

# “This is the Real Deal”

Luke 1:1-2:40 <sup>1</sup>

**1.** My dear Friend of God: A number of people have already undertaken to write a book about the events which have occurred among us, each claiming to be "just as the original eyewitnesses and participants in the cause related them to us." So it seemed wise to me to trace carefully everything from the very beginning and write it down in an orderly fashion, so that you might be absolutely sure of your information.

Yours, Luke

In the days when Ole Gene was governor of Georgia, there was a preacher by the name of Zack Harris. His wife was a very aristocratic woman named Elizabeth. They were both strict church members and were careful to observe all the rules and regulations of the Lord. They had no children, since Elizabeth was barren and by now they were both quite old.

One day when it was his turn to conduct services (the ministers had worked out a schedule among themselves), Zack went into the study to meditate, while all the people waited prayerfully in the sanctuary for the hour of worship. He looked up and saw a messenger from God standing just to the right of the desk. When Zack Harris saw him, he was quite alarmed and frightened.

But the messenger said, "There's no need to be afraid, Zack Harris, since your prayers have been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, whom you'll call John. He will be your pride and joy, and his birth will bring gladness to many people. He'll be a great man of God. No wine or whiskey will touch his lips, but he'll be full of holy 'spirit' while his mother is still carrying him. He'll turn a lot of church people toward the Lord their God. God himself will go in front of him with the spirit and power of Elijah. His job will be to turn the hearts of fathers toward their children, and to bring the stubborn around to the thinking of the devoted; in short, to get a dedicated band ready for the Lord."

Zack Harris said to the messenger, "How am I to believe all this? You see, I'm an old man, and my wife is well along in years."

The messenger replied, "I am Gabriel, God's attendant. I was sent to speak to you and to break the good news of these things to you. Now listen, you'll be silent and unable to talk until the day all this happens, because you didn't believe what I told you, which will surely come to pass in due season."

Now all this time the people were waiting for Reverend Harris, and they were amazed that he was staying so long in the study. When he did come out, he was unable to speak to them. They recognized that he had had a vision in the study, for he was gesturing to them and remained speechless.

When he had wound up his church duties, he went home. Shortly afterwards his wife Elizabeth became pregnant, and for the first five months she didn't go out in public. She was thinking, "The Lord did this for me, to take away the stigma of my sterility."

During the sixth month of her pregnancy the messenger Gabriel was sent from God to a city in Georgia by the name of Valdosta, to a young lady named Mary. She was engaged to a man

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<sup>1</sup> A sermon by Dr. David C. Stancil, delivered at the Columbia Baptist Fellowship in Columbia, MD on December 24, 2019. CHRISTmas Eve. This sermon was given as a “vernacular delivery” of Luke 1:1-2:40 from Clarence Jordan’s *Cotton Patch Gospel, Book 2, Luke and Acts*. Smyth & Helwys Publishing. Kindle Edition.

whose name was Joseph, from one of the old-line families. The messenger went in to her and said, "Hello, you blessed one. THE LORD IS WITH YOU!" She was nearly bowled over by this, and wondered what to make of such a greeting.

The messenger said to her, "Don't be so alarmed, Mary, for you have been chosen for a special favor from God. Listen, you'll become pregnant and have a baby boy, whom you'll name Jesus. He'll be a great man, and will be called 'The Almighty's Son.' The Lord God will set him on the throne of his father David, and he'll always be head of the faithful. His movement will never end."

Mary said to the messenger, "How can this happen when I'm not even married yet?"

The messenger replied, "Holy Spirit will lie upon you, and Power from the Almighty will impregnate you. For this reason the child, sired from on High, will be called 'God's Son.' Now listen, your cousin Elizabeth has also become pregnant with a son, despite her age. And this is now the sixth month for her who was thought to be barren. God will see to it that every word of this will actually happen."

So Mary said, "All right then, I am at the Lord's service. I want it to be just as you have said." At that the messenger left her.

Soon after this, Mary quickly packed up and went to a town in the hills of north Georgia. She arrived at the home of Zack Harris and greeted Elizabeth. And do you know what happened? When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby in her womb gave a kick. And Elizabeth bubbled over with Holy Spirit and shouted as loud as she could, "Praise the Lord for a woman like you! And praise the Lord for your baby! How did a thing like this ever happen to me--the mother of my Lord coming to me? Because listen here, when the sound of your greeting entered my ears, the baby in my womb kicked for joy. It's a wonderful woman who has believed that the words spoken to her from the Lord will become a reality."

And Mary said,

"My soul exalts the Lord And my heart exults before God my Savior. For he has disregarded my humble origin, And from now on the ages will honor me. Great things the Almighty did for me, And Holy be his name.

From generation to generation His mercy showers those who fear him. With his strong arm He scatters the big boys Who think they're somebody. He pulls thrones from under the royalty And gives dignity to the lowly. He loads the hungry with good things But the rich he lets go with nothing at all. Mindful of mercy, he gives a lift to his people Just as he promised our fathers-- Abraham our father and his many descendants."

