

Nativity Special 09-12-27a

This is Sunday, the 27th of December 2009, and we are going to continue our study of the Nativity of the Lord Jesus. We talked about the virgin birth in our previous excursion, and this morning we're going to continue to look at that. If I was going to give a title to this message, it would be The Real Nativity Scene.

We have a lot of things on church lawns and mantel shelves, but what was the real nativity scene like? Let's take a moment at the outset to prepare our hearts and to cultivate the full and unhindered ministry of God's Holy Spirit to our souls as we look together at God's Word.

Father, we are grateful every time we think of the many benefits and blessings and provisions and expressions of your compassion and your grace toward us. We could fill many minutes simply recounting the things that you have done for us, the sustaining evidence of your love toward us and the benefits that we enjoy because of our standing in the Lord Jesus Christ.

At this time of year, we focus especially on His incarnation, His willingness to empty Himself and take on the form of a servant and to come in the likeness of man. In that role, He was obedient and set an example for us in the faithful fulfillment of your plan through the empowerment and enablement of the Holy Spirit. We're grateful for all of these gifts and all of these wonderful truths that sustain us and that teach us in this relatively brief time that we have to learn and grow before the return of the Lord Jesus and our entrance into eternal life and the future things of which we can only gain a glimpse in the limitations and the hampering effect of our fallen flesh. And yet you have converted cursing to blessing, and out of things that seem bad you have brought forth so much good for us. And we are grateful for our fellowship, we're grateful for this time of study of your Word, and we ask that you will bless it to our hearts. In Jesus' name, amen.

We have just had Christmas proper, and as you know, we have no real idea of the actual date of the Lord Jesus' birth. Some people have looked in Luke and have seen a reference to the sixth month for the announcement of the pregnancy, which would nine months later put the birth in spring. That's possible.

There's some prophetic traction that that might have when you think about the former and latter rains as a picture of the first and second comings of the Lord Jesus. The former rains come in the spring, the latter rains come in the fall, and the spring feasts foreshadow the first advent, as they call it. Advent always sounded faintly Catholic to me, but that's what they call it, the first advent, and then the second coming, of course, is reflected in the fall feasts. And so it's possible. I would say it's more likely than not that Jesus might have been born in the spring.

However, that reference to the sixth month refers to something else, and we'll be driving past that at a relatively high speed this morning as we look at the main portion of our study. But in this time of the year, we rather arbitrarily have the opportunity to look at the nativity, the birth of the Lord Jesus, the incarnation, all of the things surrounding it, and the songs and the glorious epiphany-type things that we think about. We have the sort of holy glow, the star glittering over the manger scene, and the shepherds reverently coming and kneeling, and the sheep obediently surrounding the manger, and the wise men, three of them, with their gifts and their camels standing quietly by, not making any camel noises.

We have idealized and typified the birth of the Lord Jesus through tradition, and "Do You See What I See," leaving aside the drummer and that, but the glorious "O Holy Night," and it's a wonderful thing. And that element is certainly there, and there is a reverence and a respect for that event that attaches. And in your greeting cards and your nativity scenes, you have this idealized scene. What I would like to do this morning with you, since we're still in that general time of the season, is to kind of appreciate all of that and, like a card, close it up, lay it aside, the little electronic "Away in a Manger," close the thing, stop it, and take a look at what actually happened. What is the reality that Mary and Joseph experienced in this event? What was it really like, and what is our purpose? We're not just going in to be debunkers or naysayers or, "Ha ha, I know something you don't know about Christmas."

There is a reason why Scripture records in two different Gospels the events surrounding the birth of the Lord Jesus. It's important. All Scripture is inspired, all Scripture is God-breathed, and it's profitable. It's profitable to us. So by looking at these things, we want to find the answer to the question, so what? So there were shepherds, so there were wise men, so there was a star, so there was the angel Gabriel, so there was Zechariah and Elizabeth.

What is the actual applicational benefit in meditating on these particular events as they are presented to us in the Word of God? And what you find is that there are some fascinating things in this account that don't make it onto the front of the card, they don't make it into the music, they don't get into the hymns. Taking nothing away, I love the Christmas songs, most of them. I love the "O Holy Night." I mean, that thing can just send you. It's almost as good as the Hallelujah Chorus. But there are some other details that don't make it into those accounts, and they are right here in Scripture, and they are really beneficial to think about for interpretation and application. And what I would like to suggest to you is, and I'm going to simplify and summarize here and just boil this down into two great challenges that surround the birth of the Lord Jesus.

