

HOW GREAT IS OUR GOD! STUDY TWELVE

The Spirit's Most Significant Mission

Luke 1:26–38

In the counsel of divine decrees, before there was ever time on earth, before there was ever matter, before there was sun, moon, or stars, the Godhead planned salvation. In the plan of salvation, it was ordained that this angel be sent on this particular day to this particular woman in this particular place. The details of Mary's virginal conception are left to our imaginations. Nothing in Scripture covers that epochal moment, the Spirit's overshadowing of Mary. Nevertheless, it's the Spirit's most significant mission.

—Charles R. Swindoll

THE apostle Paul wrote a profound statement about the first-century arrival of Jesus Christ, the God-man. In his letter to the churches of Galatia, Paul said, “But when the right time came, God sent his Son, born of a woman” (Galatians 4:4).

God could have sent Jesus during Egyptian Pharaoh Akhenaten's monotheistic renaissance, or during Babylon's militaristic dominance, or at the height of Athenian political and cultural flourishing, or closer to our time during the industrial and technological revolutions of the West. But God didn't. Instead, He chose the setting for His Son's first coming in a rather simple, agrarian Jewish culture, suppressed by the Roman Empire. God the Father sent Jesus to be born from an obscure teenaged virgin girl, already betrothed, living in a small, out-of-the-way village. Why? Because, according to God's sovereign plan for His creation, it was the right time.

Such a momentous event could happen only when God's celestial clock chimed the precise hour. The climactic moment had come to launch the Messiah's redemptive mission, and the Holy Spirit overshadowed Mary so that she was found with child. A child both truly divine and truly human. Chuck Swindoll walks us through the incredible sequence of events as recorded by doctor Luke.



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

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PREPARE YOUR HEART

Begin this study by preparing your heart to receive God's Word. Internalize Chuck's prayer below, and let it be your desire before God.

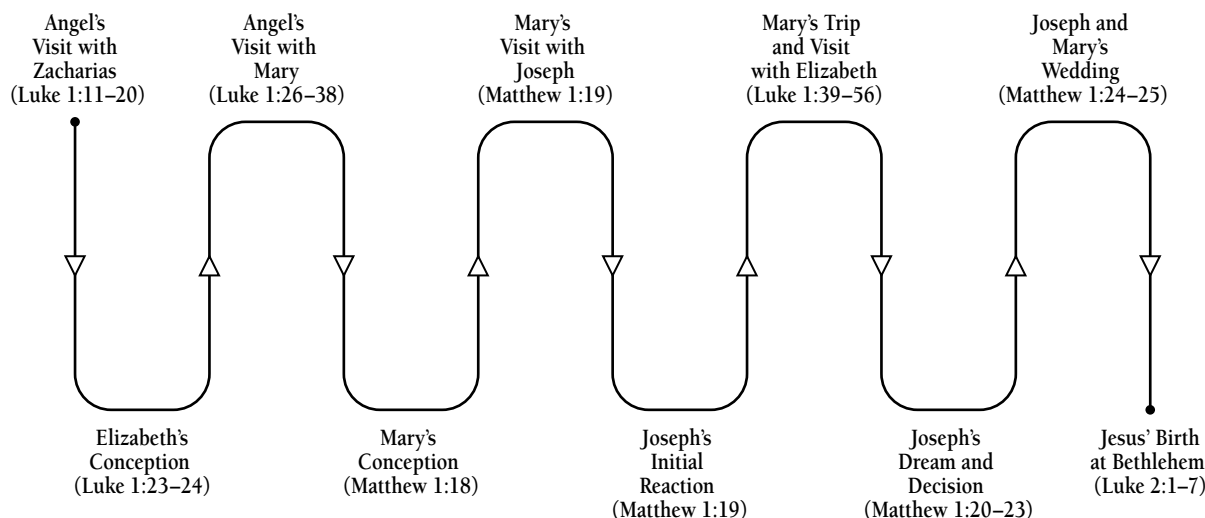
Father, thank You for the first time when we realized the meaning and significance of deep and abiding worship, when we were delivered from the feeling that we needed to be entertained. Now we come before You, Holy God, to hear Your truth, to sing Your songs, to pause in quietness and let in the wonder of Your presence. When all else was wrong in the world, You sent Your Son, gave Him to us, and for that we thank You. In Jesus' name, amen.
—Chuck Swindoll



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

Both Matthew and Luke recorded the happenings surrounding Jesus' birth. Take a moment to review the chart below that outlines what occurred and when.

Important Events Leading to Jesus' Birth



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This *Searching the Scriptures* study explores the third event, the angel's visit with Mary, in Luke 1:26–38 to which we now turn.



Observation: The Angel's Message

Begin by carefully observing *Luke 1:26–38*.

When and where did the event take place (Luke 1:26–27)?

What names are mentioned in verses 26–38, and who are the two main characters? (Note the main characters by how much narrative space is given to them.)

Summarize Gabriel's message to Mary.



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What you must understand is that you will never, ever unravel the puzzle. You can't because it's a miracle. God comes. God makes the announcement. God lets Mary wonder what it's all about, but God doesn't back off. Nothing will be impossible with God.

—Chuck Swindoll

Summarize Mary's response to Gabriel.

That short conversation between the young woman and angel ignited events that would turn the world upside down through the birth of just one individual. The divine power that sparked His conception would set the stage for Jesus' divine life. His heart would exude divine love, His Words convey divine truth, and His death and resurrection accomplish a divine mission.