Mary stayed with her about three months and then returned to her home.

Now when Elizabeth's term was up, she gave birth to a boy. The neighbors and her relatives heard that the Lord had been mighty good to her, and they shared her joy. The day came for the child to be christened, and they were calling him by the name of his father, Zack Harris. But his mother said, "No, he'll be called John."

They said to her, "But none of your kinfolk is named that." So they made signs to his father to find out what he wanted him to be called.

He asked for pencil and paper and wrote, "His name is John." They were all quite surprised. Then right away Reverend Harris's tongue and mouth started working again, and he was praising God.

All the neighbors were simply dumbfounded, and the story of these events was repeated time and again through the hills of north Georgia. People tucked it away in their memories, saying, "What will this child grow up to be? For the hand of God is surely on him."

His father bubbled over with Holy Spirit and started preaching,

"Praise the Lord, the God of our nation, Because he took notice of us, and arranged a way out for his people. In the house of David his child He raised up a bugler to sound deliverance for us, Just as he spoke through the mouth of the holy prophets of old-- 'Deliverance from our enemies And from the hand of all who hate us.' He did well by our fathers And honored his solemn agreement-- The one he swore with Abraham our father-- To give us tranquility, release from our enemies' hands, And freedom to worship him With devotion and righteousness All the days of our life.

"And you, little one, will be called the Almighty's prophet. You'll go in front of the Lord to prepare his paths, to give news of deliverance to his people, and of pardon for their crimes. Because of the tender concern of our God, Heaven's sunrise will dawn upon us, to illuminate those groping in death's shadows and darkness, and to train our feet for the path to peace."

The little fellow grew up and matured in spirit. And he stayed on the farm until he began his public ministry in the South.

**2.** It happened in those days that a proclamation went out from President Augustus that every citizen must register. This was the first registration while Quirinius was Secretary of War. So everybody went to register, each going to his own hometown. Joseph too went up from south Georgia from the city of Valdosta, to his home in north Georgia, a place named Gainesville, to register with his bride Mary, who by now was heavily pregnant.

While they were there, her time came, and she gave birth to her first boy. She wrapped him in a blanket and laid him in an apple box. (There was no room for them at the hospital.)

Now there were some farmers in that section who were up late at night tending their baby chicks. And a messenger from the Lord appeared to them, and evidence of the Lord was shining all about them. It nearly scared the life out of them. And the messenger said to them, "Don't be afraid; for listen, I'm bringing you good news of a great joy in which all people will share. Today your deliverer was born in the city of David's family. He is the Leader. He is the Lord. And here's a clue for you: you will find the baby wrapped in a blanket and lying in an apple box."

And all of a sudden there was with the messenger a crowd of angels singing God's praises and saying, "Glory in the highest to God, And on Earth, peace to mankind, The object of his favor."

When the messengers went away from them into the sky, the farmers said to one another, "Let's go to Gainesville and see how all this the Lord has showed us has turned out."

So they went just as fast as they could, and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in an apple box. Seeing this, they related the story of what had been told them about this little fellow. The people were simply amazed as they listened to what the farmers told them. And Mary clung to all these words, turning them over and over in her memories. The farmers went back home, giving God the credit and singing his praises for all they had seen and heard, exactly as it had been described to them.

And when the day came for him to be christened, they named him Jesus, as he was called by the angel before he was conceived.

After they had finished carrying out the rules and regulations of the church in regard to the child, they brought him to the bishop in Atlanta to dedicate him to the Lord, just as the scripture said: "Every first baby, if it's a boy, shall be dedicated to the Lord." Also, they wanted to make a thank-offering--as the scripture said--of the equivalent of "a couple of ducks or two fryers."

Now then, there was a man in Atlanta whose name was Simon. He was a sincere and devout man, and deeply concerned for the welfare of the world. Being a spirit-led man, he had been assured by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before seeing the Lord's Leader.

Guided by the Spirit, he came to the First Church. And when the parents brought in the child Jesus for the ceremonies, Simon picked him up in his arms and praised God. He said,

"Now let your servant, Almighty Master, Slip quietly away in peace, as you've said. For these eyes of mine have seen your deliverance Which you have made possible for all of the people. It's a light to illuminate the problem of races, A light to bring honor to your faithful disciples."

And his father and mother were really amazed at these things that were said about him. Simon congratulated them and said to Mary his mother, "Listen, this little one is put here for the downfall and uplift of many in the nation, and for a symbol of controversy--your heart, too, will be stabbed with a sword--so that the inner feelings of many hearts may be laid bare."

Now Hannah, a lady minister, was there. She was from one of the best families in the South. She was quite old, having lived with her husband for seven years after getting married, and as a widow from then until her present age of eighty-four. She never left the church, worshipping there night and day with prayers and vigils. She came up to them at the same time and gave God's approval, and started talking about the child to all those who were hoping for the nation's deliverance.

And when they got through with all the church requirements, they went back to south Georgia, to their own city of Valdosta. And the little fellow grew and became strong. He was plenty smart, and God liked him.

Amen, and Amen.