And we're going to look at the first one in this first session. We'll look at the second one in the second session. But as wonderful and glorious and halo-like as we think the birth of the Lord Jesus was, let's think about it in a non-Hallmark kind of way. So if you'll turn with me to Matthew chapter 1, let's get the account of Scripture before us, beginning in verse—well, let me go back up here. Right after the genealogy, we have the account beginning in chapter 1, verse 18. Helps to be in 1:18 instead of 2:18; that was my hesitation.

"Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows." This is what we're looking for. This is what happened. Matthew is giving us the account. "The birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: after His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph"—she is engaged. They are aimed at marriage, but they are not married yet.

This is the traditional period of engagement, and it is before the marriage, it is before they came together. This is before they are at the stage in the matrimonial process where they are married and they can start a family.

"Before they came together she was found with child of the Holy Spirit. Joseph her husband, being a just man and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly."

Now, here's my question. You think about village life. They're in a small town somewhere up in Galilee, don't know exactly where actually, but everything is going along smoothly. Think about this from the standpoint of the community. Think about people you know. Here's a family here and a family there, you've got some relatives here, some relatives there. All of a sudden, a young girl, teenage most likely, who has great prospects, she has been selected to become the wife of a good man. He has a good reputation in the community. He is a just man, and people know this about him. They're betrothed, and everything is looking rosy. Boy, what a good marriage. Won't this be great? All the family says that. Joseph, he's a hard worker, he's a good man, he's got some prospects, and he's noted for his integrity. He's a devout man. We really think this is going to go great.

And out of nowhere Mary turns up pregnant. Now what? And keep in mind, this is the coming of the Messiah of Israel to the nation. He will save His people from their sins. He is going to be the light to the Gentiles. But how does it begin? Scandal. It's scandalous. You're not supposed to get pregnant when you're not married, and there is a lot of legalism in Israel at this time. You know this from later on when Jesus begins His ministry, and there are wide eyes and frowns and aspersions. This is a scandal. It is scandalous like it used to be in this nation decades ago if a prominent man was found to be carrying on outside his marriage. I mean, this was political death. This was the end of careers. This was, "Get thee hence and be banished." Your judgment, your integrity, your character is all shot because this is not supposed to do. You don't do this.

And so the entrance, the incursion of God Himself for salvation in Israel begins on this note. This would be like Armstrong stepping down onto the moon and doing what I did this past week after loading stuff on top of the car and stepping back down from reaching up there to tie straps and things, and up and peel, the ground was lumpy and soft, and when I stepped down I just rolled my ankle, the same ankle I sprained last year. Just rolled it. Got that sharp tearing, ice-pick-in-the-joint pain.

Well, what if Neil Armstrong had done that when he was stepping down from the lunar module? One small—yeah, you know, the first mark on the moon is the seat of his astronaut suit hitting the lunar dust. One small—and then just this scream of pain. Well, it kind of spoils the moment, right? For all of history, we don't even get the rest of the thing. It's just the first thing said on the moon was unspellable, or worse, he might have let out something like a four-letter expletive.

Well, thankfully that didn't happen. But you think about this. This is the coming of the Messiah. This is the birth of the Lord Jesus, and instead of being in a royal palace surrounded by scribes and notables and holy men and the Annunciation and angels descending, instead the first note of this is scandal. How do you explain this? And you say, well, but didn't the angels come? And do you want to try to tell somebody that the reason your teenage daughter is pregnant before the marriage has been consummated, well, an angel came and this is from the Holy Spirit? No more wine for the Joseph family.

Yeah, sure. Of course, you're going to be the parents of the Messiah. You saw angels? We're not coming to the wedding. Forget it.

You guys go down to the justice of the peace. Go down and let the Romans document your marriage. Of all the people in all of Israel and all of the generations, who are you? You don't live in Jerusalem. You're not from a noble family. You're up here. What do you do? You make harnesses or plows or whatever, carpenter. We don't know exactly what that word meant, but he was some kind of a blue-collar tradesman. He made stuff. He wasn't a prosperous businessman. He didn't own flocks and herds. He wasn't notable. He wasn't in the upper class. So I seriously doubt that anybody other than the immediate family was given the actual explanation.

Joseph and Mary had to bear this social ostracism and the inevitable criticism and aspersions and gossip. They just had to endure it. This is how it starts.

