

CCLEB SERMON NOTES



SUNDAY DECEMBER 21, 2025
LUKE 1:26-28

PASTOR DUANE MILLER

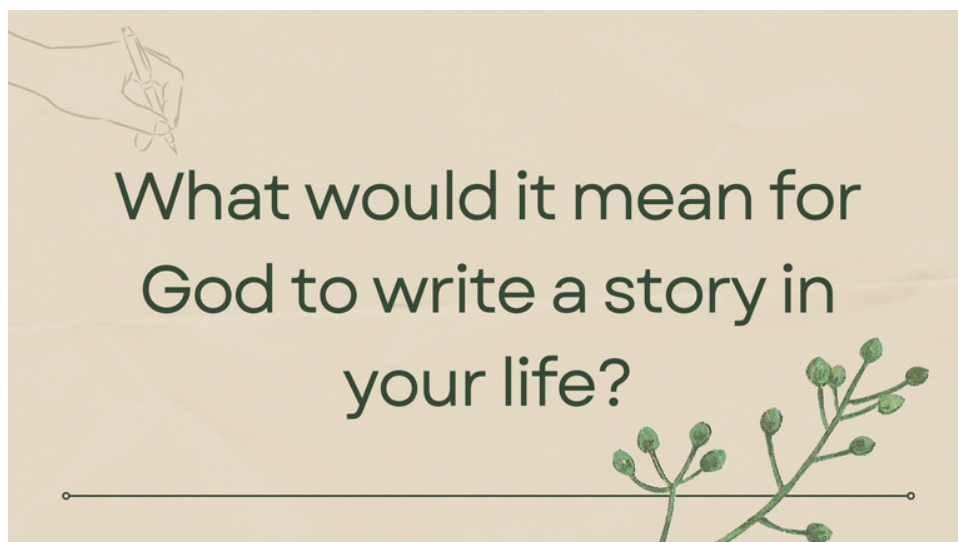
WHEN GOD WRITES A STORY IN YOUR LIFE



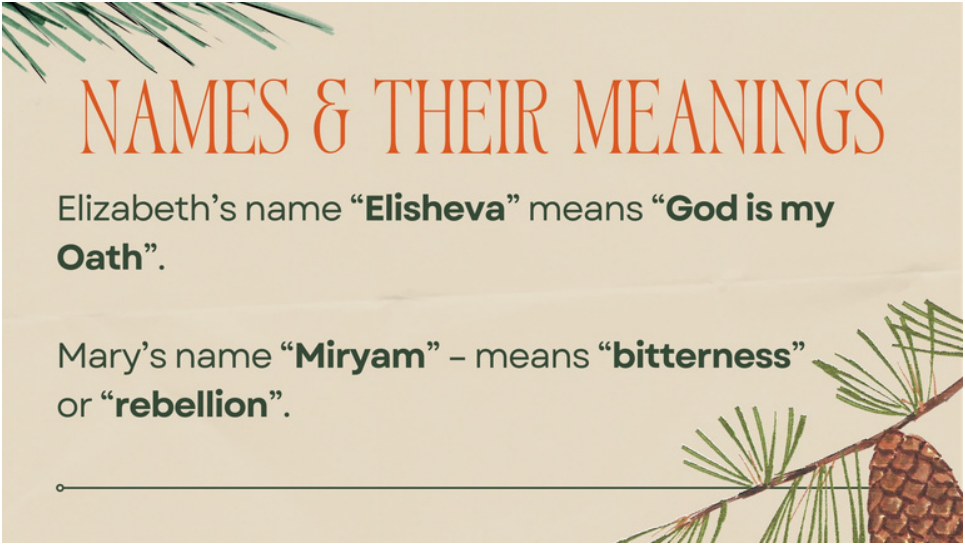
Today in our Christmas message we are going to focus on one small piece of the Christmas story - when God sent the angel Gabriel to Mary in **Luke 1:26-38** telling Mary that she will be the mother of the Son of God - Jesus.

What I am asking you as the reader and listener is to visualize this passage as God the Father writing a story in Mary's life.

Now having read Mary's story, What would it mean for God to write a story in your life? We are going to explore components of God writing Mary's story and see what may apply to God writing our stories.



Let me tell you - I love to read a good well written story. And this is a great story!! **Verse 26-27** opens this particular story by telling us about two woman Elizabeth & Mary.



NAMES & THEIR MEANINGS

Elizabeth's name "**Elisheva**" means "**God is my Oath**".

