregnant tonight if I can use that phrase or what's bloating you is it food, vanity ego, self indulgence or are you pregnant with the presence of a most high God that the very coming into a room with another person makes something leap up in that one may God so impregnate us by his Holy Spirit maybe a lot of us haven't minded a little peck on the cheek and that's quite enough thank you but we've not been willing to be that intimate that we might be impregnated with him there may be some in this

room who are waiting for just such a relief pent up prisoners we've laid hands on them we've shaken them by the ankles for demons to come out and we've done everything we've lifted their hands, we've chucked them on the chin we've slapped them on the back and they still don't speak in tongues they're not filled, they're not delivered, they're not released our methodologies have not worked our techniques have not worked but I tell you there's a presence that never fails and God is waiting to bring it in you pregnant with the presence of the living God hallelujah and it occurred when Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting the baby leaped in her womb and Elizabeth was filled with and controlled by the Holy Spirit and she cried out with a loud cry and then exclaimed blessed favorite of God above all

other women are you and blessed favorite of God is the fruit of your womb and how have I deserved that this honor should be granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me for lo the instant the sound of your salutation reached my ears the baby in my womb leaped for joy what shall we say of this that as the mother leaped the baby leaped that the mother and the baby are one mother and child are one life so much so that holy thing that was being formed in her is so consonant with her own life and her own nature that both responded to the presence of God blessed happy to be envied is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of the things that were spoken to her from the Lord you know that's pretty poetic language I would even go so far as to say that it's eloquent hard

to believe that a simple Jewish elderly woman could speak like that most Jewish grandmothers that I know don't have that kind of prose but isn't it amazing what the Holy Spirit can do out of the mouth of one for whom he has the whole control and possession and then we hear from Mary who is a simple virgin Mary said my soul magnifies and extols the Lord my spirit rejoices in God my Savior for he has looked upon the

low station and humiliation of his handmaiden for behold from now on all generations of all ages will call me blessed and declare me happy and to be envied for he who is mighty has done great things to me and holy is his name to be venerated in his purity majesty and glory and his mercy his compassion and his kindness toward the miserable and afflicted is on those who fear him

with godly reverence from generation to generation and from age to age he has shown strength and made might with his arm he has scattered the proud and haughty and by the imagination and purpose and designs of their heart he has put down the mighty from their throne and exalted those of low degree he has filled and satisfied the hungry with good things and the rich he has sent away empty handed without a gift he has laid hold on his servant Israel to help him to espouse his cause in remembrance of his mercy even as he promised to our forefathers to Abraham and to his descendants forever I don't know if you've ever noticed this I think that this might well be the mightiest and most eloquent poetry to be found in the entire holy writ David the great psalmist never spoke as eloquently as

this I never before noticed that until I began really to peruse the Christmas story verse by verse what do you think of that do you think that Mary had some latent talent for poetry that somehow was fired by the Holy Spirit when the spirit of the God overshadowed her or is this an illustration of what can come forth from the simplest most innocuous unpromising vessel of whom God has the whole possession what an inspiration it ought to be celebrated for its literary value alone and its mighty in faith and magnitude and grasp and knowledge of God and all his ways it's a tremendous statement and few of us have stopped ever to consider it and give glory to the God whose spirit has made such an utterance possible out of the mouth of a simple virgin I'll tell you I'm getting so intoxicated

about virgins I'm likely to go on a one man crusade and how overdue is such a program how much have we missed for the lack of it there ought to be a one minute respectful silence at that last question I'm happy in her statement for the frequency with which she mentions the things that are low he has exalted those of low degree he has looked upon the low station and humiliation of his handmaiden to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed to that one who is humiliated that one who is low in degree all precious children what proud strutters we are and in what subtle ways do we display our peacock feathers how much are we yearning for ministry ostensibly for the purpose of God but hiddenly and secretly and deeply for our own self advancement that men might see us and recognize us and applaud us