If you wanted a greeting card, have all the people in the village over here whispering to one another and Mary and Joseph standing over here. This is why it says, "Joseph, her husband, being a just man," to whom such things did not attach, he knew nothing of scandal or having any sort of blot on his reputation, "didn't want to make her a public example." She's already being talked about, and if he had done what was normally done, "Get thee hence, you untrustworthy wench. How could you do this to me?" he could have maintained his public reputation by casting her out, by annulling the betrothal, which was his right under the law.

He could have preserved himself and his reputation by casting her aside. He could have kept his reputation by not being a public example. Now, we don't expect this kind of communication from God today, but in earlier days there was much less Scripture, and yet you still have to decide whether or not you're going to believe what you're told.

Dreams are tricky things. Is that a product of my imagination, or he's under stress, he's rolling these things around in his mind? But an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David." Have you ever thought about that? How many times is Jesus referred to as the Son of David? Joseph, son of David.

It is a reminder that not only is he in the tribe of Judah, but he is a lineal descendant of King David. Joseph, son of David. There's a reason you're here on this earth. There's a reason you were born to the parents you were born to. There's a reason you have the heritage and the descendancy that you have. Joseph, son of David.

How many times do you think anybody called Joseph this in the community? I would wager he had never heard that phrase in his life. Lots of people are. David had hundreds of descendants in the tribe of Judah at that time. It's not like there's only a son of a son of a son of a son and there are no brothers, there are no cousins, there are no other men equally related. Many had a similar heritage that Joseph is addressed as son of David. "Do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife."

And it's a reminder. You made a pledge. She is your wife.

And you're probably familiar with the way betrothal worked. It's a little bit different than engagement and marriage here. Betrothal was, it's kind of like a—it was a lot more binding than just mere engagement. It was a sort of pre-marriage, and then you had a chance to get everything ready, and then you formalize and consummate the marriage. But it's a lot closer. You know, people can break an engagement. Girl gets mad, throws the ring in the guy's face and stomps off, and okay, see if you can get something back on the ring and go do something else. It was much more serious.

It was—there was an air of finality in betrothal that doesn't attach to engagement today. "Do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife." And even in the betrothal stage, the man is the husband and the girl is the wife. That's how it was thought of. For that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. Now, we'll back up and see some of the additional information here.

But that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit, and she will bring forth a son, and you shall call His name Yeshua, for He will save—and this is the verb from that noun—His people from their sins. He will save His people. Who are His people? When Joseph heard these words and God through the angel says He will save His people from their sin, who is it? Who are His people? Israel.

He will save Israel from their sins. That's the mission of the Messiah, the Mashiach. He is the anointed one. He is the Son of David. Who is David the king of? Was David king of the world? King of Israel. He will save His people, Israel, from their sins.

That's the meaning of Yeshua. Joshua didn't deliver the world when he marched across on dry ground and went into the land of Canaan and started hacking and slashing all of the -ites. He was the deliverer and the general in charge and the one who effected deliverance and the consummation of that deliverance and possession of the land for Israel, the twelve tribes.

So, all this was done that it might be fulfilled, which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, "Behold, the virgin shall be with child and bear a son, and they shall call His name Yeshua." Is that what it says? What is the matter with Matthew? Can he not keep his concentration? He has the angel telling Joseph to name the child Yeshua, and then he cites the prophet who says you call the child Emmanuel. This is a fulfillment? Why didn't they name Him Emmanuel?

Well, this gives us a clue as to the difference in God's hermeneutics and man's hermeneutics. Modern Western scholarship says if you are going to fulfill a thing, you've got to follow it to the letter. Obviously, hermeneutics is the science of interpretation, biblical interpretation in particular. We would think, well, if it is going to be fulfillment, then Joseph should have named Him Emmanuel, because you shall call His name if it is going to be a fulfillment, and yet the two names are different. What does that tell us?

There is a very important principle illustrated and reflected here, and we are going to be talking about it tomorrow night in our Bible challenges off-schedule class that would normally be Friday, but due to the holidays, we are going to pick it up tomorrow night. But just remember this when we get to that, because I will refer back on Monday night. But it is a fulfillment.

The virgin shall be with child. Not only that, but there is a difference in language in this citation of Isaiah 7:14, because in Hebrew the word simply means young woman. When it was translated into Greek, it was translated into Greek. The Greek translation, the Septuagint, which was done hundreds of years before Jesus, two and a half to three hundred years before, it was old. It was almost as old as the King James is for us. 1611 to 1911 would have been 300 years, and 2011 it will be 400 years old.