Mary's name "**Miryam**" – means "**bitterness**" or "**rebellion**".

Elizabeth's name "Elisheva" means "God is my Oath". Which is nice and fits Elizabeth's story. Mary's name "Miryam" – means "bitterness" or "rebellion". "Bitter or rebellion" may be indicative of her demeanor prior to her encounter with Gabriel, however historical traditions sometimes connect Mary's name meaning to the "bitterness of sorrow" from **Luke 2:35** "a sword will pierce your very soul" – sorrow.

Elizabeth we are told is six months pregnant, and Mary we are told is a virgin. Interesting that both women are identified by their status of pregnancy. Elizabeth is pregnant, and Mary cannot possibly be pregnant because the text tells us that she is a virgin. This intentional contrasting between the two women means that Mary's story is going to be uniquely hers. This is a story about Mary!



Mary's story is going
to be uniquely hers.



Now that the text tells us that Elizabeth is six months pregnant means that there is already a story behind Elizabeth's pregnancy happening at the time Mary's story begins. So think of this as a story within a story.

We know from the account earlier in the chapter that Elizabeth's is married to a priest named Zechariah and that Elizabeth's pregnancy is miraculous – **Luke 1:7** tells us "Elizabeth was unable to conceive and was very old". "Very old" in the original Greek means "elderly". Picture an elderly woman you know – now picture that same elderly woman pregnant – it would be miraculous! So Elizabeth being elderly and six months pregnant in **verse 36** is truly miraculous.

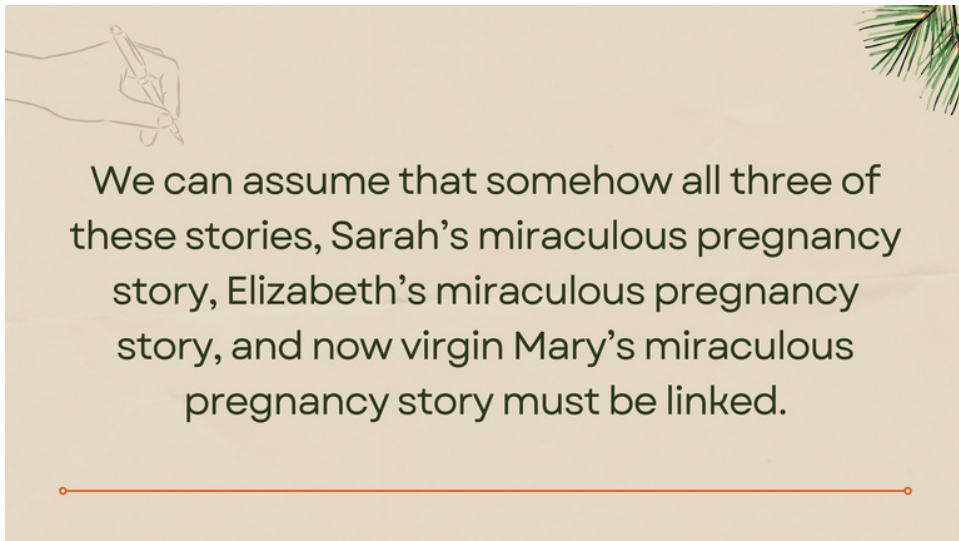
Mary's story is not just a story within a story, Mary's story is a miraculous story about pregnancy within a miraculous story of pregnancy. Think about what God in his sovereignty had to orchestrate just for the context of Mary's story. So God's sovereignty and orchestration is involved in writing Mary's story.



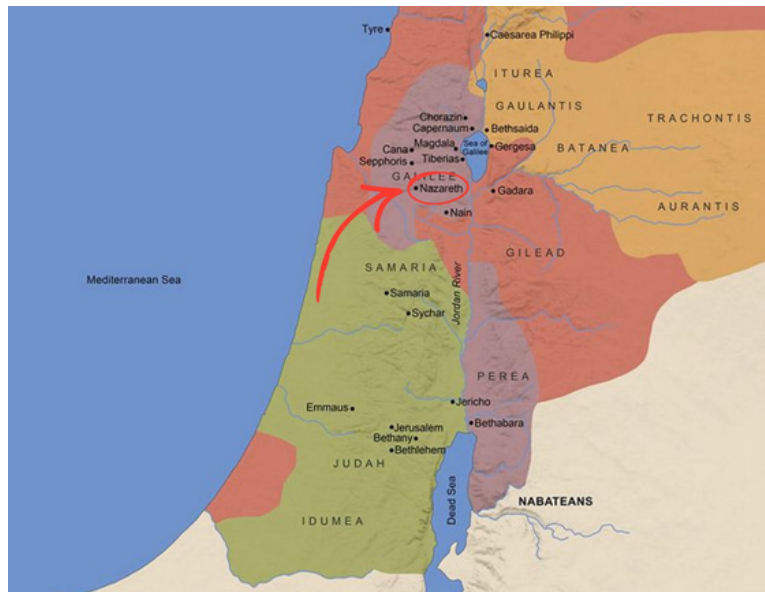
SO GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY AND ORCHESTRATION IS INVOLVED IN WRITING MARY'S STORY.



