

# Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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## The Way of The Cross in the Christmas Story

by Dan Trygg

“...the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city in Galilee called Nazareth,<sup>27</sup> to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the descendants of David; and the virgin's name was Mary.<sup>28</sup> And coming in, he said to her, ‘Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.’<sup>29</sup> But she was very perplexed at this statement, and kept pondering what kind of salutation this was.<sup>30</sup> The angel said to her, ‘Do not be afraid, Mary; for you have found favor with God.’<sup>31</sup> And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus.<sup>32</sup> He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David;<sup>33</sup> and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end.’”

Luke 1:26-33

Having studied the prophecies in the scriptures, from what we now call the Old Testament, we can have a better grasp of what may have been going through Mary's mind, as she heard these words from the angel. She may have pondered the passage from Isaiah 9: “For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; and the government will rest on His shoulders; and His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.<sup>7</sup> There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness from then on and forevermore. The zeal of Yahweh of hosts will accomplish this” (vss. 6,7). ***She had no idea, however, how drastically her life was about to change. God's Kingdom often works in ways that are very different from the world's ways, ...certainly different from our own expectations and dreams.***

Mary was a very devout young woman, probably at the marriageable age of 14-16 years old, as was common at that time. ***Her friends were likely also good, devout, modest, chaste young women.*** She came from a good family. In her genealogy (Lk. 3:23ff.), there is a “Levi” listed as a great-grandfather, and we also read in Luke 1:36 that her “kinswoman” was Elizabeth, who was a “daughter of Aaron”, that is a descendant of the priestly line. So, it seems that Mary's family, though it could trace their lineage back to Nathan, a son of David, had recently also been intermarried with a family of Levi, maybe even the priestly family itself. Besides being a respectable lineage, it also meant that ***she had grown up in a household that was especially steeped in the scriptures, worship, and maintaining a high standard of love for God and personal holiness. As a young girl she probably dreamed of her wedding day, the public celebration, and establishing her own household. She probably expected to become one of the respected “mothers” of the community one day.***

God was about to shatter her expectations in a ***wonderful, and yet very painful way.*** She who was the pure virgin daughter of respectable, highly devout parents, ...engaged to a very respectable, godly young man..., ***she was suddenly going to become pregnant. Pregnant out of wedlock. In the culture of Mary's time, that was a very shameful thing.*** Premarital sex was forbidden. In fact, a woman could be taken out and *stoned*, if she was not found to be a virgin by her husband, on their wedding night (Deut. 22:20). ***What God was going to do in Mary's life was going to lead her down a path where she would be shamed, misunderstood, talked about, and possibly rejected by many of the people she knew and loved.*** She was about to find out if their brand of spirituality was harsh and judgmental, or compassionate and gracious. Do you think there was *anyone* that she may have been able to tell her story to, and be believed, ...it was such a crazy story!

***Yet it was God's way. It had to be that way.*** As Gabriel told Mary, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy Child shall be called the Son of God” (Lk. 1:35). The angel also spoke to Joseph, saying, “Do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the thing begotten in her is of the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 1:20). Matthew goes on to point out that this was a fulfillment of Isaiah 7:14, “Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and shall bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel, which translated means, ‘God with us.’” (Matt. 1:23). It was also the fulfillment of an even older prophetic passage, “The seed of the woman will strike the head of the Serpent, but the Serpent shall strike Him on His heel” (Gen. 3:15). ***The only way for her to be an unquestionable virgin, was for this conception within her womb to happen to her before she was ever married, or had been with a man.*** Only then, could it be clear that this thing begotten within her was of the Holy Spirit. ***Yet, that was also the very stumbling block! Who was going to believe this story?*** Everybody knew enough about “the birds and the bees” to know that babies do not just *happen*. ***Certainly, all the evidence indicated that Mary must have been unfaithful and promiscuous.***

**Joseph, to his credit, with the assistance of a personal revelation from the angel of the Lord in a dream, believed.** Therefore, he wanted to be sure that there was no question regarding what GOD was doing in Mary's life, that **he chose to not have sex with her until after she gave birth to the Child conceived in her womb** (Matt. 1:25). **He, a man who was seriously devoted to God, was willing to walk with Mary under the shadow of shame and misunderstanding.** His choice was seen by others as an admission of guilt, and a tacit acknowledgement that he was the father of this child, ...which of course was *not* true.