This was 250 or 300 years old at the time of Jesus' birth. But in that translation, they didn't use a perfect equivalent. There was a word in Greek that meant exactly what the Hebrew word means, but something happened in the translation. Instead of using a generic word for young woman, they used the word parthenos. Parthenos in Greek means virgin, in the sense that the modern English word means no previous relationships with a man. That's not what the Hebrew word specifically means. It can cover such a person, but it's not specific.

So Matthew cites the Greek version with its sort of new importation of an idea of virginity that wasn't specifically in the Hebrew. The Greek translation has an element that is fulfilled here that wasn't in the original Hebrew. You'll find that this is not the only case. "He shall be called a Nazarene," and there are some other places. This tells us something about the way Bible interpretation works. I'll flesh that out tomorrow night. We'll see.

The coming of the Lord Jesus into the world creates problems. There is a negative element here. There is an immediate rejection of the idea by people in the periphery. Why did God let that happen? Why didn't God send an angel to stand on top of the synagogue in this town, wherever it is Mary and Joseph lived, and we don't know where? Why didn't the angel stand and announce it to the community? Don't criticize Mary. Don't fault Joseph for picking a frivolous and untrustworthy girl because this is of the holy. He gets this in a dream.

How many people hear this? It's not even as good as the Damascus Road, where at least somebody saw light and heard thunder and said, well, something happened. Joseph gets this in a dream. He can't say, "Hey, come in here and look, an angel is in the room." He can't get any confirmation from anybody else. It's a personal problem.

So when somebody says, "Well, Joseph, how did this happen? You haven't had the thing yet and she's already with child, and this is a terrible scandal. What a bad thing for your reputation." And Joseph says, "Well, you know, I had a dream, and God told me that this is all okay. It's like a virgin conception, and she didn't mess around, and everything is okay." How is this story going to play? Would you even try that?

So he has to endure the suspicions and the criticisms and the gossip. You know how it is in a small town. Everybody knows everything about everybody. And everybody knows when Mary starts changing shape that, hey, they didn't have the—you know, how did this happen? I checked my calendar here, and this girl is obviously six months pregnant, and wait a minute, we only had the wedding two months ago. Something bad has happened.

God makes no apology to the community. It's a scandal. There's no reasonable explanation except there is an inner circle of family who are going to get this. The only people to whom this is going to make sense, the only people to whom it is not a scandal, are those who are of like faith and like mind with Joseph and Mary. Because you notice when the angel comes and tells him that she's going to bring forth a son, Joseph, verse 24, being aroused from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord commanded.

This is hard. This flies in the face of custom, of expectation, of convention. He's laying his reputation aside. He is going to be thought of as a man who has been fooled, who has been cuckolded, as they used to say. She has fooled around on you and you're taking her anyway. What is the matter with you? Or you yourself are responsible, so that people are not going to believe a virgin birth. This never happened in history. And you say, well, an angel came down. I mean, it's not going to play.

He does it anyway. He does as the angel of the Lord commanded. One of the hardest things anybody has ever had to do, Joseph had to take this on faith. He's got no material evidence. He's got no physical evidence. The angel didn't leave behind a nugget from the golden streets in heaven. He didn't leave Joseph a cup of the sapphire sea water or anything from heaven. He had this in a dream. He was told. It was information given to him by God. He believed it. He applied his faith to it and he acted on it. And he suffered for it.

He will be ill thought of. It's a scandal. This is the first big greeting card moment, the coming of the Lord Jesus, is this negative problem. And it's going to continue to be a problem all through the pregnancy. Every time somebody sees Mary in the streets, any time somebody thinks about that whole situation, they're going to be tut-tutting and clucking and shaking their heads and whispering behind their hands to each other. And they have to endure this over and over, day by day, week by week, all through the pregnancy.

That's just the challenge they face. And it's a test. You think, why would God do that to them? Why couldn't she just miraculously walk in one day and there's the manger and there's the baby, and she didn't have to go through this whole scandal? If it came from God, why couldn't God just pop the baby into the room and not have her go through this year of abuse from the community? And poor Joseph.

Taken her as his wife, and everybody said, the guy's nuts. But he took to him his wife and did not know her until she had brought forth her firstborn son. And he did just as the angel commanded. He called His name Yeshua, Deliverer. How ironic that the coming of the Deliverer just creates this huge headache for the parents.

They don't have a glow. They don't have golden dishes behind their head as they walk around. People aren't saying, "Oh look, it's the holy family." They're saying, "There's the scandal family. There's the didn't-do-it-right family."