We know from recently studying Genesis that miraculous pregnancy stories are not unique to Elizabeth and Mary. In Genesis we saw Sarah the wife of Abraham miraculously become pregnant in her old age, just like Elizabeth in **Luke 1**. From that we can assume that somehow all three of these stories, Sarah's miraculous pregnancy story, Elizabeth's miraculous pregnancy story, and now virgin Mary's miraculous pregnancy story must be linked. Hrmm.. fascinating. This story really starts to draw you in doesn't it? So all three stories linked, but Mary's story is the standout because because we know that Mary is a virgin.



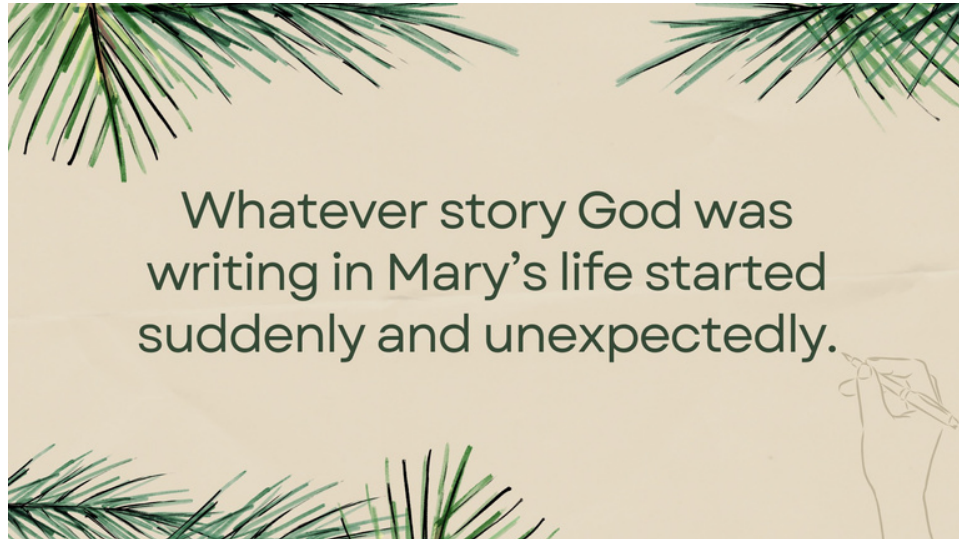
In the end of **verse 26** it says God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth. Nazareth at this time was a village near an intersection of roads between Roman cities and trade routes – Nazareth was known to be secular, rough, and very diverse culturally. To give you an image of the common perception of Nazareth, Nathanael, one of the disciples, famously said in **John 1:46** "Can anything good come from Nazareth?"



