

## **Proverbs 22-12-28b**

Let's ask God's blessing on our fellowship and on our time of discussion and observation and we'll get started. Father, we are so grateful for the circumstances that you have assigned to us. Sometimes they are difficult and challenging, other times they are enjoyable and such a wonderful blessing and provision.

We thank you for all of the ways that you work in our lives. We thank you that you have brought us together as a fellowship and as a brotherhood in your son, the Lord Jesus Christ, to share the experience of this life and the opportunity to grow in grace and appreciate the truth of your word and the presence and power of your spirit in our ongoing journey through this life. We pray that our time of fellowship together tonight will be meaningful and helpful, that the Lord Jesus will be glorified, that we as individuals will be edified and as a group, we'll be drawn closer together and closer to you.

We pray it in Jesus' name, amen. Did mom and... Okay, because I can get the e-box on from here while we're talking. And then I think she knows how to... It's on, let me just see if she can... I'll put her in and then all you do is just text her and say, turn the TV to e-box and they'll be in and on.

Let's see what is going on there. Looks like it rebooted. You know, we had a power outage here on the property today, so might've gummed up the works.

In the meantime, if you've got a Bible or a phone or something and wanna just take a quick look at Luke, I'm gonna be referring to that in my sort of thought starting remarks. Every year in recent times, when it comes to Christmas, Patty and Elizabeth and I will spend some time. Elizabeth has been reading to us from the Chronological Bible and reviewing.

They put all of the gospel accounts in order beginning with John 1, which gives you the broad perspective and then interleaving the accounts from Matthew and Luke for the birth narrative. And that has been a blessing. So we did that on Christmas morning.

And then we, on Wednesday, not on Wednesday, today's Wednesday, on Monday, we went through Edersheim and got the background of what was going on in the day. And he is a guy that can just put your mind into, you can hear the gravel crunching under people's sandals and here's the sun and here's how it smelled and how it looked and what people thought and did. And so that was a great contextual reminder as well.

But in the course of doing both of those things, I was struck by what the account says in Luke chapter one and verse 26, in the sixth month, this is the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy with John the Baptist. 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.

And if you haven't already done so from our Luke study, you can scratch everything else out. Gabriel did not say blessed are you among women. It does not say in verse 29, but when she saw him to scratch all that out, Gabriel came in and said, rejoice highly favored one, the Lord is with you.

He just evidently walked in the door, appeared out of the daily traffic and said this. Well, she was troubled at his saying and considered what manner of greeting this was. Notice the word there that says she considered it.

Over and over again, especially in Luke, Mary pondered these things in her heart. She is one of the most thinking is attributed to her in the Bible as much or more than just about anybody. Gabriel comes in and says one sentence and her wheels are already turning.

She can't figure out why he would say what he said. Why is he saying it today? Who is he? I don't know him. Here's him call her highly favored one and saying that the Lord is with her.

This is very close to Emmanuel, which is God with us. If you just shift that a little bit to God with you, she's hearing this in Aramaic, no doubt. And so she immediately is thinking her way through this new, unusual and unexpected experience.

This is why God chose her to be the mother of the humanity of Christ because nothing gets past her. Circumstances happen. She doesn't blow it off.

She doesn't forget. She stores these things up in her heart. She ponders them in her heart.

She gets a greeting and she's immediately processing it. She's troubled and considered what manner of greeting this was. Why is this verse in the Bible? Couldn't you just skip that and have Gabriel just keep on talking? We are given Mary's reaction because it's important.

How many times does something unexpected happen to us? Sometimes it's an unexpected insight from the word of God. It is as though a messenger from God has spoken. And we might've heard these words before but we're hearing them for the first time because they're striking me.

We know that God favors his people and loves them. We know that God is with us in some sense but suddenly we are made aware in a new, fresh and unexpected way. I am highly favored and God is with me.

That calls for reflection. I need to work on this. That's Mary's example.

So the angel said to her, do not be afraid, Mary for you have found favor with God. A

second greeting, a second assurance. Don't be afraid.

How many times? Fear not. For I bring you good tidings of great joy. Many times when the unexpected hits us and we detect a divine element in it, we can lean toward fear.

What is God about to do? Am I going to not enjoy this? Is this going to be a hardship? Is this going to be a test? I know God has just done something very unexpected and unusual. I've gotten a fresh insight from scripture. Oh no, does this mean? And our mind starts going in the direction of fear.