So, not only this, not only is there the expectation of the community, but you know how people like to plan ahead and think about and prepare for a family. It's a lot easier today. We've got all kinds of technology so that you can kind of help decide when and where. And every once in a while there's a surprise, and here's an unplanned pregnancy. We didn't see it coming. Now what?

And this creates logistical uncertainty. This is a bad time. Joseph has gotten the word that he's going to have to go down to Bethlehem and participate in the census that's going to be run by Quirinius. Well, now he has to take not just a wife, but a pregnant wife down there. And that complicates travel. It's going to make the trip much more difficult. And they haven't had a chance to get everything ready. Normally, Joseph would arrange for different accommodations so that they would have space. And it just comes of a sudden. Now everything has changed.

All of their expectations, whatever plans they had for the culmination of their betrothal and the marriage and where they were going to settle and what they were going to do, this is all thrown into confusion because you're starting with a child. It's kind of nice when you get married to have a little bit of time before children come along to enjoy one another, to spend time and kind of get the household set up. And depending on the way things work, some people marry into a previous family if somebody's been married before or whatever. But

normally, most people, you get married and you have at least some time before the first child comes along. You don't start on day one and here's—we're way far along.

Well, Joseph just has to rethink the whole situation because they're starting with a child. Where are they going to live? What are they going to do? What arrangements are they going to make? Maybe he was figuring on working and saving up, and it's just all changed. So it complicates things.

Well, he has to go down for the census. This is law. They have to go down. It's based on a decree from Caesar, and we can cover the timing of Quirinius and the census at another time. The historians don't think that it happened. Well, it happened. Luke tells us that. He's a historian, so the other historians are going to have to get in line. It happened. It was run by Quirinius, and it's the first. He does another one in like 6 A.D., but this is about a decade before that.

So we flip over to Luke. Go over to Luke chapter 2, and along with this challenge, there is provision. Oh, by the way, let me just add one other thing to the challenge. Along with the scandal, along with the travel complication, there is the delayed honeymoon. You might think, well, that's not that big a deal. It's not the worst thing in the world. It's not the worst aspect of the situation, but you think about the expectation.

I think Joseph loved Mary. I think Mary loved Joseph. Yet this intrusion of the plan of God into their lives, their expectation of having their ceremony with great enthusiasm and celebration on the part of the family and friends and so on, culminating in the honeymoon, that's off. There's not going to be a wonderful celebration of all these enthusiastic participants saying, "Way to go, Joseph. Way to go, Mary," because it's all surrounded with scandal. This pregnancy has created this pall and this scandalous nature. So that kind of taints everything.

And because she's pregnant, there is no consummation of the marriage, as it tells us. He did not know his wife until after the birth. So this is nine months to a year after the fact. So the honeymoon is pushed into the indefinite future. We know that later on they had the rest of their family. Jesus has half-brothers and sisters, but that's just another part of the equation that they had to deal with. Well, our expectation, our hope for that is pushed way into the future somewhere.

But along with this challenge and this test that God has put into their lives, He also has provision. And He makes provision through His Word. We talked when we were going through our memory verses this morning, how do you apply, how do you succeed in doing the things that God asks us to do? It's through His Word. Ephesians begins with the theology and ends in the application. That's the way Paul's letters typically work. He gives you the truth and then says, in the light of that truth, here's how we live, in the strength and the power of God's Holy Spirit, bringing those truths to our mind.

Now we know how to change the tire. You have a flat. If you have the knowledge, you can change the tire. If you don't have the knowledge, you're stuck with a problem. And you've got all the tools. There is the ability to do the jack and the other tire, and all of the things you need are in the car. But if you don't have the knowledge, you can't fix that problem. You can't work through that issue. It all depends on whether you know how to use what you have or not.

Well, what did God do for Mary and for Joseph in this situation so that they could cope and so that they could be obedient? Well, let's look at the provisions. First of all, you go back in Luke chapter 1 to the message to Zechariah. Remember, Zechariah is a priest, and in verse 23 you see that after he gets this message from Gabriel—you remember that story—Gabriel comes to him while he's burning incense in the temple and tells him he's going to have a son who's going to be the forerunner, and Zechariah doesn't believe it. And Gabriel says, "Well, since you didn't believe, you're going to be mute."

And so he goes home, and when his days of service were completed, he went to his house. After those days, his wife Elizabeth conceived, and she hid herself five months, saying, "Thus the Lord has dealt with me in the days when He looked on me to take away my reproach among the people." She's an old woman. She's like Sarah, never had a child. And when nobody thinks she can have a child, she gets pregnant.