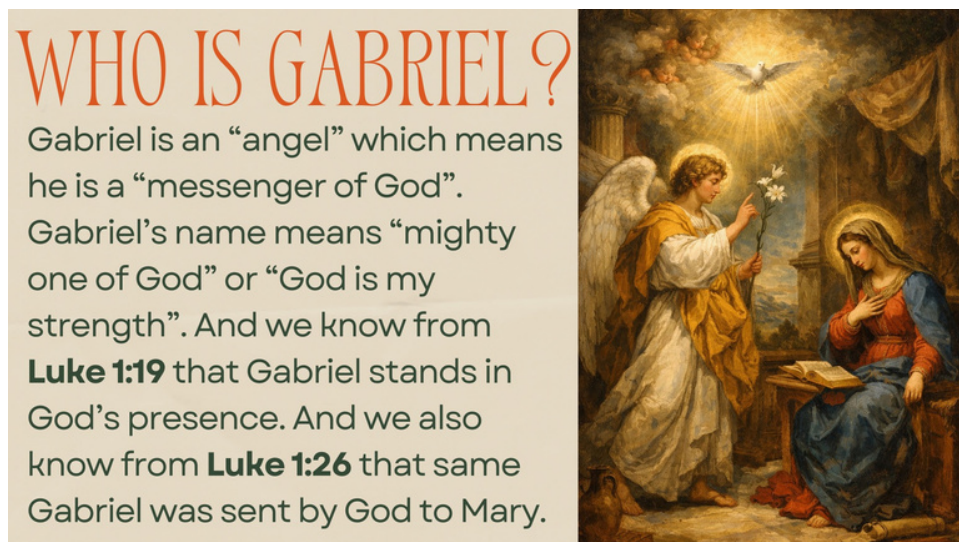
So adding some intrigue to the story, we have Mary's story being written in a place that has a questionable reputation. Seems to be the type of place God likes to work!

And the end of **verse 27** tells us about Mary's fiancé, Joseph – and it is curious because the text makes sure to tell us that her fiancé Joseph was a descendant of King David. So an important part of Mary's story is the tie in here to the lineage of King David – and look what **2 Samuel 7:16 NASB** says about King David. So now we have Mary's story, within Elizabeth's story, within David's story, connected to Sarah's story. It gives the impression that all these stories, are all pointing us to something important.

Well, most good stories contain an element of surprise– and that is what we see in **verse 28**. The angel Gabriel suddenly appears to Mary. For bible readers an angel appearing is not to surprising – however for Mary that Gabriel appeared to her would be surprising. From a story writing perspective Whatever story God was writing in Mary's life started suddenly and unexpectedly.



So who is this Gabriel? Gabriel is an “angel” which means he is a “messenger of God”. Gabriel's name means “mighty one of God” or “God is my strength”. And we know from **Luke 1:19** that Gabriel stands in God's presence. That means Gabriel is in God's throne room, God's celestial courtroom -the place of power. And we also know from **Luke 1:26** that same Gabriel was sent by God to Mary. So this important angel Gabriel suddenly appearing to Mary must mean something significant is about to happen.

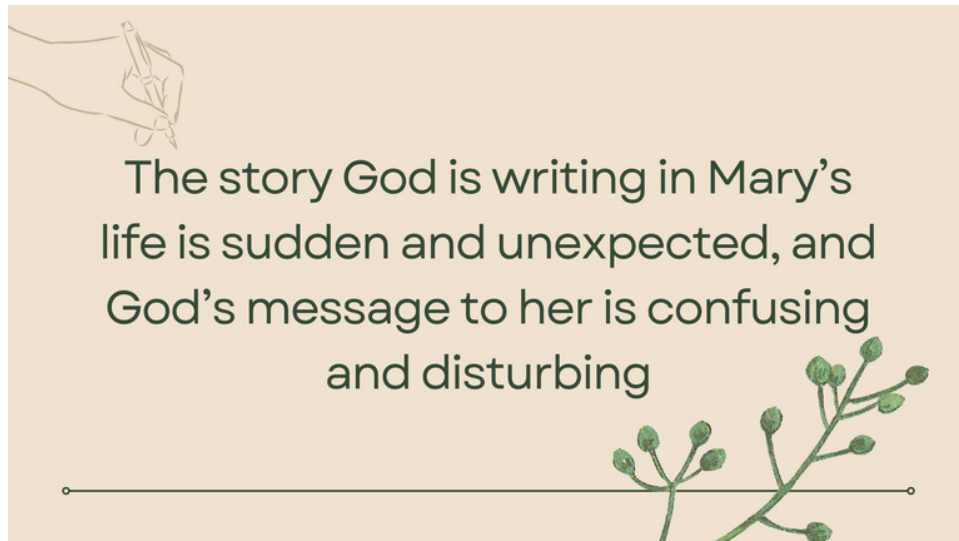


The story goes on in **verse 28** to tell us that Gabriel doesn't just appear, Gabriel speaks to her “Greetings favored woman, the Lord is with you”.

Now full confession here, I personally have never had Gabriel appear to me and start talking. That would be something!

I imagine most of you haven't had that experience either. If Gabriel suddenly appeared to me I imagine that I would be wishing I was wearing an adult diaper.