Mary would have prayerfully read over the stories regarding other children who had seemingly been called or appointed from birth for some special Divine task or purpose. Seth, Ishmael, Isaac, Samson, Samuel... She would have pondered over the prophecies regarding David's lineage, and God's promise to give him a kingdom that would never end. She would have rolled them over again and again in her mind, but they certainly would have remained beyond her grasp. **Her yieldedness to the angelic word, during the proclamation: "Behold, the handmaiden of the Lord, may it be done for me according to your word" (Lk. 1:38), did not fully prepare her for the reality of what it would mean.** The loss of dreams, the alienation of friends and possibly family, the loss of status in her community, the gossip spoken about her behind her back. **And, all the while, she was "highly favored by God" and entrusted with an incredible mission and life purpose: The birth and rearing of the Messianic King.**

While this is a unique circumstance in the history of humankind, **Mary's dilemma was not unlike the choices many have had to make throughout history. The way of the Cross is the way of death to self.** It is the choice to follow God, even when others will think you are foolish, crazy or even just plain wrong! **This road will lead us to choose Jesus over everything and everyone else. It has to be this way.** He has to be Lord *of* all, ...or He is not really Lord, *at* all! **Jesus Himself walked this path.** He left a solid, stable life as a reputable carpenter, to go galavanting all over the countryside, preaching and making disciples. Some, especially the people who knew Him from childhood, thought He had gone too far. They were offended by Him, and some even wanted to kill Him. Of course, that is where this pathway led for Him, ...to a literal cross, beaten, stripped buck-naked, and hung on display before passersby, ridiculed as "The King of the Jews". Yet, little did they know, He *is* the King of kings, ...and He will someday return to reign in power. But at the time, there was a greater mission, a greater purpose to fulfill, ...the salvation of the entire world! ...as many as will recognize and respond to Him in faith and obedience, and who are willing to follow the way of the Cross. **It had to happen this way.** Jesus Himself asked, "Father, is there any other way?"...but there was *not*. So He arose from prayer to embrace the Cross, despising or disregarding the shame.

**The apostle Paul made the same choice.** All the credentials he has obtained, all the good standing he had accomplished through his religious life among Jerusalem's elite, ...he had to count it all loss for the surpassing greatness of knowing Jesus, and fulfilling a mission God had chosen for him before his birth, ...a mission he would have been horrified at in his earlier understanding. He was actually chosen by God to be an apostle to the Gentiles!

It was the way of the Cross that inspired **Martin Luther** to challenge the corrupt religious system of his day (1517). He risked everything he had accumulated in life to do so. His reputation, his position, and even risked his own life to do so, but God chose to use him to make a needed change in church history.

It was the way of the Cross that motivated **William Carey** to raise a call for missionaries to bring the gospel to other nations that had not yet heard the good news. He was a simple shoe maker, but he was a diligent and skilled student. He overcame the limitations of his position, and traveled throughout England proclaiming the call to missions. When a mission society was finally formed, and they were ready to send *someone*, he volunteered to be the first missionary sent out by his organization (1793). Again, family and friends thought he was crazy. He took great risks, and suffered much, but in end had a powerful and effective ministry to India. His example and writings stimulated a movement of others who responded to God's call to serve Christ abroad, something virtually unheard of before, especially for lay persons. His watchword was: "Expect great things from God; Attempt great things for God."

**J. Hudson Taylor** was another such person. One of the key initiatives he introduced was to wear the clothing and adopt the language and customs of those he was working to reach. In his case, this was the Chinese. At a time when other missionaries lived in gated compounds on the sea coast, and continued to wear foreign dress and follow their own customs, Taylor was led by God to grow out a pony tail, shave his head, and dress like the common people of China. He also chose to travel inside the country, and set up missionary outposts in the neighborhoods and communities he was trying to reach. To other missionaries, this was outlandish and shameful, and he was ostracized and rejected by many. Yet, his innovations (based on 1 Cor. 9:19-22), proved to be instrumental in reaching the Chinese.

**Mary's extreme circumstances were not so different than the choices we all must make to follow Jesus.** Are you willing to become *anything* to serve Christ? Are you willing to be misunderstood and rejected for Him? Then, you are not far from the Kingdom, ...from experiencing God's reign and rule at work in your life.