but to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed and through whom is his son made manifest through one of low degree he looked upon my low station and the humiliation of his handmaiden he has put down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of low degree no wonder the Jewish people missed the coming of the Messiah he just absolutely contradicted their every expectation from the coming forth of the Holy One of Israel in a stable to the inception of the Acts which we have been reviewing tonight everything which God has chosen is uncomely, unpalatable does not commend itself to our sensibilities or taste, but it is an offense to everything that men exalt and consider of high esteem barren, stricken with age you know what that meant for a couple in that generation? it was a reproach to be

childless because they believed that somehow you must have been sinning that God did not favor you with offspring what a reproach for one who is a priest and they carried that reproach all their life long and God never bothered to explain to them why I'll tell you children, I've had a little dealing at the hands of the Lord and in fact if I had not I'd not be here now because it's my only qualification before you God has brought something out of my life and out of my mouth that's pure and holy and sinless but you can't believe the rage that has occasioned in others Christians waiting to mob me and to flay the flesh off my

bones for the thing that came out of my mouth and I was so innocent I didn't even know what they were getting excited about I only spoke about a eunuch for Christ's sake

you just hit men below the belt and see their reaction when there were a couple of grandmothers there that wanted to join the the noose party too who saw their sons and daughters standing and wanted to be grandmothers and in my great innocence I wasn't even asking for actual commitment to being a eunuch I was thinking only in spiritual terms but I wonder now if you can really separate it but at any rate they were enraged and I hadn't gone five minutes when some man grabbed me saying that he was a Jewish prophet and that God had told him that I had confused the people of God and that I should take the microphone and make a public apology while there was still time before 6,000 people and I went gulp hey can that be right Lord I fasted two days for this message I locked myself up talk about

eunuch for all the good I've done my wife and all the socializing I've done she might just as well have not come to that conference I wouldn't talk, I wouldn't chat, I wouldn't eat I was locked in with God only that I should have his mind or he should have mine and this is what came forth and that precipitated a series of circumstances that sent me into exile, literal exile out of the country and for six months I would not take a meeting you can't believe a more tortured man groaning with stress God did I miss you, could I have missed you Lord after two days of fasting and prayer and seeking your face knowing the significance of that occasion and 6,000 people in the audience and it's being taped and it's going out on the radio if I've missed you under such circumstances and preparation as

that when have I ever known you and if I can miss you then how shall I ever be sure that I shall not miss you in the future I didn't just say to the Lord Lord take ministry away from me I said take me away I'm not better than my father take my life and for six months I groveled and groaned and was ground to powder and you know what there wasn't a God to say that's okay you were right on all the while silence from heaven you say what kind of God is this he's a God who knows what it takes to bring forth holy things and he'll never he'll never use anything that's exalted no flesh shall stand in his presence and if he's preparing a mouth for holy proclamations you can be sure that the possessor of it is going to be ground to powder and not just once but again and again and again oh you want

to enter into ministry I'll sign you up right after the meeting you want to be a public speaker groovy huh here's the principle children if there's going to be a son revealed it's going to be out of those who are of low estate who know humiliation and have received it at the hand of God because he exalts those of low degree some of my friends came from Berkeley for these days of meetings and they said Art you didn't seem especially happy to see us not because I don't love them I do it's because I was expecting on the first night of those meetings last night terrible humiliation I was expecting to be devastated I was expecting to crumble and fall to naught I was expecting to be tongue tied and choke and sputter and nothing would come out of my mouth of any consequence I was mixed up I was

in a terrible mood I couldn't unravel my spirit I was bent I was pushed out of shape I couldn't get it together I couldn't find the mind of the Lord and they had to come to witness that debacle and I came to this pulpit fully expecting that that would be the case and fully expecting that then God performed something that I think might have been a little holy are you willing to pay such a price? think it's grueling to be a public speaker? and have ministry? well Mary remained it says in the 56th verse with Elizabeth for about three months and then returned to her own home I wonder what they did for those three months these two Jewish girls an old woman stricken years with a gargantuan stomach can you picture it? no wonder it says that she hid herself you know what children isn't that