Interpretation: The Virgin's Response

The Spirit required both an angelic messenger and a humble recipient of the message. The Spirit saw the heart of such a recipient in the young and tender Mary who opened her hands to accept whatever God willed for her life.

Notice how Gabriel addressed Mary in Luke 1:28. What did he call her, and how did he explain the reasoning for her title? How does this statement begin to prepare her for further revelation about the virginal conception?



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How did Gabriel describe to Mary the forthcoming virginal conception in Luke 1:35?

How did Gabriel connect Jesus' miraculous conception to Jesus' identity (Luke 1:30–33, 35)?

What does Mary's response to Gabriel (1:38) indicate about her character? How is her response instructive for Christians today?

Mary did not go on and on with questions seeking more information even though she surely had them. The Bible does not say she avoided Joseph even though she probably wondered how he would respond. Mary gave no argument or resistance to Gabriel's plan even though she certainly could imagine the inconveniences her pregnancy would bring. She accepted Gabriel's words. She said of herself that she was nothing more than a servant of God.



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Correlation: Following Mary's Example

Mary, in Luke's scene of Gabriel's visit, portrays one of the most astonishing portraits of humility recorded by the biblical authors. So, in correlation with this theme, we turn to Peter's exhortation concerning the importance of humility, so we might discover its benefits and how to attain it.

First, read *1 Peter 5:5–7*.

Whom did Peter address in his command to be humble? _____

What reasoning in verse 5 did Peter give for his command?

What do we receive if we humble ourselves before God according to verse 6?

We rest in His promise when we humble ourselves. God will reward this kind of attitude: "Lord, I don't understand it. I'm not necessarily in agreement with it. I don't have enough of the facts to feel peace about it, but I trust You. And, as a result, I will be exalted at another time." —Chuck Swindoll



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How does 1 Peter 5:7 logically follow 5:5–6?

We find the embodiment of Peter's commands in Mary's acceptance of God's words. At the end of her angelic conversation, Mary uttered the holiest and noblest of prayers any Christian can pray: "Your will be done, O Lord." A prayer worth emulating.

Application: Following the Spirit's Leading

God has likely placed you in one of two positions at this moment in your life. On one hand, God might be calling you to be a Gabriel, to deliver a Spirit-empowered message to one who needs to hear it. Or God might be calling you to be a Mary who is currently sensing a direct and clear message from God and needs to receive it humbly and confidently. Which one do you sense you are and why?

If you're a Gabriel, what is God calling you to speak and to whom? If you're a Mary, what is God saying to you, and how should you respond?



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This fourth study on the Holy Spirit closes our twelve-part series on the greatness of our God. We learned about the attributes of the Father, the cross of Jesus Christ, and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. Hopefully, you have come to appreciate the practical side of trinitarian theology and have gained a deeper understanding of our God who is most worthy of our adoration and worship. Close this study and series with the hymn below. Make it your song, and let it express the feelings of your heart for all that Christ has done for you. He loves you and enjoys spending time with you.



A FINAL PRAYER

How Great Thou Art¹

O Lord, my God, when I in awesome wonder
Consider all the worlds Thy hands have made,
I see the stars, I hear the rolling thunder,
Thy pow'r thro'out the universe displayed.

Refrain

Then sings my soul, my Savior God, to Thee;
How great Thou art! How great Thou art!
Then sings my soul, my Savior God, to Thee;
How great Thou art! How great Thou art!

When thro' the woods, and forest glades I wander
And hear the birds sing sweetly in the trees,
When I look down from lofty mountain grandeur,
And see the brook and feel the gentle breeze;

Refrain

And when I think, that God, His Son not sparing,
Sent Him to die, I scarce can take it in;
That on the cross, my burden gladly bearing,
He bled and died to take away my sin.

Refrain

When Christ shall come with shout of acclamation
And take me home, what joy shall fill my heart!
Then I shall bow in humble adoration
And there proclaim: my God, how great Thou art!

Refrain

ENDNOTE

1. Stuart K. Hine, "How Great Thou Art" in *The Celebration Hymnal: Songs and Hymns for Worship* (n.p.: Word Music/Integrity Music, 1997), hymn 147.



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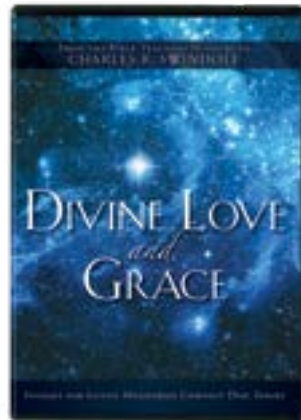
Luke 1:26–38



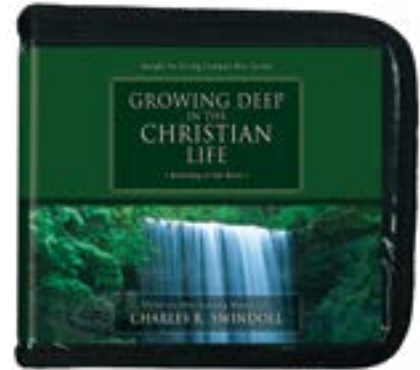
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For the 2019 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by Aaron Massey in collaboration with Bryce Klabunde, executive vice president of Pastoral Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages.

