

BIBLE WOMEN – NEW TESTAMENT

ELIZABETH AND MARY - LESSON 15

I. ELIZABETH learned that she would give birth to a son in her old age.

Luke 1

- A. Elizabeth and her husband, Zacharias, were faithful servants of God.
1. Zacharias was a priest from the lineage of Aaron.
 2. He married, Elizabeth, also a descendant of Aaron.
 - a. They were both raised in priestly families and they knew the importance of service and obedience to God.
 - b. They were described as "*righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.*" **Luke 1:3**
 3. Like Abraham and Sarah, their only disappointment was that they had no children and they were both "well advanced in years".
 4. The traditional belief was that barrenness was a curse from God for those who were unrighteous.
 5. In order to dispel this belief, it is stated clearly that they were "blameless". **Vs. 6**
 6. Also like Abraham and Sarah, Zacharias and Elizabeth were chosen by God to bear a special child with a special purpose.
- B. The priesthood was reorganized by David when he was preparing the materials to build the Temple, which his son, Solomon, actually built.
1. This reorganization was necessary because the tabernacle would be abandoned when the temple was finally built.
 2. David kept the three divisions, each named for the three sons of Levi: Gershon, Kohath and Merari. **I Chronicles 23:6**
 3. The sons of Aaron belonged to the division of Kohath and their responsibility was "*to sanctify the most holy things, to burn incense before the Lord, to minister to Him and to give the blessing in His name forever.*" **Vs. 13**
 4. These priests served until they were physically unable, unlike the Levites who only served between the ages of 25 and 50. **Numbers 8:23-25**, although David changed the beginning of service to the age of thirty. **I Chronicles 23:3**
 5. Since Zacharias was a priest and not just a Levite, he was still serving even though he was described as "*well advanced in age.*" **Luke 1:7**
 6. The duties of the Levites were "*to help the sons of Aaron in the service of the house of the Lord, in the courts and in the chambers, in the purifying of all holy things and the work of the service of the house of God, both with the showbread and the fine flour for the grain offering, with the unleavened cakes and what is baked in the pan, with what is mixed and with all kinds of measures and sizes; to stand every morning to thank and*"

praise the Lord, and likewise at evening; and at every presentation of a burnt offering to the Lord on the Sabbaths and on the New Moons and on the set feasts, by number according to the ordinance governing them, regularly before the Lord; and that they should attend to the needs of the tabernacle of meeting, the needs of the holy place, and the needs of the sons of Aaron their brethren in the work of the house of the Lord.

- C. Reviewing this history allows us to understand the position that Zacharias was in as a descendant of Aaron.
1. The descendants of Aaron were divided into twenty-four divisions.
(Named for the 24 grandsons of Aaron, 16 sons for Eleazar and 8 sons for Ithamar, the sons of Aaron)
 2. These priests served in the temple on a rotating basis.
 - a. Each division served one week, so with twenty-four divisions, each division served twice each year (every six months), which equals 48 weeks.
 - b. During the other four weeks of the year all divisions served at the four special feast days celebrated by the Jews. (Passover, Pentecost, Feast of Booths and The Day of Atonement.)
 - c. When it was their turn to serve, the priests went to Jerusalem for a week at a time, although some priests lived in Jerusalem.
 3. Many priests were serving each week. They each receiving assignments of duties by lottery (except for the high priest), so that no one would gain more prestige over the others. **I Chronicles 24:5**
 - a. The burning of incense was done at the end of the sacrifices in the morning and at evening. It was a very prestigious task for a priest.
 - b. It was so coveted that each priest could only perform this duty once in his lifetime. ("The Jerusalem Perspective", a historic reference to the life and words of Jesus.)
- D. Zacharias was indeed having the best day of his life, when the lot fell to him to offer the incense in the temple that day and it was only going to get better.
1. The burning of incense was done inside the temple on a small altar placed in front of the veil that separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy place in the temple.
 2. The burning of incense was done while the people gathered and prayed in the temple court. The incense was representative of the prayers of the people going up to God. **Luke 1:20**
 3. Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared to Zacharias, standing on the right side of the altar of incense.
 - a. When Zacharias saw him, he was afraid, but the angel said, "*Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your prayer is heard; and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. And you will have*

joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth. For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink. He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, 'to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children', and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