So A, here comes this messenger with a message and he's encouraging. Highly favored one. God is with you.

She's starting to think and Gabriel sees her wheel spinning and he says, don't be afraid. Don't let this be fear inducing. You have found favor with God and favor with God is a good thing.

You think there's a little bit of a bracket because at the end of the account of the coming of the wise men and the moving back to Nazareth, it says, and Jesus grew in spirit and in wisdom and in favor with God and man. Jesus grows in favor with God, grows in favor. He's not automatically infinitely favored.

It says he grows in favor with God and man. This account begins with the expression to Mary, you have found favor with God. Favor with God is devoutly to be wished.

And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a son and shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the son of the highest. And the Lord God will give him the throne of his father, David.

And he will reign over the house of Jacob forever and of his kingdom, there will be no end. Mary goes on to ask some questions and get some answers, but I'm focusing on this initial revelation. How can this be? I do not know a man.

Notice we were told in verse 27, she is a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph. This is one of the things you get listening to Edersheim is how did betrothal and marriage work in these days? Because the timing here is everything. So Joseph and Mary get betrothed, which is stronger than the concept of engagement that we now have.

You can get engaged and you can break off the engagement. You're kind of aiming toward and you're probably going to get married. But if somebody breaks off an engagement, well, okay.

You know, you got to know each other a little better. Something came up, okay, the deal's off. It's not a big deal.

I mean, any more marriage in a lot of circles is not a big deal, but betrothal was

different. The way we look at marriage is the way the Jews looked at betrothal. Once you are betrothed, you have set a series of events in motion that are going to eventuate in the marriage, the wedding feast, the wedding night, and the marriage after that.

The betrothal was as firm a commitment as what we have when we say I do at the altar in front of witnesses. This is a contract, very difficult, if not impossible to break or annul. But that commitment comes to fruition one year later, 12 months, one year.

There is a betrothal. There is this year-long preparation. And then the formal tying of the knot, the celebration and the consummation and commencement of the marriage, cohabiting in the same dwelling and all the rest of it, that's a year hence.

But the commitment is made in advance. And in the early days and weeks and even months of that, not a lot changes except you're off the market for any other marriage possibilities that the course has been set. And you think in a way, it's like our salvation.

We place our faith in the Lord Jesus and we are adopted into the family of God and all of the reconciliation, redemption, propitiation takes place and we are saved. But the consummation of our salvation and the entrance into the new and different life, coexisting with the Savior, this is where it is useful to think of the church as the bride of Christ in that sense. Although we're never formally called that, but that idea is there, that this is the betrothal period.

We are committed, it's a certainty, but we haven't had the formal uniting, the wedding feast, and then the forward movement of life together. That's in the future. So it's interesting to remember that this life is really the betrothal period and we're doing our best to get prepared and be sure that we're on track to fulfill that objective that is certainly coming.

However, the details that we get by comparing these two gospels are quite interesting. Mary is betrothed, so that 12-month clock has started running. How far into the betrothal are we when the Lord Jesus is conceived? Initially, you could say, well, it could be anywhere within that 12-month period, but here's the thing.

The marriage is going to take place 12 months from the date of betrothal. If Jesus is born after the marriage, then you have a lot of complications in terms of, well, was it really a virgin birth? And so keep your finger here in the gospel here. So in chapter two, you skip forward.

You know, we can all almost quote this by heart. We've heard it so often. It came to pass in those days, decree went out, Caesar Augustus taxing, everybody went to be registered.

Verse four, Joseph also went up from Galilee out of the city of Nazareth into Judea. So what does this tell you? He and Mary both are born and raised in Galilee. His family city

is Bethlehem.

He's of the stock and tribe of Judah. His clan is located there, but he's a Nazarene. Mary is a Nazarene.

All of their people, all of the people they know have grown up with. Remember later on when Jesus is going to preach, they just showed this on the chosen where Jesus goes to the synagogue in Nazareth and people who have known him all his life grew up with him. The chosen writers have decided to put Lazarus and his sisters as also from there.

And so Laz knew him when he was a young man and so on. Yeah, he's Laz in the story. Okay.

