

“The Common Made Special”
Luke 1:26-56

12/12-13/09

6 pm; 9 & 10:45 am

Series, “*Be Amazed!*”

INTRODUCTION

A very rewarding experience in life is to take something that’s average, a very common kind of thing, and to make it special, unique, maybe one of a kind.

The first time I can remember attempting this was with my first baseball glove. I was in the seventh grade and was playing on our school baseball team.

I got a glove and, with instructions from others, started to break it in and make it my own.

I bought some glove oil and spread it all over the glove and rubbed it in. I placed a few baseballs in the right places inside the glove, bent the glove around them, wrapped a cord around it to tie it in place, and put it under the foot of my mattress.

A few days later I pulled it out and unwrapped it ... much improved ... but not quite ready.

I beat my fist into the pocket time after time, and threw hardballs into it hundreds of times. I tightened the leather strip that was woven through the ends of the fingers to pull them tightly together, making a pocket of the fingers as well as the pouch... and it was ready!

That glove would close around a ball that hit anywhere within it ... and I used it in junior high, high school, and even playing softball for years after that. That special glove served me well for about 15 years, until I finally replaced it with a larger softball glove ... that I made just as special through the same process.

My wife is really amazing when it comes to taking less than average things ... like second-hand furniture or a stack of wood ... and turning it into something really special. One time she took a stack of lumber and made a very creative and cool seating area in our back yard ... bench seats, receding supports under the seats, finished with ½” by 4” redwood in a diagonal pattern with under-seat lights for a special night-time touch... just one of several such projects. She loves taking the common or even run-down and making it exceptional.

I’ve known people who were especially gifted and effective at encouraging people, getting them to take steps in their lives that they never would have taken alone ... and training, equipping, encouraging, persisting ... until that person had the ability and confidence to then turn around and do the same for someone else.

But, God is ***the most amazing*** transformer of people and places and things in the universe.

Every day He takes what is common and transforms it into that which is so special that it would never happen without His touch.

That's the dimension of the Christmas story we're going to look at today ... God doing the amazing work of selecting common things and making them very special.

OPEN to Luke 1:26 (**PAGE** 1588)

I. God Selects Everyday People and Places (Luke 1:26-27)

READ Luke 1:26-27

A. Nazareth, a common town (v. 26)

The city of Nazareth was a small and insignificant agricultural village in the time of Jesus. It had no trade routes, was of little economic importance and was never mentioned in the Old Testament.

During the lifetime of Mary, Joseph and Jesus, it's believed the population was between 200 and 500 Jews. It was small enough that they likely knew one another pretty well, and lived, prayed and studied in the Jewish tradition; gathering in the synagogue, meeting for prayer and holidays. (<http://www.nazareth-israel.com/nazareth-history>) And, like most small towns and villages it had a dimension that was embarrassing or looked down upon. "Nazareth was the town which housed the Roman garrison for the northern regions of Galilee (i.e., the northernmost "county" in Israel). Those who lived in Nazareth were thought of as compromisers who consorted with the Roman enemy.

To call someone "a Nazarene" was to use a term of contempt. This was Nathanael's reaction when he heard Jesus was from Nazareth (John 1:46): "*Can anything good come from there?*" (**BKC**)

Nazareth was a common town.

B. Mary, a typical Jewish young woman (v. 27)

v. 27 tells us Mary was a **virgin**

"virgin:" special word. A **virgin** was a young woman who was not married, was not a mother, who was available to be married, and was

faithful to God's Word, specifically in the area of reserving sexual intimacy for her future husband.

Among the Jewish people, this was normal; even though there were always a few who did not live this way.

v. 27 also says Mary was **pledged** to Joseph.

Being **pledged** was similar to engagements of our day, but far more substantial:

“Marriages were arranged by parents for their eligible children and contracts were negotiated. After this was accomplished, the couple was considered married and were called husband and wife.

However, the woman continued to live with her parents for one year. The waiting period was to demonstrate the purity of the bride. If she was found to be with child in this period, she obviously was not pure and the marriage could be annulled. Normally the waiting period demonstrated the purity of the bride, and the husband would then go to the house of the bride's parents and in a grand processional march lead his bride back to his home. There they would begin to live together as husband and wife.”
(BKC)

To this point, Mary was a typical young Jewish woman.

