

## “When Gabriel Speaks” (Part 2)

Luke 1.26-56

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December 9, 2018

Gabriel, the mighty archangel, sped on his way to deliver his second message. This time he was headed not for a big city, but a small village; not to a priest but a peasant; not to an old married man, but to a young unmarried woman. It had been six months since he had delivered that previous message, to Zechariah in the temple in Jerusalem right in the middle of the worship service – but, of course, to an angel, six months was nothing.

As Gabriel made his way towards Nazareth in Galilee, he wondered how this might go. Those humans, they are so fickle. Sometimes they believe messages from Almighty God; sometimes they don't; sometimes they listen; sometimes it seems like they're completely tuned out, so lost in their own thoughts and emotions and busy-ness that can't hear that persistent tapping on their shoulder when the Almighty is trying to get their attention. *This would be so much simpler*, Gabriel thought, *if Adam and Eve had just listened to the Almighty in the first place.* Listened, and obeyed. But no. They had taken matters into their own hands; they had flagrantly disregarded the one and only instruction they had been given; they had eaten of the fruit; and catastrophe followed. *Why?* thought Gabriel – not for the first time. *Did they not realize just how much of a mess they would create?*

Of course, it hadn't *just* been them. There was a part of Gabriel that wished he could just blame it all on the humans. Those foolish, disobedient, rebellious, disrespectful humans. But no. He knew the truth. It wasn't *entirely* their fault. They had been coaxed. Nudged. Prompted. Tricked. And not by a human, a mere mortal, but by one of Gabriel's own kind, the Dark Angel. The one who had thought himself better than God. The one who had rebelled. The one who had been banished. The one who held a grudge. The one who wanted to poison God's good creation. One fallen angel, two gullible humans, one utter disaster. For all this countless span of time, evil and sin and death had had their way with the world. Gabriel shuddered when he thought about all the consequences. The murder, the lies, the *hate*. The jealousy, the violence, the infidelity – both to their fellow humans, and to their maker. Humanity's history was not very pretty. The Almighty's heart had been broken time and time again.

And now – *now*, after all this time – the Almighty was going to set things right again. It was a complicated plan; no mere *human* could set all things right; yet at the same time, in order to redeem the fallenness of humanity; it *had* to be a human. No human was that good; no human would be able to withstand the trials and the temptations; yet if it *wasn't* a human, it wouldn't have any effect on

humanity. It was *humans* who had eaten the fruit. That damage could only be undone by someone who was *fully human*. Yet, because of what Adam and Eve had done, *no human* was spiritually capable of seeing the plan through, all the way from beginning to end. The Redeemer *had* to be fully human. And the Redeemer also *had* to be fully God. There was no other way. Nothing else would work.

Which was why the Almighty had sent Gabriel on this second errand. He had a message to deliver, to a young woman named Miriam, or Maria, or Mary. A message about the crucial role that *she* would play in the redemption of humanity. Of all the people the Almighty could have chosen, the Almighty had picked *her*. She had found favor in his eyes. Gabriel found that a little perplexing. Was she somehow more *holy* than the rest of humanity? Somehow more *blessed*? Gabriel wasn't sure. He suspected that some people would come to believe that she was more holy and blessed than the rest of humanity, regardless of whether or not she was, in truth. God had chosen her to become the mother of the Redeemer, the Savior of the world, *God incarnate*. Did that make her the "Mother of God"? There were some aspects of this plan that Gabriel did not fully understand. No matter. His job was clear: *deliver the message*. That, he would do, faithfully.

He wondered what her response would be. When Gabriel had delivered the news to Zechariah that he would bear a son in his old age, who would prepare the way for this Savior-to-come, Zechariah hadn't believed him. A priest of God, in God's holy temple, unwilling – or perhaps unable – to believe *truth* when it was staring him in the face. Gabriel hoped this next meeting would go better.

"Greetings, favored one," he said as he made his appearance to the young maiden; "the Lord is with you." She was perplexed, and thoughtful. *Good*, thought Gabriel. *That's promising*. "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God." *So far, so good*, thought Gabriel. He proceeded with his message: "You will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus." *Yeshua*, "God is salvation," that's what the name means; Gabriel thought it was a fitting name, aptly describing what God was doing, sending *salvation* to fallen humanity. He continued delivering the message, telling Mary some of the reasons – but by no means all of them! – why this child would be great. He knew more than he told her. She didn't need to know it all, at least, not yet. She would learn more in time.