Anyway, but think about the timing here because we're coming to a point and it's got strong power in terms of application, what we're about to see. Joseph went up from Galilee out of the city of Nazareth into Judea to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem because he was of the house and lineage of David. So all of those who could trace, not just their line as being from the tribe of Judah, but specifically lineal descendant of David went to Bethlehem because that is David's city.

To be registered with Mary, his betrothed wife, who was with child. Now this is important because no sooner does he get to Bethlehem, then the child is born. So at the point that Jesus is born, Mary is still his betrothed wife.

You haven't passed the year yet. And they haven't had the complication yet of, well, are we going to do something along the lines of the wedding feast of Cana? And Mary is showing and, you know, this scandal, this is why Joseph is minded to put her away privily. Keep your finger here.

Now I'm ready to go back to Matthew chapter one, where, sorry, my page turning is a bit awkward. I knew this would happen. Verse 18, the birth of Jesus Christ was, in the King James, on this wise, or as follows in our new King James, after his mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus is not yet conceived in Luke when Gabriel is talking to Mary. If you flip back there and Gabriel says, you are going to conceive in verse 35 of Luke one, the Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the highest will overshadow you. Therefore also that which is to be born will be called the Son of God.

So you are in verse 31. Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a son. Conception has not yet taken place.

The power of the Holy Spirit is going to overshadow. She's betrothed. She's in a three-month window before the wedding because Joseph has not put her away privately as he

was so minded.

But the timing of this is very narrow. They are betrothed. It's within the first three months of the betrothal.

Gabriel comes and says, you've not yet conceived, but you're going to. And nine months later, she is going to have the humanity of Christ born to her and she's still the betrothed wife. So the timing is everything here.

The conception, the pregnancy, and the birth have to fit inside the 12-month window of the betrothal for all of scripture to say what it says. Why am I belaboring this? When you go back to Matthew and verse 19, Joseph, her husband, being a just man and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly. But while he thought about these things, behold, so now he's still in the period of betrothal.

Now she has conceived. We're, what, a month later, two months later. It's becoming unavoidable.

He finds out she probably, and wouldn't you like to be a fly on the wall for that conversation? Joseph, I know, and typically in ancient Near Eastern culture and in the Jewish culture of the first century, betrothed people did not spend a whole lot of time together. So did Mary tell Joseph, I'm pregnant? Probably. I don't know who else could have.

Did she say, you know, an angel, I mean, did she try to get this story to float in his mind? Evidently, whatever she said was not sufficient for him to be at peace because he's thinking, I think I need to bail on this. I can just, some kind of way, we've got to, if you were betrothed, you actually had to divorce your betrothed. You couldn't just say, we quit.

There were formalities that had to be accomplished. It was very rare. While he thought about these things, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary, your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit.

If I had to guess, and this is pure speculation, scripture does not say, I think she probably told him what Gabriel told her. And he says, I've been around pregnant women, hormones, who knows, is she, I don't know her all that well, but this is the second witness when the angel appears to him in a dream. I think it's so cool because Gabriel walks through the door of Mary's house and talks to her face to face.

He doesn't do that with Joseph. How does he talk to Joseph? Say it out loud. Joseph in dreams.

Is this apropos or not? She will bring forth a son, you shall call his name Yeshua, for he

will save his people from their sins. All this was done that it might be fulfilled, which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet saying, the virgin shall be with child, bear a son, call his name Emmanuel, which is translated God with us. Then Joseph being aroused from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took to him his wife and did not know her until she had brought forth her firstborn son and called his name Jesus.

Names are so important. They were told what to name the child in the same way that Zachariah and Elizabeth were told what to name their supernaturally conceived child. You will call his name John.

And remember when John, eight days after he was born, they were gonna take him down and call him Zachariah Jr. And Zachariah is saying, no, no, no. And he says, his name's John. That's what Gabriel told him.

John in Hebrew is Yohanan, which is Yehochanan in its fullness, which is Yahweh is gracious. Yeshua, and Elizabeth was reminding me of this. And I think maybe you saw somebody point this out somewhere, but there are only three Yeshuas, only three Joshuas in scripture.

There are all kinds of Zacharias. There's all kinds of Abinadabs and all kinds of repeated names. Jesus has got two or three Simons amongst his disciples, but there's only three biblical Joshuas.

The first one, the middle one, and the last one. Who's the first one? Moses' companion and assistant. But that wasn't his name to start with, remember? Moses renames him Joshua.

