

13 November 2022: Baby number 4: The most important baby of all (Isa 7:14, Luke 1:26-43; Matthew 1:18-25)

Two of the mothers we have spoken about had to wait longer than they wanted before they fell pregnant. Think of Hannah (Samuel's mother). Think of Elizabeth (John's mother). When the baby arrived, he was welcomed, and the mothers were full of gratitude.

In today's story, the mother fell pregnant before she had even thought about having a baby! In fact she was probably a teenager still. And, Mary, was engaged to be married, she wasn't living with her husband yet.

One day she, like Zechariah, became aware of the fact that there was someone unexpected in the room. It doesn't seem as though she was particularly frightened, however. But she was puzzled when the angel told her that she was special to God. I expect she wondered how a teenager from a little town could possibly be important to the great God who had made all things and all people.

Her puzzlement must have shown in her face for the angel went on to tell her that God had chosen her for a special adventure/ duty. She was going to have a baby who she was to call 'Jesus'. This name (a form of 'Joshua') meant 'God rescues us'.

I expect that although Mary heard the rest of what the angel said, she must have sort-of pushed the information into the background at that time. Later she would remember those details. At that moment she must have found it difficult enough to realise that she was chosen by God to have a baby! Unlike Zechariah, she didn't think this was impossible, but she did wonder how it could happen when she was a virgin and hadn't slept with a man yet.

The angel (the same one who had been sent to deliver the message to Zechariah) explained that this would be a special birth and that no man needed to be involved with the impregnation! That idea must have been even more mind-boggling in those days before artificial insemination! The angel went on to say that the Holy Spirit of God would

‘overshadow her’ and that is how she would become pregnant. So the baby would literally be the ‘Son of God’ as well as the ‘Son of Mary’. Amazing!

I wonder how we would have reacted to that news! Mary must have been a person of deep faith. She knew that God had promised to rescue his people one day. Perhaps she guessed this was part of that prophecy coming true. All she wanted to do was to serve him. So she simply bowed her head and said “I am God’s child and he can do what he wants.”

Before the angel disappeared, he told Mary that Elizabeth was also going to have a baby. She knew how much Elizabeth had wanted this to happen and she knew that this must also be God at work. This meant Elizabeth could share in her excitement and so off she went to visit her. When she got to the house, it was clear that Elizabeth understood about Mary’s baby for Elizabeth knew without being told that this baby was going to be extra special. And baby John did a somersault in her womb when he heard Mary’s voice.

Mary’s baby was going to be the most special baby ever. But instead of being proud and feeling important, Mary lifted up her heart in prayer to God.

Of course it wasn’t all ever going to be easy! Joseph was very upset, thinking that Mary had been unfaithful to him. He decided not to marry her – until God told him in a dream that he needn’t be afraid to do so. And I am sure there was lots of gossip about this teenage pregnancy. But we aren’t told about that – Mary just focused on being God’s humble servant.

How would we have reacted I wonder – with trust? with irritation? She simply bowed herself to God’s will. May we imitate her in that when God interrupts our self-made plans.