something like a picture of the body of Christ? we're so ungainly we have nothing calmly to show the world we're not hot shots we're not so well appearing that we can make a splash but somehow in our hiddenness with our ungainly stomachs there's something gestating there there's something being formed there that God is going to bring forth in the soon coming season that's going to be holy holy holy are you willing to be ungainly? have to hide yourself? but I'll bet those two pregnant women for those three months had an unspeakably rich time together oh the fellowship oh the communion in fact the very sound of Mary's voice the infant in her womb leaped up with joy what then had they experienced in the three months of continual fellowship with each other and you know what children why

shouldn't we enjoy the same why shouldn't something in us leap up in the communion of the same why shouldn't we have such a time together why is it that after we have discharged our favorite scriptures and explained our favorite burden and something else we stare at each other like blank mannequins and we wait for the evening to end God hasn't called us to be such but to be rich and full of treasures containing in his life that we should delight ourselves in such an opportunity to be closed in with each other for three months and not to seek an escape hatch always wanting to run we're the most transient people on the face of the earth there's something to be said for this kind of fellowship and I'll tell you what at the end of the age this is all we're going to have no Chinese dinners no

going out to Luigi's for a hot pizza or taking in a show or going down to the bay area for the big full gospel conference or something like that no place to go nothing new to see just the same old saints who long ago told us what their favorite scriptures were I pray that it shall be for us the joy and the delight a rich thing unspeakable that it was and I'll tell you what I speak as one who has had the first taste of such glory because we meet every morning at 7.30 in the dining hall of our little place there in Minnesota so remote you can't even find it on the map just a ragtail collection of souls a Jewish brother who is a kind of a misfit, a nebuchel, a nebbish if you know what that is the kind that even my mother finds hard to love ungainly, awkward never had a girlfriend never went

on a date shy, does not speak to people you know what we're seeing? that one is coming that one is beginning to open like a flower that one is beginning to exude a fragrance he's becoming a delight as we say in Yiddish, he's becoming a mensch he's becoming a person God is putting him together he's being made whole because he's in an atmosphere with other saints meeting each other face to face praying, seeking the face of God reading out of the scripture talking, conversing about ordinary things and ending every morning with communion of all the times that I've dreaded communion having to take it like with white-lipped obligation gritting my teeth here we go again, okay cat, fix your religious face it'll only be over in a minute holding the grass and the bread in a room with 300 strangers

I can't explain to you the joy of being in a circle with those whom I know intimately and love and I know by name breaking bread and taking the cup of covenant together hallelujah that must have been something of what Mary and Elizabeth enjoyed and something for which God himself is preparing us if we have a heart to receive it and to go on with the Lord well came the day that John himself was born the 57th verse now the time that Elizabeth should be delivered came and she gave birth to a son and the neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown great mercy on her and they rejoiced with her and it occurred that on the eighth day when they came to circumcise the child they were intending to call him Zechariah after his father but his mother said not so, he should be called John and

they said that none of your relatives is called by that name, you've never done that before and they inquired with signs of his father what he wanted to have him called who was silent for nine months God

had taken from him the power of speech how many of us could stand that boy I'm full of observations and things today but God has done something wonderful for us he's given us the privilege of meeting some German saint whose style of life is altogether different from anything that we know in this state maybe a lot of us would say pietistic contemplative where's their evangelistic program but they meet three times a day for prayer for supplication for a lost world, for the people of God for the forming of his body they have a burden for the reconciliation of a fragmented body of Christ and

you know what they do these silly people after they meet 7 o'clock every morning from 7 to 8 and have communion the next hour, their breakfast hour is taken in silence you can't even so much as say pastor brother nothing breaks the silence and on top of that they'll have something like a three day period my secretary Kathy is there now and she began with a three day period of silence and almost went out of her skull because God was talking to her in that silence and revealing things to her and the first thing she wanted to do was share it what should happen if the fuse is blown we can't play our tapes anymore I mean with all due respect for the tape ministry and I was the one who said amen loudest for these thousands of tapes which are circling the earth I would say for us we're probably