Then it came: her question. He knew, or at least suspected, that she would have a question. Every human always has at least *one*. "How can this be, since I have not known a man?" Gabriel breathed a sigh of relief. *She's willing to believe*, he thought. *She's willing to accept this is true*. *She just needs a little more explanation*. According to human understanding, conception only happened when a woman and a man *knew* each other, in that intimate way. Mary was engaged, but she and her betrothed had not crossed that line; they both had a great deal of respect for the customs and traditions of their faith. Mary's question was simple: *how could she conceive a child, unless a man was involved?*

"The Holy Spirit will come upon you," explained Gabriel; "and the power of the Most High will overshadow you." *You will bear God's child*, was what Gabriel was saying, though he knew that among the Greeks, they believed their gods actually came down to have intercourse with human beings. *That's not what's going to happen here*, thought Gabriel. God did not need to have a *body* for this event to occur. God had created the reproductive process, but God could also *circumvent* that process.

Mary seemed to be satisfied by that explanation. Greatly encouraged by this young woman's faithfulness and ability to accept the seemingly impossible, Gabriel pressed on: "Your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son ... for nothing is impossible with God." To Gabriel's delight, Mary accepted this news, without reservation. *Here is a woman who does not presume to be smarter than the Almighty*, thought Gabriel, barely able to restrain his joy. *Would that more humans were like that!*

Mary's next words revealed to Gabriel just how wise the Almighty had been when he selected this woman: "Here am I," she said, "the servant of the Lord." Gabriel smiled. *There's no arrogance here*, he observed; *no haughty pride. Just simple, contented acquiescence to the will of God.* She's willing to accept God's Word for what it is: *the very Truth of God.* It was God's will for her to be the instrument through which the Redeemer came to the world, and she was humbly willing to *be* that instrument. *No wonder why the Almighty chose her*, he thought. *This kind of faithfulness is not very common!*

Gabriel parted from the woman, bound back towards the heavenly realms from which he had come. As he made his way heavenward, he watched the young woman's next moves: her visit to Elizabeth, her song of praise. *"My soul magnifies the Lord, and my Spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name."* Yes, thought Gabriel again, with a joyful smile on his face. *This is going to turn out just fine.*

Gabriel pondered again what the Almighty had told him would come to pass. The Savior, the Redeemer, the only-begotten Son of God, would be born to that young woman. He would grow and mature, faithful and wise. His cousin John would help prepare the hearts of the people. The Son would make an offering, an offering to the people, an offer of salvation. *"Come, follow me."* He would win some of them. He wouldn't win all of them. Some would resist. Some would oppose. The Almighty had told Gabriel, *He's going to have to die. That's the only way this is going to work.* Gabriel had objected. *Why? Surely there's another way? - No*, the Almighty had said. *If we're going to defeat death, then he has to conquer death. Just the same way that if we're going to defeat sin, he has to conquer sin; and if we're going to defeat evil, he has to defeat evil. There is no other way. He's going to have to die.*

*But what about his mother?* Gabriel had asked. *Is she going to have to watch him die? - Yes*, the Almighty had said. *She will be there, watching, when he dies. - It's going to break her heart*, Gabriel had said. *She's going to carry him in her womb for nine months; she's going to give birth to him, nurture him, raise him – and then she's going to watch them kill him? – Gabriel, my friend*, the Almighty had said, *don't you think that I would choose a woman who would be able to endure that? – Yes, my Lord*, Gabriel had said, *but what woman could? - Trust me, Gabriel*, the Almighty had said. *She will understand.*

Gabriel smiled as he recalled the memory. Now he had met the woman. He had delivered the message; he had seen her response – her *faithful, trusting, obedient* response.

*He's right*, Gabriel realized. *He's always right.* He knew: *she's going to be okay.* Then, a second flash of insight hit him: *We're ALL going to be okay. Everything is going to turn out just fine.*

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