

**Luke 1:30-35**  
The Christmas Kingdom  
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In the gospel of Luke, the Christmas story starts before Jesus' birth. About nine months before Mary gives birth to Jesus, the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary. Mary is a young godly girl who has never been married or been with a man. But she's betrothed, or what we can call engaged, to a carpenter named Joseph. But when this angel shows up, her life changes. The angel Gabriel greets Mary, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" Mary of course is troubled by this supernatural visitation. What has she done to deserve God showing up to her? I know I would have felt scared if an angel showed up with a message from God for me. So here we have a young soon-to-be-married woman who has found favor with God. This is the background of the very first Christmas.

There were no Christmas trees or Christmas carols. There were no Christmas gifts or Christmas songs. There was a young frightened woman and an angel. And here we begin to learn what Christmas is all about. Christmas is not about Santa or reindeer. Christmas is not even about Christmas gifts or lights. Christmas is about Jesus and his kingdom.

**Christmas is about Jesus and his kingdom. (v. 30-33)**

Christmas is about Jesus. (v. 30-31) Christmas is about God's undeserved grace given to us through Jesus. In these two verses we read two examples of God's undeserved grace:

First, God chose Mary to carry Jesus even though she's not worthy. In verse 30 the angel Gabriel tells Mary she has "found favor with God." Notice that God has given Mary his favor—Mary hasn't earned it. Sometimes we think of Mary as a perfect girl who never sinned. Mary trusted God but it doesn't say she was perfect. Nothing in her made her worthy except for God's grace.

Second, through Jesus God sends us an undeserved savior. The angel named the child "Jesus" for a very specific reason. The name Jesus means "Yahweh is salvation." Yahweh is the name of the Old Testament God of Israel. Yahweh himself was going to give Mary a child named "Yahweh is salvation." Mary didn't deserve to carry Jesus and we don't deserve to receive him. Christmas is all about God's undeserved grace given to us through Jesus. Christmas is about Jesus.

Just like God freely gave Mary the baby Jesus, God is giving us this building. Maybe it's tempting to say, "We're such a great church, no wonder God is giving it to us." But that is wrong—just like Mary we're sinners and don't deserve to plant in Westford. If there's anything in us that makes us worthy for such a task, it's only by God's grace. Just like Mary was frightened, I know some of you are terrified to church plant. When we encounter God, it's only natural that we feel some level of fear. Christmas is about Jesus and I pray this new church is about him too.

In verses 32-33 the angel Gabriel tells us more fully who this baby Jesus is. Who is this small child that will be born to Mary?

Jesus is God—the Son of the Most High. (v. 32a) Verse 32 says, “He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High.” Throughout the Old Testament God is called the Most High. The name the Most High emphasizes God’s supremacy above everything. The Most High means God is sovereign and transcendent over all. It’s as if God is completely out of our reach on a high mountain peak. This is why ancient religions built platforms to reach into the sky. They wanted to ascend to their deities in the heavens. But here God is reversing the process. Even though God is Most High, he is making himself most low for us. God is making himself known to us through a real person named Jesus. The God of the universe will become a baby in a manger. Jesus is God—the Son of the Most High.

Jesus is king—the Son of David. (v. 32b-33) Verses 32b-33 tell us Jesus will sit on the throne of David and rule over Jacob’s house. In 2nd Samuel 7 the God Yahweh made King David a promise. God told David, “I will establish the throne of [your offspring] forever.” This means that one day one of David’s descendants will rule as king. Remember that both Mary and Joseph come from the line of David. See Mary wasn’t a queen and she wasn’t marrying a king. But Mary was going to give birth to a king. And if there was any doubt, Gabriel points all the way back to the father of Israel. Jacob’s 12 sons became the 12 tribes of Israel. Jesus’ lineage goes all the way back to King David. But his kingdom will surpass King David’s kingdom. King Jesus is going to have an everlasting kingdom. Verse 33 ends, “...and of his kingdom there will be no end.” Jesus’ kingdom is still building and spreading. I know this because Jesus’ builds his kingdom through the church. And as more and more churches are planted, the kingdom grows. Jesus is king—the Son of David.

When a king comes, things change. My wife Monica just visited her missionary friend Mary at a London church plant. One of Mary’s friends told Monica about the importance of a new king. Queen Elizabeth is the current reigning monarch of England. But within the next several years that is going to change. And when there’s a new king, they have to change the national anthem. They have to change it from “God save the queen” to “God save the king.” They also have to reprint the British pound so it has a picture of the king on it. When a king comes, things change. What sort of things are going to change when the kingdom comes here? Through this church plant, we’re renewing the kingdom of God in Westford. As Christ’s kingdom comes to Westford, we can expect things to change. What sorts of things need to change when the king comes to you? It’s only by God’s grace that the king comes, but he calls us to get ready. Christmas is about Jesus and his kingdom.

In verse 34 we read Mary’s response to Gabriel. She asks, “How will this be, since I am a virgin? Mary was asking how she could give birth to a God and king. And I think we’re asking something similar today. How can we give birth to God’s kingdom right here? How can Christ’s kingdom come to Westford?”

### **The kingdom comes by the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. (v. 35)**

The kingdom comes by the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. (v. 35) In verse 35 Gabriel answers Mary, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you...” The very presence of God, the Holy Spirit, will come upon Mary. Through the Holy Spirit she will conceive the child Jesus. She will conceive him as a virgin and he will be without sin. It’s not that Mary was sinless, but that the Holy Spirit could conceive Jesus sin free. Then Gabriel adds, “and the power of the Most High will overshadow you...” The word for “overshadow” also means “cloud cover” or “darkening.” We get a picture of a dark cloud coming and enveloping Mary. This reminds us of Moses at Sinai and Abraham in Genesis 15. Both Moses and Abraham experienced the

powerful presence of the Holy Spirit. And now Mary is about to experience that same overwhelming presence. But it's going to be worth it, because she will give birth to the "Son of God." The kingdom comes by the power and presence of the Holy Spirit.

Christmas is about Christ and his kingdom. The kingdom comes by the the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. The year 2015 is a big year for Immanuel Church, this building, and the plant. Lord willing sometime next year we're going to have a brand new church right here. Just like Mary there's nothing we've done to deserve this blessing. God is simply being gracious to us and we haven't earned it. With this gift comes a great deal of responsibility. Mary carried the king of the world in her womb. And we carry the message of the kingdom into this part of the world. Christ's kingdom will continue to grow through this new church. But there's only one way Mary could give birth to the Son of God. And there's only one way we can succeed in this new church. We will succeed by the power and the presence of the Holy Spirit among us. We need the power of the Spirit to strengthen us and the gospel message. We need the living presence of the Spirit to lead us through what's coming next.

The first Christmas was not easy for Mary and I don't expect this plant to be easy. She was frightened by the presence of the angel Gabriel and by what he said. Maybe you're frightened by God's call and what he's asking you to do. If the power and presence of the Holy Spirit is with us, we don't have to fear. I want to challenge all of us to seek the Holy Spirit as we step forward. It's my prayer that next Christmas we will stand here worshipping God. And at that time we will give him credit for all we've seen happen in 2015. I want us all to be able to say, "I saw the Holy Spirit move in Westford." The kingdom comes by the power and the presence of the Holy Spirit.