- b. Surely Zacharias was thrilled at the news, but he was also skeptical, considering his age.
- c. Zacharias asked the angel, *"How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is well advanced in years."*
- d. The angel identified himself as *"Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God"*. **Vs. 19**
 - 1) Gabriel said that he was sent by God to give this great news to Zacharias.
 - 2) Because Zacharias did not believe his words immediately, Gabriel said, *"You will be mute and not able to speak until the day these things take place, because you did not believe my words which will be fulfilled in their own time."* **Luke 1:20**
4. The incense was burned every morning and every evening. **I Chron. 2:4**
5. After burning the incense, the priest was to step outside the temple and give a blessing to the people gathered for prayer. **I Chronicles 23:13**
 - a. When Zacharias was delayed in coming out for the blessing, the people wondered what was taking him so long. **Luke 1:21**
 - b. When he finally appeared, he could not speak to them.
 - c. The people then realized that Zacharias had seen a vision in the temple.
6. When his week of service at the temple was complete, he went back to his own home. **Vs. 23**
 - a. Soon after, Zacharias' wife Elizabeth conceived.
 - b. Even Elizabeth believed that her barrenness was a "reproach" from the Lord.
 - c. She said, *"Thus the Lord has dealt with me, in the days when He looked on me, to take away my reproach among people."* **Luke 1:25**

II. MARY learned that she would become the mother of the Messiah. Luke 1:39-56

- A. Six months after Gabriel spoke to Zacharias, he was sent to a virgin in the city of Nazareth, named Mary.
 1. Mary was "betrothed" to a man named Joseph, of the tribe of Benjamin and the family of David, King of Israel.
 - a. During this period of history, marriages were almost always arranged between parents.

- b. The ones to be betrothed may not even have known each other before. We don't know if Mary was acquainted with Joseph before.
 - c. Betrothal was similar to engagement, however, it was as binding as marriage. In fact, **Deuteronomy 22:24** refers to the betrothed woman as a "wife", even though the couple does not yet live together as husband and wife.
- B. Every young girl and woman among the Jews in the first century knew the prophecies that foretold the coming of the Messiah.
1. Each one hoped that SHE would be the chosen vessel to give birth to the Christ.
 2. Imagine how Mary must have felt when Gabriel appeared to her saying: *"Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!"* **Luke 1:28**
 3. Even knowing the prophecy in **Isaiah 7:14** that said, *"Behold the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel."*, she was confused as to HOW she could give birth to a son when she had never known a man.
 - a. However, once she heard what was required of her, she immediately responded, *"Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word."*
 4. Mary did not consider the problems this would cause her because she was "betrothed" to Joseph.
 - a. Faithfulness to the betrothed partner was demanded. Unfaithfulness was considered adultery and was not only cause for breaking the betrothal contract, it was also an offense punishable by stoning, according to **Deuteronomy 22:23-24**.
 - b. Mary didn't stop to think how she might be judged by the community, she simply trusted God to take care of the details. She yielded her life totally to God.
 - c. Gabriel also told Mary that her relative, Elizabeth had conceived a son in her old age six months ago. **Luke 1:36**
 - d. Gabriel used this news to confirm the fact that *"with God nothing will be impossible."* **Vs. 37**
 - e. Mary accepted the word of Gabriel and he left her.
 5. When Joseph learned that Mary was expecting a child before they were married, he assumed that Mary had been unfaithful.
 - a. It was a logical assumption under the circumstances.
 - b. However, he was a "just" man and did not want her to be humiliated publically, so he decided to divorce her secretly. **Luke 2:19**
 - c. An angel of the Lord came to Joseph in a dream to assure him that Mary had not been unfaithful. He confirmed that her child was "of the Holy Spirit".

- d. The angel instructed Joseph that Mary would have a son and that his name would be Jesus, *"for he will save His people from their sins."*
Vs. 20-21
 - e. Joseph believed the angel and he took Mary for his wife.
- C. Mary went almost immediately to the hill country of Judah to the city where Elizabeth and Zacharias lived. **Vs. 39**
1. When Mary entered, Elizabeth recognized that Mary was the chosen one of God. She said:
Luke 1:42 – *"Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! ⁴³ But why is this granted to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?"*
 2. At that time Mary sang a song of praise to God. In this song she referred to at least twelve scriptures from the Old Testament.
 - a. No wonder she was chosen by God to give birth to the Messiah. While young Jewish boys were diligently taught the scriptures – girls were usually not educated in the scriptures to the same degree.
 - b. Mary must have voluntarily learned the scriptures because of her true devotion to God.
 3. Mary stayed with Elizabeth for three months; maybe she was there when Elizabeth's son was born.

