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## According to Your Word

by Bill Lockwood

### Luke 1:38

The Announcement of Our Lord's Birth to Mary is recorded in Luke 1:26-39. The Angel Gabriel is sent by God to *Nazareth* before Jesus' birth. It is important to note that Matthew does not allude to the fact that Mary lived at Nazareth, and we have, without contradiction between the two narratives, a "distinct proof of their independence" (Cook, 314).

But Mary is said to be *highly favored*. This does not highlight "favor" in the world's eyes, but in God's eyes. Who would have dreamed that an obscure Jewish girl from a peasant culture, from an unknown village, would be selected by God to be the mother of the Savior? It did not happen in Rome, nor Athens, nor Alexandria, nor Ephesus, not even in Jerusalem, but in Nazareth in unheralded Galilee. Her favor with God is seen in that she was selected by God to be the mother of the Savior of the world. "You shall conceive in your womb, and bring forth a son, and shall call his name Jesus." (1:31).

Consider two remarkable features of the portrait drawn of Mary in Luke, chapter 1.

***First, she exhibited a spirit of obedience.*** The fact that she was a virgin (v. 27) and she so stated to the angel ("seeing I know not a man" v. 34) did not cause her to doubt the announcement that she would conceive of a child. She simply and humbly responded, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord: be it unto me according to thy word." The word "handmaid" is actually feminine of "doulos" –slave. "Doule" means "female slave" or "bondmaid." She quietly places herself at the Lord's disposal.

The next line, "Be it unto me..." is a prayer that the angelic word be fulfilled. But this was no trivial matter to her. On one hand the highest honor ever given to a woman had been conferred on her by the Lord—to become the mother of the Son of God. On the other hand, Mary was placed in an extremely difficult position—even possibly mortally dangerous. She realized how radically it would influence her social position and especially her relation to Joseph if she were pregnant before their marriage. How would she handle this? She left the difficulty to God. And her words of surrender and devotion touch us. "Be it unto me according to thy word."

This brings to mind an incident in the call of Peter (Luke 5) in which the future apostle responded similarly. Jesus had been teaching the multitudes and they pressed upon him so closely on the beach of the Lake of Gennesereth that he boarded a small fishing boat owned by Simon (Luke 5:1-3). Simon had been washing his nets from an unsuccessful night of fishing. Jesus asked him to put out a "little from the land." Simon heeded and Jesus taught the people from the floating pulpit. When he had finished speaking he said to Peter, "Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a draught." (Big Catch). Simon knew that time for fishing was over. But he responded, "Master we toiled all night and took nothing, but at thy word we will let down the nets." When they obeyed they enclosed a great multitude of fishes and their nets were breaking!

I suggest that the **command** to “let down the nets” was a command that human philosophy would never suggest. (a) Go wash in the pool of Siloam (John 9:7); (b) Go to sea, cast hook, take a fish, open mouth, find shekel.. (Matthew 17:27). (c) Smear blood on doorposts and lentils of house (Exodus 12:7). (d) Stretch your rod over the waters. Exodus 14:11. (e) March around city walls (Joshua 6:3). (f) Go, dip in river Jordan 7x (2 Kings 5:10). These commands defy *human reason*. So also the promise of a Virgin Birth. So also is the response of Mary like Peter’s. “At thy word we will.” “Be it unto me according to your word.” She recognized that the will of God was decisive and from it there is no appeal.

**Second, she exhibited a spirit of gratitude and praise to God.** Luke has preserved for us her wonderful inspired hymn (v. 46-55) which has been called “Magnificat” from the Latin version. The first word of v. 46 in that version is “Magnificat” where Mary begins, “My soul does *magnify* the Lord.” One has written that in this hymn, almost wholly composed of OT passages, shows us most clearly the character of Mary. (Dummelow). This song of Mary is conveniently divided into two parts: (1) V. 46-49, personal in character, *Mary expressing her praise for God*; and (2) V. 50-55 in which she sets forth the *Character of the Kingdom as a moral revolution and reversal of all standards of greatness*.

Examine the first. (V. 46-49). **(a) She sings gloriously of the all-excelling perfections of God:** His divine power (49, 51); His holiness (49); His mercy (50); His faithfulness (54,55). These are true because He is engaged in fulfilling His promises concerning King Messiah the Redeemer (1:32,33). In that latter verse one will note that the fulfillment of Daniel 7:13,14 is highlighted when it is said, “The Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of His father David.” David’s kingdom was merely a type (Doyle Mant). This was associated with Christ’s *first coming*.

Examine the second. (V. 50-55). **(b) Mary shows the character of the kingdom and lays a foundation for true living.** The “mighty princes” (52) in her day included Herod and the ruling Caesars and their dynasties. The borders of their influence would be spread by power and blood. But the kingdom based upon humility and love is *more powerful than all the worldly kingdoms*. It is a revolutionary idea. Individual and social life is normally based upon power, prestige, popularity, money. But Mary says, “He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their heart” (51); “he has put down the princes from their thrones” (52a); and “He has exalted them of low degree” (52b). Promises of God do not come to the high-born or wealthy. The most powerful influence for God does not come by swords and money but by humility. Even the unknown are important to God. God defends the weak. Again, “The hungry he has filled with good things, but the rich he has sent away empty” (53). How opposite what the world reckons as important. How different from a physical kingdom expected by so many then and today! *The blessings are spiritual*.

Finally, “He has given help to Israel” (54) and remembered mercy “As he spoke to our fathers, Toward Abraham and his seed forever.” Not only did the coming of Christ fulfill the promise of sitting upon David’s throne (1:32, 33) but fulfilled Abrahamic promise.