

How should we appreciate the *prophetic purpose of the Old Testament*? In the past, we have studied the life of David, with all his ups and downs and spiritual triumphs or failures. Have we found lessons to apply to our lives? To be sure. But there is a higher, *prophetic purpose* to David's life beyond any moral lessons for us. In the same way, when we study the lives of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph, we see that the lives of the patriarchs are molded by God to signify more than just human-interest stories or life lessons. Under God, these Old Testament figures had a *prophetic purpose* in pointing forward to the fulfillment of every prophecy which the life of Jesus Christ would accomplish. No wonder godly folk have always paused over the Christmas story! It brings together all the hopes of believers throughout history down to one place: the manger in Bethlehem – where we in this week's notes once again pause to meditate on the great miracle of the Incarnation - as the writer of hymn # 200 urges us to do:

*And ye, beneath life's crushing load,
Whose forms are bending low,
Who toil along the climbing way
With painful steps and slow,
Look now! for glad and golden hours
Come swiftly on the wing.
O rest beside the weary road,
And hear the angels sing!*

Monday: read Luke 1:26-38 and Hebrews 11:1-2. Faith shines most clearly in the realm of the humanly impossible – impossible births; impossible life situations; impossible moments of need – where only God's direct, miraculous intervention will answer the cries of the desperate believer. The announcement of the angel to Mary is one such moment, where Mary, overwhelmed by the astounding events leading up to the announcement of the Virgin Birth, cannot help but cry out in Luke 1:34: "How will this be...since I am a virgin?" She cannot grasp how God will keep His promise to a virgin like her and bring to birth no one less than the Son of God, the Messiah, miraculously conceived in her womb! She has no previous experience by which to understand what God is doing. All she can do is lay her mind, heart and will before the Lord and say: "May it be to me as you have said" (Luke 1:38).

Meditate and Pray: Let us thank God for this clear demonstration of the nature of saving faith. Faith is in its essence a submission to the Word and the Promise of God: "Yielding obedience to the commands, embracing the promises and trembling at the threats" of God's Word is the way our Westminster Confession chapter XIV paragraph 2 puts it. "*Lord, grant us such faith, content to rest in what you say and in what you will do. Thank you that your Holy Spirit alone is able to produce such implicit, trusting faith in us, and He will do it.*" Amen.

Tuesday: read Luke 1:34; Genesis 18:10-12 and Hebrews 11:11-12 (NKJV).

Mary's amazed questioning of the promise of a Holy Child is much like Sarah's question in Gen. 18:12 where she wonders how God could give her the promised son Isaac when she was past the age of child-bearing. Barrenness in the Old Testament proved to be just the same kind of hindrance to faith as Mary's virginity proves to be in the New. But Sarah shows us the way faith works when faced with such an impossibility in Hebrews 11:11, which reads in the Original Greek and in the New King James Version: "By faith Sarah herself received strength to conceive seed, and she bore a child when she was past the age, because she *judged* Him faithful who had promised." The key word here is that Sarah "*judged or considered or reckoned* God faithful." Ah, here is what the Holy Spirit is able to work into the hearts of Sarah and Mary and we ourselves when He works faith into us: a *reckoning or resolution of trust* in God's power which goes far beyond bare theory and translates into action! And what then was the action produced in Sarah (and I daresay in Mary) from such faith? Verse 11 again: "*strength to conceive.*" Amazing! By faith, God was able to give to both Sarah and Mary the

physical ability to conceive their miracle children! Let us never agree with unbelievers that faith is light and airy, too heavenly to be any earthly good! Faith is as practical as the birth of a longed-for child.

Meditate and Pray: Ask God to help you towards an increased conviction of the power of faith. It is able to move mountains, as Jesus said. Do you long for such faith to be “birthed” in you and in those you care for so much? *“Lord, increase our faith in the Holy Spirit’s power to produce faith – even in the dead wombs and barren minds of unbelievers... for such were Sarah, Mary and we ourselves before the light of faith dawned.”* Amen.