III. The birth of John the Baptizer – Luke 1:57-80

- A. When Elizabeth gave birth to her son, her neighbors and relatives rejoiced with her.
1. On the eighth day, when the child was to be circumcised, his name would also be chosen.
 - a. Friends and relatives assumed that the child would be named Zacharias after his father.
 - b. But Elizabeth said: *"No; he shall be called John."*
 - c. The friends and relatives were all surprised because there was no one among their relatives named John, so they asked Zacharias what his name would be.
 - d. Imagine if your relatives believed that you had no right to choose the name of your own child and asked your husband for his decision.
 - e. Zacharias asked for a writing tablet and he wrote, *"His name is John."*
 2. Immediately Zacharias was able to speak and he praised God.
 3. The people were amazed and asked, *"What kind of child will this be?"*
 4. They realized that all of these events were God's work.
 5. Zacharias then spoke a prophecy saying: **Luke 1:76-79** – *"And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Highest; for you will go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways, ⁷⁷ to give knowledge of salvation to His people by the remission of their sins, ⁷⁸ through the tender mercy of our God, with which the Dayspring from on high has visited us; ⁷⁹ to give*

light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."

6. The child, John, grew and became strong in spirit and stayed in the deserts until his mission was revealed. **Vs. 79**

IV. Mary gives birth to a son – Luke 2:1-40

- A. Six months after the birth of John, the Baptizer, Caesar Augustus decreed that all the world (under his control) must be registered.
 1. Everyone went to the city that represented their lineage.
 2. Since Joseph was from the lineage of David, he and Mary went to Bethlehem, known as the "City of David". **Vs. 4**
 3. The city was so crowded because a multitude of people had also travelled to Bethlehem to be registered.
 4. All of the inns were full, so they found shelter in a stable.
 5. Soon after they arrived in Bethlehem, Mary gave birth to a son and she laid him in a manger.
 6. Luke tells us that when Jesus was born, Mary *"kept all these things and pondered them in her heart."* (Luke 2:19).
 - a. Did she understand everything that was going to happen to her and Joseph? I doubt it, but she learned that when she turned her life completely over to God, He was able to make great and wonderful things happen.
 - b. We can only imagine how she felt as she faced life as the mother of the Messiah.
- B. In the countryside there were shepherds living in the fields with their herds.
 1. As they kept watch over their flock at night, an angel of the Lord appeared to them.
 2. They were all frightened but the angel said:
 - a. **Luke 2:10-12** – *"Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. ¹¹ For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. ¹² And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger."*
 - b. When the angels left, the shepherds decided to go to Bethlehem and see the child themselves.
 - 1) They found Mary and Joseph in the stable and the baby lying in a manger.
 - 2) The shepherds then told Mary and Joseph that the angels had said their the child was *"Christ the Lord"*. **Vs. 17**
 - 3) They "marveled" at the words of the shepherds, but Mary kept all these things and "pondered them in her heart"

- C. According to the Law of Moses, after the birth of a child, the mother was considered unclean for seven days after the birth of a son and fourteen days after the birth of a daughter.
1. Eight days after the birth of her son, he was circumcised and given the name Jesus, which was according to the instructions from Gabriel, the angel of the Lord.
 2. Mary and Joseph were also required to offer a sacrifice for a “first born child” according to the Law of Moses. **Exodus 13:1**
 - a. **Leviticus 12:4-5** tells us that this sacrifice was to be made thirty-three days after the birth for a son and sixty-six days after for a girl.
 - b. This offering was to be a lamb one year old as a burnt offering and a young pigeon or a turtledove as a sin offering.
 - c. Those who could not afford a lamb were permitted to bring two turtledoves, one as a burnt offering and one as a sin offering.
 - d. Mary and Joseph took Jesus to the temple in Jerusalem where they offered two turtledoves or two pigeons. **Vs. 24**
 - e. There they met a devout man named Simeon.
 - 1) The Holy Spirit had revealed to him that he would not die before seeing the Christ.
 - 2) When Mary and Joseph brought Jesus, Simeon said: *“Lord now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word; ³⁰ for my eyes have seen Your salvation ³¹ which You have prepared before the face of all peoples, ³² a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, And the glory of Your people Israel.”*
 - 3) Simeon blessed Joseph and Mary and then made a prophecy saying: *“A sword will pierce through your own soul also.”*
 - 4) Do you think Mary remembered this prophecy as she watched her first-born son being crucified?
- D. The next event has been a matter of misunderstanding by most of the denominational world. **Matthew 2**
1. **Vs. 1-2** – *“Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, ² saying, “Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him.”*
 2. The news these wise men brought was very troubling to King Herod.
 - a. Herod was a politically savvy and had denied his own people in order to gain power within the Roman government and was appointed King in Judea, a very large territory.
 - b. He gathered the chief priests and scribes to ask them about the prophecies regarding the “Christ” and where he was to be born.
 - c. They quoted **Micah 5:2** – *“But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are not the least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you shall come a ruler who will shepherd My people Israel.”*