an over-taped generation, saturated we've got libraries full and we're carnal as all get out would to God we had only three and digested them fully and lived every syllable and then go on to the fourth tape would to God we did less hearing less things drumming into our ears and more silent waiting on God here's a man who was silent for nine months and catch this after his baby was born he was still silent until the eighth day when it came time to dedicate the child and you know what I would suspect that those eight days were more demanding than all of the nine months that preceded it but eight is the day of new beginnings have you ever allowed the Lord to push you beyond your strength to allow you to go even beyond the nine months when you thought you've been valiant you fasted a whole

day or two days or three days or five or you made a vow or you gave of your substance and you thought what more could God require have you ever allowed that last eight day period eight is the day of new beginnings we may have just fallen short or stopped a little too soon I don't say that thus sayeth the Lord and this is what is implied in the scripture but I just feel like saying that and I could almost say with Paul and I have the spirit too and isn't it interesting the things that Paul said two thousand years ago which is that now the Lord hasn't said this but I would just suggest to you and I have the spirit too that today we call it a scripture I'm not saying that that's going to come from this utterance of mine but there's something about waiting for the eighth day there's something

about waiting for the day of new beginnings and not just bursting out when we see the first appearing of the child because it says in the 64th verse at once his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed and he began to speak blessing and praising and thanking God and awe and reverential fear came on all the neighbors and all these things were discussed throughout all the hill country of Judea listen to what he said blessed, praised, and extolled and thanked be the Lord God of Israel in the 68th verse because he has come and brought deliverance and redemption to his people he has raised up a horn of salvation that is mighty and valiant as a help of the author of salvation for us in the house of David his servant this is as he promised by the mouth of his holy prophet from the most ancient

times in the memory of man that we should have deliverance and be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who detest and pursue us with hatred to make true and show the mercy and compassion and kindness promised to our fathers and to remember and carry out his holy covenant to bless which is the most sacred because it's made by God himself that covenant he sealed by oath to our forefather

Abraham to grant us that we being delivered from the hand of our foes might serve him fearlessly in holiness, divine consecration and righteousness that is in accordance with the everlasting principles of right within his presence all the days of our life and you little one shall be called prophet of the most high for you shall go before the face of the Lord to make ready his way to bring and

give the knowledge of salvation to his people and the forgiveness and remission of their sins because of and through the heart of tender mercy and loving kindness of our God a light from on high will draw upon us dawn upon us and visit us to shine upon us and give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death to direct and guide our feet in a straight line into the way of peace I'll tell you what I think I'm willing to be silent nine months and eight days to speak only one such utterance and hang up my hat that's an utterance that's a mouthful that's a mighty statement that's pure poetry that's full of the savor of God full of the knowledge of his ways redolent with faith and with fulfillment of promise it's worth such a silence for such a speaker and just to conclude

tonight and maybe we'll continue tomorrow morning if the Lord pleases it came the time for the birth of the Lord Jesus himself we know the circumstances that Joseph came up to the town of Nazareth in the fourth verse from the town of Nazareth to the town of Bethlehem because it was of that house and family of David to be enrolled with Mary his espoused wife who was about to become a mother and while they were there the time came for her delivery and she gave birth to her son her firstborn and she wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger because there was no room or place for them in the inn you know I thought about that as I read that wasn't there one decent Jewish man he didn't have to be religious who saw a pregnant woman about to give birth and say look I've got this

room and all that but I see your condition why don't you take this room tonight and I'll take the stable you know why because Jesus was a root out of a dry ground very dry ground a ground no longer spiritual not even religious and in the last analysis not even moral or ethical or decent I'll tell you children when the knowledge of God goes everything goes with it and there wasn't so much as a Jewish man who made way for a pregnant woman about to have a child and so were the scriptures fulfilled that he should be born in a manger for unto you is born in this day in the town of David a Savior who is Christ the Messiah the Lord I'm so glad that God tacked on that last part the Savior the Messiah the Lord and this was told to shepherds who were tending their flock by night and it says in the

12th verse and this will be a sign to you by which you will recognize him you will find after searching it doesn't say that in King James but it's implied in the Greek you will find after searching a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger I'm glad that God inserted after searching it was no convenient thing there was a little something required from these shepherds but you know what I think that the same men who have a disposition to stay out all night with the flock and watch it are the same men who will carefully search out the birthplace of the Messiah the Holy One of Israel How are you shepherds doing?