He is given that name on purpose. We know who the last one is, it's right here. Who's the middle one? Remember, from Kings and Prophets? When we went through the prophet who shares a name with John the Baptist's father, what did we learn? There were two central figures in those prophetic visions.

There is a governor and there is a priest. And what is the priest's name? Yeshua. So the names are important.

And it's so interesting to me that these two things, you will call his name Jesus, he will save his people from their sins. This is in fulfillment of the prophecy that says he will be called Emmanuel. Emmanuel.

Why didn't the prophecy say his name will be Yeshua? And it slows us down enough to stop and think. These names are important. But here's my point, and I'm gonna close with this.

You think about Mary. They like to tell us that girls were typically in their mid-teen years when they were betrothed and married in these days. Could have been as young as 14.

I like to think she was probably in the 16 to 18 range. No indication of how old Joseph was. We know he lasted at least into the Lord Jesus' 12th year because he's 12 when Mary and Joseph take him to Jerusalem and he's found at the temple three days after they leave.

But he doesn't seem to be around in Jesus' adult life. So somewhere between 12 and 30, Joseph dies. So people have speculated that he was old.

Nobody knows. But here's the thing. You take this girl and she is indistinguishable from any number of other young women in Israel in that day.

One day, somebody walks through her door and delivers this message. Highly favored one, God is with you. Don't be afraid.

Now I got a piece of news for you. You're gonna conceive and bear the Son of God. And she ends up at the end of the dialogue saying, let it be to me according to your word.

Okay, so when it is to her, according to his word, and she conceives and gets pregnant, Gabriel doesn't show up again. To my knowledge, Mary never sees Gabriel again. And as that visit and those words and the memory of that goes into the past, and the reality is, I am now pregnant.

And in my culture, my friends, my acquaintances, my town, this village of Nazareth, I'm betrothed and I'm pregnant. How are we going to, you know, girls that dream of their wedding, how are you gonna do a wedding in this condition or with a newborn? It is never going to, the wedding feast of Cana for Mary is off. That's out.

That's never going to happen. Edersheim speculates that probably Mary and Joseph welcomed with great relief the decree that there was going to be a census at the order of the Romans, but done in the Jewish manner, where you would have to go back to your tribal city because we're out of town. We're not in Nazareth for the birth.

We're not having to make a bunch of explanations. It's, you know, it's kind of like, remember when Rachel is gonna hide the teraphim and so she sits on him, and this is the subterfuge by which they don't search in that one particular spot in the tent for the family idols. Well, you know, sorry, I can't get up.

Oh, feminine trouble. Great, I'm leaving. And that by some means or other, maybe Mary had been able to avoid some scandal, but what a relief to leave town and not have to involve a bunch of other people in the birth.

It's out of town and so much the better that there is no room in normal shared quarters. We'll have some privacy, but how odd? Because you ask yourself this question, but why did God do it this way at all? It is so awkward. It endangers Joseph's reputation, Mary's reputation, that gymnastics have to be accomplished so that this doesn't turn into a

stoning session or something.

And why not do it differently and not stress Joseph and not stress Mary? And all of these, and followed by all of the other things we know about the flight to Egypt and, you know, the death of two years old and under, and coming back and now Archelaus is in charge and I don't dare go back there. So we're now gonna go back to Nazareth, but after they have spent these years away from Nazareth, we saw a Christian comedian making a comment about what typically happens sometimes in engagements and you don't want to be too precise with your calendar and start checking dates too close because, you know, hmm, was this a premature child or what? And to return to Nazareth years later, nobody's got a calendar and a detailed sequence of events. Oh, y'all, the marriage is now accomplished and you're back and you've already got your firstborn child, isn't that great? And so you don't hear a whole lot of scandal.

When Jesus comes back to Nazareth and teaches in the synagogue, they don't come up and say anything related to that. We know you, we know your family, you're from here. Prophet is not without honor except in his hometown, but they don't question the legitimacy of his birth.

But that's 30 years later. They don't return to Nazareth until two to three years later. But my question is, and my suggestion is, how awkward, how inconvenient that why didn't Mary have this child without being betrothed at all? Why couldn't she not have appeared to be a widow and Joseph, the way God arranged it creates a tremendous amount of hardship and requirement for faith on the part of Mary and Joseph to believe the words of the angel in the face of all of these hard realities and potential social and family catastrophe.