- d. Herod was concerned because the wise men referred to the child as "*King of the Jews*". Herod did not want any competition for his kingdom.
- e. Herod also inquired of the wise men as to the date when the star they were following originally appeared.
- f. Herod tried to deceive the wise men by asking them to let him know when they found the child so he could also go to worship him. **Vs. 7**
3. The wise men left Herod and continued to follow the star which came to rest over the place where the young child was.
 - a. When they came to the house, they saw the young child with his mother, Mary.
 - 1) Here is where the confusion exists for most people.
 - 2) The wise men (Magi) **did not** come to the stable, yet every Christmas we see the stable scene with the wise men present.
 - 3) This passage clearly says that they came to "the house" where the child was.
 - 4) In the events that occurred in the stable, the child is referred to as an infant or "babe"
 - 5) In the events that occurred at the house, he is referred to as a "young child".
 - b. The reason Herod inquired of the wise men as to the date that the star first appeared was because he knew it was likely that the appearance of the star coincided with the birth of the child.
 - c. They fell down and worshipped the child.
 - d. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts:
 - 1) Gold – which was an appropriate gift for a King.
 - 2) Frankincense – which was an appropriate gift for a Priest
 - 3) Myrrh – which was an appropriate gift for one who was to be buried.
 - e. The wise men were divinely warned in a dream not to tell Herod where they found the child, so they returned home without letting Herod know.
- E. Herod was as evil as they come.
 1. When Herod learned that the wise men had left without telling him where the child was found, he was furious.
 2. Since he couldn't find the ONE child he thought was a threat to his kingdom, he decided to kill all of the boys born within the past two years in and around Bethlehem, according to the time the star first appeared.
 3. Herod the Great was a cruel man, an expert politician who knew how to navigate the Jewish chief priests and elders, as well as hierarchy in Rome.
 4. He murdered his own family once he came to the throne to solidify his power, including ten of his wives and two of his sons; so it is not

- surprising that he would murder every baby boy in an entire district in order to eliminate a possible rival to the throne.
5. Since Joseph had also been warned in a dream to take the child and Mary to Egypt, Herod's cruel plan failed to kill the one child he was targeting.
 6. Historians tell us that Herod died of a devastating and painful disease when Jesus was around three or four years old, while they were still in Egypt.
 7. An angel of the Lord appeared again to Joseph in a dream telling him that those who *"sought the young child's life are dead."* **Matthew 2:20**
 8. Joseph took his family to Nazareth in Galilee, where *"the Child grew and became strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him."*

V. Christians today have the deepest respect for this young woman whose purity and devotion to God was rewarded by being selected to give birth to the Son of God.

- A. Mary witnessed the three brief years of His ministry.
 1. She saw him perform great miracles.
 2. She saw him teach the people with a wisdom that was greater than anyone his age could be expected to have.
- B. While we respect Mary's role in the Savior's life, we do not elevate Mary to a position of special reverence as has been done by the Catholic church.
 1. The Catholic church teaches that Mary was "immaculately conceived".
 2. This means that when she was born, she was exempted from "original sin", which, according to Roman Catholic doctrine, is the sin of Adam that is imposed on everyone at birth. We do not accept the doctrine of "original sin". We do not "inherit" the sin of Adam or anyone else at birth.
 3. A small book titled, *A Handbook of the Catholic Faith*, published by Image Books in 1956, was endorsed by the Catholic church. On page 238 it stated:
"This point of doctrine (the immaculate conception of Mary) is not expressly dealt with anywhere in the Bible, nor was it preached by the Apostles, and for many centuries it was not mentioned at all by the Church. Gradually, however, as the idea of the future dogma began to develop among the faithful, theologians submitted the point to the closest examination, and finally, the view then generally prevailing was formally pronounced as a dogma of the Church by His Holiness Pope Pius IX in 1854.
 4. This statement admits:
 - a. The doctrine is not taught ANYWHERE in the Bible.
 - b. The idea was UNKNOWN to the apostles.
 - c. It was NOT TAUGHT by the church for centuries.