Wednesday: read Luke 1:35. We know from the beginning of the Bible, in the picture which the Hebrew writer paints for us in Genesis 1:1-2, that the Holy Spirit of God “hovered” over the first creation as a mother-bird hovers over her chicks, conveying to them warmth, life and protection. In just the same “hovering” language, the angel Gabriel explains the way the Holy Spirit will come upon the womb of Mary in Luke 1:35 to mysteriously produce the real, holy, human body for the Son of God. As our creeds put it, through the overshadowing presence of the Holy Spirit, our Lord Jesus was “conceived by the Holy Ghost” while at the same time truly born as we are “by the Virgin Mary.” Born Holy God and Truly Man!

Meditate and Pray: Let us admire the miracle of the Virgin Birth and worship the amazing work of the Trinity in this birth with the help of these poetic words from one hymn writer:

*Let earth and heaven conspire,
Angels and men agree,
To praise in songs divine
The Incarnate Deity;
Our God contracted to a span,
Incomprehensible made man.*

Thursday: read Luke 1:39-56. In the rest of Luke 1, we see Mary exercise her faith by seeking out like-minded fellowship (Luke 1:39-45) and by actively praising God’s Name (Luke 1:46-55) as she vigorously embraces the purposes of God for her life. She begins by seeking out fellowship with her cousin Elizabeth, who, like Mary, is bearing a miraculously-conceived child, John the Baptist. Not many would have understood or had any sympathy for Mary’s plight as an unmarried, pregnant Jewish peasant. So she seeks solace and strength at the home of Elizabeth, whose welcome confirms to Mary that this indeed was the right household of faith where she was to spend the next three months in safe seclusion (Luke 1:56).

Meditate and Pray: Let’s be thankful that faith is just as active in *seeking out* God’s will as it is in *passively submitting* to it. Mary did not merely declare her submissive spirit in verse 38. She then in verse 39 put feet to her faith and sought out the Christian fellowship which she needed in order to persevere in faith through the nine months of bearing the Christ child to birth. How we should pray that God would enable us to find similar solace and strength in the fellowship of believers! Let us pray for this as follows:

“Lord, please instill in our generation and the generation of our children and grandchildren a sense of the importance of Christian friends and fellowship with like-minded believers. When any of our young people are lonely, would you help them to seek out a godly friend like Mary sought out Elizabeth? Would you also help us to be like Elizabeth, ready with a welcome word and warm embrace when lonely outcast Christians come to us for help? Then we will find the joy of Elizabeth and the praise of God on our lips like Mary.” Amen.

Friday: read Luke 2:21-35 and 1 Peter 1:18-21. The Birth of Christ is full of beauty and glory. However, we must never forget the poignant future of suffering which that Christ Child was prophesied to endure even while Mary held Him in her arms. When she and Joseph brought the baby Jesus to the temple to be circumcised on the eighth day in Luke 2:21-35, Simeon prophesied as to what the future would hold for the family of Christ. Jesus Himself, Simeon declared, would be “spoken against” (Luke 2:34) and Mary would find her heart pierced with grief (Luke 2:35). Such was the ordained destiny of the Christ-Child, who was actually, as Peter puts it in 1 Peter 1:20, “Chosen before the creation of the world” to be the Lamb whose redeeming blood would be shed. Thus the costliness of our salvation was clearly brought to light even for the eight-day old Christ.

Meditate and Pray: Thank God the Father and God the Son that they entered into an agreement before the world was that the Son would suffer in our flesh and blood. The Father prepared the body for the Son (Hebrews 10:5), and the Son eagerly came down, longing to accomplish the shedding of His blood so that our Salvation might be accomplished. And what of the Holy Spirit? He longed for this great, painful work of Redemption to be successfully achieved as well. Look at how the Holy Spirit welcomes His best friend Jesus into the temple through the words of Simeon the prophet! Thus the Spirit was there strengthening the Son of God when His blood first was shed in circumcision even as He would be there to strengthen the Son in His shedding of His blood on the Cross. Marvelous mystery of the Trinity. Worship the Father, Son and Holy Spirit now in your own words.