But God works it together for good. And the example that Mary has, she knows, she's a thinker. As soon as Gabriel starts talking about this scenario, oh, so I'm gonna conceive via the Holy Spirit.

You've got two ways to respond. Look at all of the trouble this is gonna cause me. Look at my girlhood dreams that are gonna be dashed because, and by the way, just as an aside, can you imagine why Mary was so invested in the wedding feast at Cana coming off great? She never got one.

She's gonna make sure this one is great. She never had that. They're ducking and covering in all kinds of ways to get this birth accomplished and survive and eventually come back home years later.

So when they decided to have one at Cana and it's not going perfectly and she goes to Jesus, the reason for which she never got one, you do whatever he says. He says, look, it's not my time, but he knows that because of him, she never got that experience, never had that wonderful launching and family celebration. And there is vindication, there is

recompense.

God will ensure that it comes right in the end. And that's true of so many things that happened in our lives. In the short term, we think, why is God doing it this way? Could he not, he's God, he's omnipotent.

Could he not have found a way to do this that didn't create such a hardship and such a challenge to my faith and to my personal relationships, my location, my vocation? Joseph loses his entire business. He's able to make a living up there, that's why he gets betrothed. I've got a solid job here, I can take on a wife, I can provide, not anymore, not for years.

How are we going to live? And not until the wise men show up at the house with a lot of really expensive stuff that will support them until they can get back home and he can resume his profession, but they didn't see that coming. The wise men saw the star long before Mary and Joseph saw the wise men. And God launched that provision in their direction months.

And in the meantime, Gabriel doesn't say, behold, wise men are coming from the east with coffers of gold and frankincense and myrrh. It's uncertainty. But the reason God picked Mary and Joseph is they had the faith to trust that God knew what he was doing and their faith was vindicated in the end.

But in the glory of the nativity and the greeting card scene of the manger and the shepherds and such, we tend to forget what a Herculean imposition this was, a Herculean task for Mary and Joseph to accomplish by faith in these circumstances. For there to be that manger moment before and after, they endured a great deal of uncertainty, hardship, catastrophic losses in a lot of ways. And it is a reminder that there is no gracious provision and deliverance and opportunity without sacrifice and inevitably losing things that have to be taken out of the way so that those things can take their place.

And so in the Christmas season, when you think about Mary and Joseph, it is a reminder. We've thought about it before, but I would love to see the long form movie of that year. Start me out at the betrothal.

Let me watch those early months, Gabriel walking through the door, Mary swelling up in pregnancy, Joseph saying, what now? Then he gets the dream. And what did they do for the rest of the pregnancy? And well, here's a happy coincidence. I've got to travel out of town anyway to a place where nobody knows me because we're not from Bethlehem.

And conveniently, here's a place where the new lambs are birthed and some sympathetic shepherds are gonna be the ones to come and celebrate. And the angels will speak to them. As they have to Mary and Joseph.

And how apropos. And it leads to a second question is, why did God launch the incarnation of all of his possible options? He launches it this way. Through a great burden on the shoulders of a husband and a wife, much as the human race gets launched on the shoulders of a husband and wife in the garden.

And through a great deal of hardship comes the revelation of God's glory. Through hardship comes the revelation of God's glory. And all of us have to decide how we are gonna respond to hardship and unexpected challenges to our faith.

Are we gonna look at it the way Mary did and the way Joseph did? Or are we going to say, wait a minute, this isn't what I signed up for. It's a wonderful reminder. And then when you read the Magnificat, when you read the song that Mary composed, you find out why she was chosen and why she survived this and came through it with flying colors.

She is there at the beginning and she is there at the cross. She gets to see it all. And what a privilege.

And it's our privilege as well. Well, I'm gonna close in a quick prayer and then we'll talk. Father, thank you for the wonderful example you give us in scripture from so many faithful believers who have, as Hebrews chapter 11 says, encountered and surmounted by faith so many difficulties.

And the outcome is that their life transcends its own time and its own circumstance and becomes an example through which you can communicate your glory down through the ages. And in our day, you can communicate it to us. And we pray that God, the Holy Spirit, will illuminate our hearts and encourage and motivate us to be worthy of that calling and to be faithful to the upward call that you have issued in Christ Jesus so that we too can experience the joy and the satisfaction of having been incorporated into your plan in a productive and fruitful way.

We pray it in Jesus' name. Amen.