C. Joseph, a typical Jewish man

Matthew 1:16: His “Jewishness” is established; he is from tribe of **Judah**, the family line of King **David**.

Matthew 1:18a: Since he was **pledged to Mary**, he too was following the typical Jewish customs of marriage.

Matthew 13:55: We read that he was a **carpenter**. As was the custom of his day, Joseph was likely established in his career and self-supporting before marriage. This also meant that Jewish husbands tended to be 10-20 years older than their teenage brides.

Joseph was a very typical Jewish man.

So far, there is nothing remarkable about this story.

I. God Selects Everyday People and Places (Luke 1:26-27)

As you read in the Bible about people who were used by God, you tend to see what we have found so far in this story ... there's rarely anything particularly "amazing" or "outstanding" about them ... at least from the world's standards of greatness.

They tend to be from obscure places, educated in whatever ways were typical for their time and location, and there's usually little to nothing very remarkable about what they have accomplished before God chooses them.

But still God used them in amazing ways. *Why?*

Because they said, "yes" to His direction for their lives.

God uses believing, willing people.

II. God Does Amazing Things Through Believing, Willing People (Luke 1:28-38)

READ Luke 1:28-56

A. Mary was "**highly favored**" by God (v. 28)

v. 28: "The angel went to her and said, 'Greetings, you who are **highly favored!**'"

"God has bestowed His favor upon you." (perfect, passive participle)

This means Mary didn't *do* anything to *earn* or *deserve* God's favor. It is unmerited, unearned favor.

v. 30: "But the angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found **favor** with God.'"

The same word translated "**favor**" in v. 30 is translated "**grace**" in John 1:14; where we read that Jesus came in *grace and truth*. **favor = grace**

Mary received **grace** from God; unmerited favor.

The choice Mary did make was that ...

B. Mary believed and was willing

v. 38: "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May it be to me as you have said."

And so through a spiritual, non-physical act of conception on the part of the Holy Spirit, Mary brought into this world the human baby Jesus, Who was also Divine, the Son of God the Father. *The only God-man Who has ever or will ever exist.*

Amazing!

Mary believed and Mary was willing.

Now, this is all very nice and amazing, but it's happening in the real world! Mary is pledged to be married to Joseph, and he doesn't have a clue as to what is going on! After Mary agreed to God's plan, she immediately left Nazareth to visit her elderly relative, Elizabeth, who was six months pregnant by a miracle of God between her and her elderly husband.

After three months visiting Elizabeth, Mary returns home, and he finds out that she is pregnant.

READ Matthew 1:18-25 (**PAGE** 1497)

B. Joseph believed God's message and was willing to obey (Matthew 1:18-25)

“While little is said about how Joseph felt, it's easy to imagine how his heart must have broken. He genuinely loved Mary, and yet the word came that she was pregnant. His love for her was demonstrated by his actions. He chose to stay quiet and not bring Mary before the community judges. If he had, it likely would have resulted in Mary's death by stoning (Deut. 22:23-24). He decided **to divorce her quietly.**”

And it was at this point, God told Joseph what was really happening. And once he knew, he immediately took Mary to be his wife, cutting short the one-year waiting period.

He *believed* and he *obeyed*.

Four times God sent messages to Joseph:

1. this time,
2. in Bethlehem when He told him to escape to Egypt to save Jesus' life,
3. in Egypt, telling him to return to Israel,
4. and when He told him to settle in Nazareth.

Four times God sent messages, four times Joseph believed God and four times he obeyed.

CONCLUSION

It is God's pattern throughout the Bible and throughout history to do His amazing and wonderful works through mostly common people who believe Him and obey Him.

Jesus works in day-to-day people who believe and obey!

“Father in Heaven, thank You for Your willingness to use me for Your purposes. What an amazing gift and privilege! Help me not to allow my weaknesses and deficiencies stop me from believing You and obeying you. I want to be involved in Your plan! In Jesus' name, Amen.”