

Text: Luke 1:26-56

**Discussion Questions:**

A lot can happen in four hundred years! (How's that for an understatement ☺) Think about the past 400 years here in what we now call "America." Four hundred years takes us back to the year 1619AD. A lot was happening in the world back then. In the year 1609AD, a Dutch explorer by the name of Henry Hudson (namesake of the Hudson River) landed and explored the lands surrounding present-day New York City. At about the same time, a group of religious Puritans and "Separatists" in England were struggling deeply with the law that required every English citizen to be a member of the Anglican Church. Under the leadership of a man named William Bradford, a group of 102 Puritans decided to take their chances, and sail for this new, recently discovered land in search of religious freedom. We now call them "Pilgrims." On November 9, 1620AD, these Pilgrims (half of them died on the 2-month transatlantic voyage) sailed into Plymouth Harbor.

Think about that! Four hundred years ago today, in 1619AD, the Pilgrims hadn't even come to America yet! Like I said—a lot can happen in 400 years.

Why bring this up? Because four hundred years is about the same length of time that transpired between the end of the Old Testament, and the beginning of the New Testament. There was, of course, a lot of world history that played out over those four hundred years. The world saw the rise and fall of Alexander the Great and the Greek Empire—as well as the rise of the Roman Empire (which, interestingly, would last for another four hundred years after Christ). But in all of these years, God had been "silent." There had been no prophets sent from God. No books of the Bible were penned. Many were undoubtedly questioning whether God would ever speak again—and if this "promised Messiah" was just a farce and figment of people's imaginations.

It was into this "silence" that God spoke. First, Gabriel was dispatched to appear to Zechariah the priest, husband of Elizabeth, as he was burning incense in the temple—announcing the miraculous birth of John the Baptist. Then, six months later, Gabriel was given another assignment: Deliver this message to a young virgin named Mary—

***"Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call Him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David, and He will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; His kingdom will never end."***

Not only was God speaking—He was making the greatest announcement in the history of the world! The long-awaited Messiah was coming! The silence was over. God was coming to deliver His people and establish His kingdom.

Now put yourself in Mary's shoes. She's an obscure young maiden from an obscure Galilean village. What do you think was going through Mary's mind when she is receiving this message?

- Why do you think God allowed so many years to pass between the Old Testament and the New Testament?
- Here we are today—2,000 years have passed since Jesus walked this earth. Are there people today who think that God's promises are a farce—that there is no God? Why?
- Read **Luke 1:26-38**:
  - Down through the centuries, Mary has accumulated numerous titles—"Blessed Mother" & "Mother of Mercy" just to name a couple. Some traditions have

“sainted” her, and declared her to be sinless. Do you believe this? Is there anything in the Biblical account that leads us to this conclusion?

- Take a few moments to think about what Gabriel said to Mary: “Don’t be afraid, you have found favor with God.” What impact would this have if you heard Gabriel saying this to you? Do you believe this is true of you?
- How does Gabriel describe this promised child in verses 31-33?
- We see that the kingdom of Jesus “will never end.” Does that mean that we’re living in the kingdom of Christ right now?
- By agreeing to Gabriel’s announcement in verse 38, Mary was trusting in the Lord far more than we might even think. Mary is agreeing to a pregnancy that will be seen as suspicious in a culture that had a death penalty for adultery. She will be labeled as a “sinner”—carrying a child as an unwed mother. Have you ever thought of all of these implications? Do you think she considered them when saying “yes”?
- Read **Luke 1:39-45**:
  - Why do you think Mary was in such a hurry to visit Elizabeth?
  - Wow—what do you make of the fact that the 24-week-old child inside of Elizabeth’s womb (John) literally “leaps” for joy when Mary walks in the door? Talk about this. Why do you think this happened? What are some of the implications of this? Do you think this was related to the fact that, at that very moment, the Holy Spirit was filling Elizabeth?
  - Three times Elizabeth pronounces a “blessing” over Mary. It seems clear that these blessings aren’t simply kind words. There is “power” in this pronunciation of blessing. What do you think this power is? Can we convey this same power as we proclaim blessings over others in our lives?
  - What does Elizabeth tell us about what was going on in Mary’s heart in verse 45?
- Read **Luke 1:46-56**:
  - Mary breaks out in a song in the presence of Elizabeth. It is a song of praise, and of deep awareness of what God is doing in her—and in the world. Keep in mind that God has been “silent” for four hundred years.
    - What stands out to you about Mary’s song?
    - Is she aware of what her pregnancy means in the scope of human history?
    - How does this pregnancy fulfill God’s prophecies in the Old Testament?
    - Mary uses the word “mercy” or “merciful” twice. Why do think that is?

### **Application:**

In the Christmas carol “O Little Town of Bethlehem”, verse 4 begins: “O holy child of Bethlehem descend to us, we pray. Cast out our sin and enter in, be born in us today.” Sadly, some versions have changed this to “be born TO us today.” That isn’t the original lyric by Phillips Brooks in 1868. It’s not only that Jesus was born TO us—it’s that He is born IN us! Meditate on this truth this Christmas week. Invite Jesus to be born IN you today and every day. That’s the true meaning of Christmas!