There's a pattern here children there's volumes here of which we're only touching the surface that have to do with the character of men simple men, simple women not at all ostentatious not at all any kind of a brave display ordinary folk of low estate shepherds, virgins, elderly the barren and of these it pleases God to bring forth a holy son and so to conclude in the 13th verse and suddenly there appeared with the angel an army of the troops of heaven a heavenly knighthood praising God and saying glory to God in the highest and on earth peace among men with whom he is well pleased a little different from the King James men of good will of his favor I want to end with that verse glory to God in the highest and on earth peace among men with whom he is well pleased men of good will of his favor that's the same word that he had to

say about Mary I'm sure that's the same word that he felt about Zechariah and Elizabeth Mary thou art blessed among women you have found favor with God who me?

I'm just I'm just an ordinary Jewish girl who me? and she was troubled at the saying and wondered what could be the meaning of that statement she was of low degree but the Holy Spirit overshadowed her and brought forth something sinless and perfect so must it always be to her let's bow our heads tonight and ask God for something special something virginal I'm not speaking of the sexual realm although it might be included because if we have been shabby in that area it's only because we're shabby elsewhere it all goes together God's great lament about Israel is that they went whoring after other gods though he was a husband unto them there's something about keeping oneself chaste and reserved for the holy purposes of God while it wasn't so long ago we had such strange sounding and archaic

phrases as holy matrimony and now when most people go to the altar, even Christians they have an escape quote in the back of their mind that if it doesn't work well, try, try again there's something to be said for virginity may God restore our understanding and make us candidates for his use to bring forth a holy son at the end of the age precious God thank you Lord for this Christmas story mighty God when the world has a ball pops the champagne corks and the booze flows like water in office parties the bottoms of secretaries get pinched by the cabinets all kinds of giggling and raucous laughter and noise is going on in Christmas season when men are knee deep in packages and ribbons and junk only to find two days later our garbage cans are stuffed with broken plastic toys and all that

wealth of confusion and noise and mayhem and junk may you remind us precious God of an event that was holy, holy, holy may we be reminded mighty God of those whom it pleased you to use, to bring forth that great birth people of low estate barren, stricken in years men just going about doing their job faithful in the little things unobtrusive people who were surprised and startled that an angel should come to them may we be such as they mighty God we just ask a word by your spirit now Lord see our hearts cry Lord and thank you for the enormous power that you have we ask you to brood over us as you brooded over Mary by the wonderful working of your blood to wash from us everything that has violated our persons everything to which we have condescended in the spirit of the world and the flesh

and the devil our traffic our cheap kicks and thrills, our excursions into ministry that we might be seen and be heard, that we have not reserved ourselves and held ourselves for that time when it pleased you to bring something forth that was pure wash it all away now Lord purge and purify and now by your same holy presence we ask impregnate us deposit in us mighty God anew and afresh a holy seed almighty God and may it grow, may it well up may we be enlarged with the presence of the most high God in the inner man that the day shall not be far off that we who have come back from our missionizing and evangelizing and witnessing frustrated and defeated will rejoice and leap when only for the coming into a room there shall be a release of the spirit of the life of Christ Jesus because of the

presence which we carry seal to our hearts Lord all of the holy principles that you have inserted in the great story of the coming forth of our Messiah our Savior and our Lord and if they do so much as one here who has never liked a shepherd carefully sort him out that they might find him in the least expected place in the stink of a barn may there be that discovery today tonight may there be something born in a heart in a stable may be seen as filthy but made holy because of that which will be born in the calling upon that name which is above every name let this night and this speaking seal it to our hearts help us from this day forth to walk quietly before the Lord help us to revere the silences help us to take delight in the saints help us mighty God to rejoice for the small things in

the obscure things and the hidden things because that's where your holiness and your glory is in Jesus name we pray

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