It's a message from God confirmed by two signs: the sign of Zechariah going mute and the sign of this woman past the age of childbearing giving birth. And she goes away for five months. She hid herself, didn't go out, nobody saw her.

Then look at verse 26. “Now in the sixth month”—this is the sixth month of her pregnancy. It's not the sixth month of the year. You look up above: Elizabeth conceived, she hid herself five months, saying, “The Lord has dealt with me in the days when He looked on me to take away my reproach.” She is five months along. And then in the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary.

Having come in, the angel said to her, “Rejoice, highly favored one. The Lord is with you. Blessed are you among women.” No, Gabriel is not a Catholic, but that's where the Catholics get the first, you know, “Hail Mary, full of grace. The Lord is with you. Blessed are you.” They take this from Gabriel and then they mash right onto it what Elizabeth is going to say later.

When she saw him, she was troubled at his saying. She didn't fall down and say, “Happy day, happy day, an angel from God has visited me.” She was troubled. It was a scary thing. It was disconcerting, to say the least. And she thought, what kind of greeting is this? Blessed are you among women? What have I done? What did I eat? What has—what is—I mean, you can imagine.

You go along for centuries. There's been no supernatural visitations from God of any kind. Here this comes in. An angel comes and says, “Do not be afraid, Mary. You have found favor with God, and behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a son. You will call His name Yeshua.” She gets the same information that Joseph is going to get.

“He will be great. He will be called the Son of the Highest. The Lord God will give Him the throne of His father, David, and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever.” Over what house? What's He going to reign over? The house of Jacob. It doesn't say He's going to rule the world. He's going to rule. He's going to be king over the house of Jacob. La'olam, forever. And of His kingdom there will be no end.

Mary said, “How can this be, since I have not known a man?” I certainly haven't known Joseph, my betrothed. The angel said, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you. The power of the Highest will overshadow you. That Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God.”

Now, she's getting this message, and you can imagine that you might say, “I have had a hallucination. I have had some kind of delusion. What could this possibly be?” 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. That's the sixth month. “For with God nothing will be impossible.”

Mary said, “Behold, the maidservant of the Lord. Let it be to me according to your word.” And the angel departed from her.

Notice she didn't say, “Let me go check with Elizabeth and I'll get back to you. If I find that she really is with child as an old granny, let it be to me according to your word.” She didn't put out the fleece. She didn't say, “Well, give me—have you got any kind of bona fides? Can I see another sign? How many wings have you got?” Nothing. She said, “Let it be to me according to your word.”

And when she heard the Word of God, there was a response. She recognized it as the Word of God. If you are a believer who loves God and you love His Word, as a child of God, you have an instinct. It's like little babies have a nursing instinct, and they know their mother's milk. They know to seek for it and they know to nourish themselves with it. They go for that. That's a natural instinct.

And you as a believer who loves God and appreciates His Word, you will recognize it when you find it. You don't need a sign. You don't need a confirmation. You don't need a rational explanation. You don't need a six- or seven-chapter theological treatise to get all of the rationale. When you hear it, you know it. There is a recognition, just like our military aircraft, the IFF, the identification friend or foe. There's a little exchange that takes place that says, “This is friend, this is good.” And you'll know it when you hear it.

When you eat bread and it satisfies, you know that it's good. We have a taste apparatus that tells us when something is spoiled, and it tells us when something is good. And anybody with a taste apparatus knows that green peppers are not really food. I don't know why people eat those things. Your taste apparatus tells you that is not food, at least for some of us.

But we know the truth. Jesus told His disciples, "You will know the truth." And that's going to be the basis for your liberty, your freedom. Well, she recognizes this as the Word of God. This is a messenger of God. This is the Word of God. She recognizes it. He says, "You'll get a confirmation." She says, "Let it be to me according to your word."

She'll get the confirmation later on. She's got to make a trip, go find Elizabeth who has hidden herself away, and this will be additional confirmation. But Mary already believes. She has already received it with an open heart and with a positive response. That's how any true child of God who loves God, is called according to His purpose, responds to the hearing of the Word of God. That makes sense to me. That fills that hunger and thirst for righteousness that I have. And there is a positive response. There is an affirmative reaction. And that's what she has.

Well, this is the first of the provisions that God makes for this very difficult and challenging situation that she and her betrothed are going to face. We're going to pause here and take our break. When we come back, we're going to see the additional provisions that God makes. And then we'll move into that second great challenge. But let's pause here and take our break.