- d. The idea gradually EVOLVED over time.
 - e. The teaching IS NOT divinely sanctioned and, in fact, it's only authorization was given by a Pope seventeen centuries after the church began.
5. The motto of Catholicism is "*the voice of the people is the voice of God.*" Donald Atwater in his book, *A Catholic Dictionary*, states:
"It is an article of faith from a decree of the Vatican Council that TRADITION is a source of theological teaching distinct from Scripture, and that it is infallible. It is therefore to be received with the same internal assent as Scripture for it is the word of God. Whereas much of the teaching of Scripture could not be determined without Tradition, Tradition would suffice without Scripture; it is the safeguard of Scripture."
6. With this in mind, here are some other Catholic teachings regarding Mary:
- a. Along with the teaching that Mary was born "sinless", they go further and teach that she never sinned in her life, despite the teaching in **Romans 3:23** that "*all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*"
 - b. Mary also stated in her song, **Matthew 1:47** "*my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior.*" One who has no sin has no need of a "Savior".
 - c. Catholicism teaches that Mary remained a virgin her entire life and that she did not have other children after Jesus was born, even though **Matthew 1:25; 12:46; 13:55-56** and **John 2:12** all refute this teaching.
 - d. Catholics teach that when Mary died, her body experienced no corruption; rather, three days following her demise, she was taken bodily into heaven, there to be crowned "**Queen of Heaven**".
 - e. Though Catholic writers concede that this teaching "cannot be proved from the Bible", it became official dogma (which Catholics MUST believe) on November 1, 1950, far too late to be of apostolic origin. Remember, "tradition is accepted as the word of God" even with no scriptural confirmation.
 - f. Catholics teach that Mary is a "Mediatix" between Christians and Christ, and that she is the "dispenser of graces" by the power of the Holy Spirit – based upon the merits of her crucified Son and therefore prayers are addressed to "*Mary, Mother of God*".
 - 1) No such position is confirmed by scripture.
 - 2) In fact, the New Testament states that Christ is the "one mediator" between God and man. **I Timothy 2**

- 3) Therefore, our prayers are addressed to God, the Father in the name of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.
 - g. Catholics also teach that Mary is a “co-redeemer” with Christ.
 - 1) This teaching is blatantly blasphemous since in **John 14:6**, Jesus himself said *“I am the way, the truth, and the life. **No one comes to the Father except through Me.**”*
 - 2) No one can be “redeemed” except by Jesus Christ.
 - h. If the very words of Jesus can be nullified by decree from the Catholic hierarchy, then what value are the scriptures at all?
 - 1) Obviously, the Catholic clergy believes it needs no authority from the scriptures to create its own dogma which is strictly imposed upon its members.
 - 2) We must acquaint ourselves with these false teachings if we are going to be able to defend the gospel against such blatant false teachings.
- C. One of my favorite songs, played only at Christmas time is sung by Kenny Rogers and Wynona Judd. It is called **“Mary Did You Know”**. The words are very thought provoking and always brings tears to my eyes:

Mary, did you know that your Baby Boy would one day walk on water?
Mary, did you know that your Baby Boy would save our sons and daughters?
Did you know that your Baby Boy has come to make you new;
This Child that you delivered will soon deliver you.

Mary, did you know that your Baby Boy will give sight to a blind man?
Mary, did you know that your Baby Boy will calm the storm with His hand?
Did you know that your Baby Boy has walked where Angels trod?
When you kiss your Little Baby, you kiss the face of God!

Oh, Mary, did you know?
The blind will see, the deaf will hear, the dead will live again.
The lame will leap, the dumb will speak the praises of the lamb!

Mary, did you know that your Baby Boy Is Lord of all creation?
Mary, did you know that your Baby Boy Will one day rule the nations?
Did you know that your Baby Boy is Heaven's Perfect Lamb?
This sleeping Child you're holding is the great **I Am!**