

Mary and Elizabeth

Strange Women

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I want you to see Mary's response in verse 38, "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. 'May it be to me as you have said.' Then the angel left her. At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea."

Have you ever been to a bus station at Christmas time? I remember, in college, I would sometimes get on a bus for Christmas holidays, other times I hitchhiked, and so I've been on buses a lot and bus stations are fascinating places. If you go to zoos and you like the primate section, that a bus station is a wonderful example of primates looking for something, wandering, and lost sometimes, not knowing what they're going to do.

My 9th great grandmother was a virgin named Mary. Her name was Mary Browne. She was born in 1635 and she married my 9th great grandfather, John Evelyn, who was born in 1620. She married him in Paris, France on June 27, 1647. She was 12. He was 27.

I want that to sink in for a moment because what I want us to think about is how old Mary might have been. Now, my 10th great grandfather happened to be the Ambassador for King Charles I of England to the court of France. That's why my 9th great grandmother was married in Paris, France as a 12-year-old. Think about it for just a moment. We look at that with great horror and we think, "Oh, my gracious, she married a 27-year-old man when she was 12!"

But he was Ambassador to King Charles I who was executed by Parliament, and he remained in France, and then when the monarchy was restored with King Charles II, he continued on in his role as the Ambassador.

I'm not sharing that to kind of brag about something; I'm trying to drive a point: How old was the Virgin Mary, and I submit to you that she was probably 12 or 13 years old.

And I submit to you something else, if you look there at that verse, 39, “At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea.” Now, think about it for a moment, there are all kinds of dogmas that have been created out of human imagination that we’ve inherited down through the years. There’s the dogma of the Immaculate Conception. What is that?

It means that the parents of the Virgin Mary, St. Anne and St. Joachim—and we have no idea if that’s really who they were or not. There’s nothing in the Bible about that—that they did not have physical relations and somehow or another Mary was miraculously conceived because these people were great saints.

Well, I’ve got a question: What do you do when you’re a young teenage mother-to-be and you need spiritual counsel? Why didn’t she go to St. Anne or St. Joachim? You know that that dogma was only promulgated by the Church, the Catholic Church, in 1854. Why didn’t she go to them? Why did she go down quite a distance to see her cousin?

The angel told her that a miracle had occurred and that her cousin, who was an elderly lady—let that sink in for a moment—and her husband, Zechariah, was an elderly man, and they had not had any children.

Well, for Zechariah to be able to serve in the temple and offer the incense offering, he had to be under the age of 50 (Numbers 8:25). Wow, what does that make me? A really old geezer. So, this elderly couple, around 50, have a miracle. It’s a natural conception. Zechariah is the physical father of John the Baptist, but it’s quite a miracle in that she was barren and now is having a child, and the angel tells Mary about this. “Your cousin is now expecting a child,” and he says—look again at verse 36, “Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month.”

So, Mary heads out. She heads out on her own. What is it like tonight at the bus station? What do you think about people there? You know, if you are into human trafficking, bus stations are great places to go because people are there; they don’t know what to do; they don’t know who to talk to; they’re alone; they’re frightened; they’re concerned, and along comes some charming fellow who ultimately kidnaps them. Can you imagine the risks that the Virgin Mary took that night? She heads out. Once she had had this revelation from the angel Gabriel, she heads out on her own.

Now we have movies like “The Nativity Story” which is a great movie, except that the wise-men didn’t come that night; they come sometime later, but it’s a great movie because it shows her kind of hooking up with people

and riding in a cart with other people and kind of bumming a ride here and bumming a ride there, not unlike the time that I went from one side of England to the other side by hitchhiking.

So, she's bumming a ride here, bumming a ride there. I just want it to sink in.

My point is this in a very practical way, strange women: She's a strange woman.

How many teenagers do you know would agree to the public embarrassment that Mary submitted to? She submitted to it. She said, "I'm the handmaiden of the Lord. May it be as you have said." (Luke 1:38) And how many would head out all alone for a journey of many miles, not on a bus, but walking and occasionally perhaps getting a ride on the back of a cart quite a distance from Nazareth down to the hill country of Judea?

I want you to see something else here. The other strange woman here is her cousin. Mary visits Elizabeth and look at verse 39 to get it in context again:

"At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit."

Now I'm going to say it the way it was, "In a loud voice she exclaimed: 'Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished!'" (Luke 1:39-45)

So, she leaves her home. If her mother's name was Anne, I don't know. If her father's name was Joachim, I don't know. But I know this, she didn't stick around for mom and daddy to advise her. I think that's interesting.

She got out of Dodge, or got out of Nazareth, and she went to see Elizabeth. And Elizabeth's greeting is striking, isn't it? Elizabeth says as soon as she greeted her, the baby leaped in her womb. And we think, "Well, maybe Elizabeth was excited and, you know, when a mom gets excited, sometimes it stirs up the baby, and around a certain time"—you know, you can say—I can remember with our five pregnancies—not mine—but Sandy would say, "Oh, look, feel over here," and I could feel the baby kicking, and so Elizabeth was having the baby kick. But that's not really the situation. Look at what she says.

She says, verse 44, “As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby leaped in my womb **for joy**.” Can a baby know joy? Absolutely.

John the Baptist was filled with the Holy Spirit in his mother’s womb (Luke 1:15), and he was so excited that the baby Jesus was in his presence, because Mary had the baby Jesus at that point inside her womb, and that caused John the Baptist to get so excited, he just started to jump, jump for joy.

Imagine it, he jumped for joy inside his mother’s womb, and maybe that helped Elizabeth to cry as loudly as she did. I mean, imagine a kick is one thing, but a baby deciding to jump? Wow! And that’s why she cries out in a loud voice, a loud voice.

What I submit to you is this: Elizabeth was a woman who was full of God, full of the Holy Spirit, and she was the kind of woman that Mary, a lonely 12 or 13-year-old virgin girl, facing a very uncertain future, needed to be discipled by. And so, she stays with Elizabeth for three whole months, and that is an amazing story, isn’t it?

So, think about it tonight: Have you ever gone to a bus station on Christmas Eve? Have you ever gone there asking God to guide you to see somebody? Have you ever had the Holy Spirit tug on your heart and say to you—not vibrating the tympanic membranes—but in that thought that’s there, that’s deep, and you know it’s God, “Why don’t you go over and speak to that person?”

Here’s an interesting thought: I wonder if anybody will do it; I’m not going to do it tonight, but I wonder if anybody would think to go to the bus station and to say, “Lord, show me someone who’s lonely, someone who’s uncertain, someone who doesn’t know what to do, and may I be Elizabeth to her?”

Wow! what an amazing thing to do and that’s what happened and that is how the Lord Jesus is conceived, and we will continue that, God willing, tomorrow.