

If you can imagine: Luke's Gospel is like a West End Play; so Act One would be Luke chapters 1 to 4:13. And Scene One was in the Temple, in Jerusalem, where Gabriel appeared to Zechariah. **Now, the scenery and props change.** Six months have passed, and the stage is now the interior of a modest home in Nazareth – **where we find a pious, teenage girl sweeping the floor.**

[ON SCREEN: map of Israel] Geographically, we are transported from Jerusalem in the South, to NAZARETH in the North, in Galilee. **FUN FACT: Nazareth is on a hill, and was largely isolated from the other surrounding towns.** Nazareens kept themselves to themselves. **Galilee had a nickname, which was "Galilee of the Gentiles"** – because there were a lot of non-Jewish folk living in the region; and so it's possible that the citizens of Nazareth – **to keep themselves pure and untainted by Gentile culture and moral standards** - preferred to stay on the hilltop, minding their own business (MAYBE Jesus 'City on a Hill = Naz) Saying that ... just over 3 miles from Nazareth, there was a **Greco-Roman town called Sepphoris.**

[ON SCREEN: pic of Sepphoris] **ANOTHER FUN FACT: this was the largest and busiest town in Galilee,** so it's possible that Joseph and Jesus – because it was an less than hour's walk from Nazareth – went there often for work as carpenters. **That's where the work was.**

[ON SCREEN: READ - Luke 1:26-33] Mary was very likely just 13 or 14 years old, and was in a **legally-binding contract to marry local lad Joseph** (as was the culture of the day). And despite being a young girl, and living in 'off-the-grid' Nazareth – **she was on God's radar. God admired her piety and her humility.** And so God chooses Mary to be a major player in His Plan of Redemption for Humankind.

[ON SCREEN: Do NOT Read! Luke 1 & 2 Samuel 7] the name Jesus means ...? - **"YAHWEH saves". His name was His mission!** The eternal, immortal **Second Person of the Trinity – Jesus – would be born of flesh so that He might fulfil God's promise** to King David, centuries earlier. **Do you see the similarity [ON SCREEN] of what Gabriel says to Mary - and what God says to David in 2 Samuel 7?**

Jesus is the GREAT & ULTIMATE KING! Gabriel's nod to 2 Samuel 7 reminds us that we are actually in the **MIDDLE of This Great, Sweeping Story – not the beginning.** And **Jesus is the FULFILMENT of ALL that God had Promised,** centuries ago.

[ON SCREEN; READ Luke 1:34-38] Sometimes people ask: why was Gabriel harsh with Zechariah in the Temple, when he questioned the angel – **BUT he's gracious and kind to Mary when she questioned him?** (Is it ageism..?!) I think the answer is that **Zechariah reacted to Gabriel with UNBELIEF;** whereas **Mary is reacting with BELIEF but requests CLARIFICATION:** "I believe you, Gabriel," she says, **"but HOW EXACTLY is that gonna happen...?"** Do you see the difference?

And Gabriel gives her the answer: "the POWER of the MOST HIGH will OVERWHELM you. **In other words – GOD will do it, Mary.** He can do ANYTHING – even the IMPOSSIBLE ... **in fact, ESPECIALLY the IMPOSSIBLE!**" and **THEN we see WHY God CHOSE Mary** – because of her response:

Becoming pregnant may well cost Mary **her honour, her reputation, her relationship with her family and her marriage to Joseph**. But even so – **in humility and faith** – she is able to say: “**May it be as you have said**”.

[ON SCREEN; Read: Luke 1:39-45] This passage is just delightful, innit. **Mary & Elizabeth are two WONDERFUL HEROES in Luke’s Gospel**. Don’t forget, Luke is writing for “**the Most Excellent Theophilus**” - presumably some important **MALE of Wealth, Privilege, High Standing and Power**. And so it’s as if Luke is **showcasing the LOWLINESS & JOYFUL HUMILITY of old Elizabeth and teenage Mary** – two **OBSCURE FEMALES** who acknowledge their lowly estate and are **overwhelmed by the condescension of the MOST HIGH to choose THEM** to play a key part in **His Redemption Story**.

[ON SCREEN: HIGHLIGHTED v44] **and the unborn John ‘leaps for joy’ in Elizabeth’s womb when he hears Mary’s greeting!** What was John’s role & ministry – do you remember? He was to ‘**prepare the way for the Lord**’ right? And so, **here’s John, kicking Elizabeth’s diaphragm before he can even speak** – because already - **in the womb!** - **he is bearing witness to the Lord**. Preparing the way! Wow **[IT’S JESUS!]**

[ON SCREEN: Do NOT Read! The Magnificat] So, if Luke’s Gospel WAS a West End Play – then it **would be a MUSICAL** – because Mary, full of the Spirit, erupts into this wonderful Song of Praise to God. And actually - through her song - **we get another glimpse into Mary’s godliness**. For example..

[ON SCREEN: Hannah’s Prayer/Magnificat] This table shows some **similarities** between **Hannah’s prayer** (in 1 Sam 2) when God blesses Barren Hannah with baby Samuel – **and Mary’s song of praise** in Luke 1. ... **[i.e. READ TABLE!]** Mary & Luke aren’t directly quoting 1 Samuel 2. **Instead, it’s IDEAS & EXPRESSIONS. So it’s fair to suggest that Mary – just a teenager, remember! – was saturated in the Hebrew Scriptures.** So that, when she prays and sings, **the words that fall naturally from her mouth ... are Scripture**. No wonder this young girl from Nazareth is highly favoured by God. **Cuz she KNEW her BIBLE!**

Mary’s Song – and all of **Luke chapter 1** so far – reveal a **God who is NOT partial to the rich, the proud and powerful**. Instead, He chooses **the elderly, the barren, the young, and the poor**.

“THIS is how God is, Theophilus!” – **Luke seems to be saying**. THIS is how holiness expresses itself: that the Great & Holy God should magnify His Greatness by blessing the Lowly; and by abasing the Powerful. **God humbles the Proud; but He lifts up the Humble.**

And this is the theme that runs through the whole of Luke’s Gospel. In later chapters, we will follow Jesus as He **interacts with, shows compassion to, and offers hope for** the **Outsider, the Outcast and even the Outlaw** – even as **He hangs on the cross**. THIS ... THIS is the God whom we love, follow, serve and worship.

It’s the God who humbles the proud; but DELIGHTS to lift up the lowly.