So Gabriel surprises Mary - Gabriel's appearance is unexpected to say the least, and further Mary is also "confused and disturbed" by what Gabriel says. So I think I can risk saying that at this point in the story Mary is not liking her experience in how God is writing this story in her life. The story God is writing in Mary's life is sudden and unexpected, and God's message to her is confusing and disturbing and Gabriel is just getting started with what he has to say.

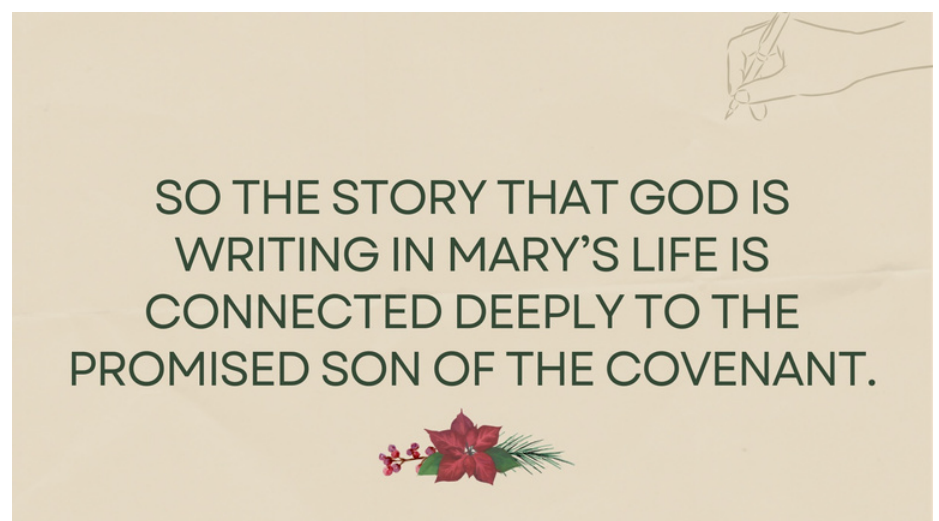


Think back on some of the stories God has written in your life -Were any of them "sudden, unexpected, confusing, disturbing? See any parallels? "Hey Duane, your wife's water just broke at 19 weeks". "Hey Duane, your son's going to need brain surgery". "Hey Duane I want you to be a pastor".

Well Gabriel recognizes Mary's response as fear in **verse 30** and says to her "Don't be afraid Mary...". Now this may seem a simple thing to say to Mary given that Mary is obviously scared "confused and disturbed".

However, the very first time in the whole bible the LORD God said these exact words "don't be afraid" was to Abraham in **Genesis 15:1**. The context was that the LORD had promised Abraham that he would have descendants that would be like the "dust of the earth, too many to count"... Yet here in **Genesis 15:1** Abraham and Sarah were in their old age, elderly, with no children, no son, no heir of the covenant. And the LORD said to Abraham, and note Lord said this before the LORD miraculously provided Abraham a son, he said "Do not be afraid, for I will protect you and your reward will be great".

The "do not be afraid" that the LORD used with Abraham are the exact same words that Gabriel said to Mary in Luke 1:30... likewise said to Mary before the LORD miraculously provided Mary a son. Was Gabriel's use of the exact same words God used with Abraham intentional? I believe so.. and this identical use of words seems to foreshadow that the son that would be miraculously provided to Mary would also be "a promised son". So the story that God is writing in Mary's life is connected deeply to the promised son of the covenant.



In **verse 31** Gabriel goes on to tell Mary that she will conceive, and give birth to this “son” and she is to name him “Jesus”.

An interesting thing about the name “Jesus”- “Jesus” was common name – In our culture and language the name Jesus would be equivalent to the very common name “Josh”.

The first century historian Josephus in his historical writings indicated several times that there were other well-known people named Jesus besides Jesus of Nazareth – which tells us that the name Jesus was common. Antiquities 20.8.6 (20.169-172); 18.3.3 (18.63-64).

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So picture yourself as Mary here. If the mighty angel Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, and who is God’s messenger, suddenly appears to you and tells you that you are going to have a son and tells you the son’s name, wouldn’t you expect the name to be something special? But here Gabriel says it just the common name “Jesus”. So let’s look at this name.

In Hebrew the name “Jesus – Yeshua” comes from the verb “yasa” which means “to deliver or save”. “Yeshua” is a shortened form of “Yehoshua” which means “the LORD saves” or “the LORD is Salvation”. “LORD” in all caps is our English word for “YHWH or Jehovah”.

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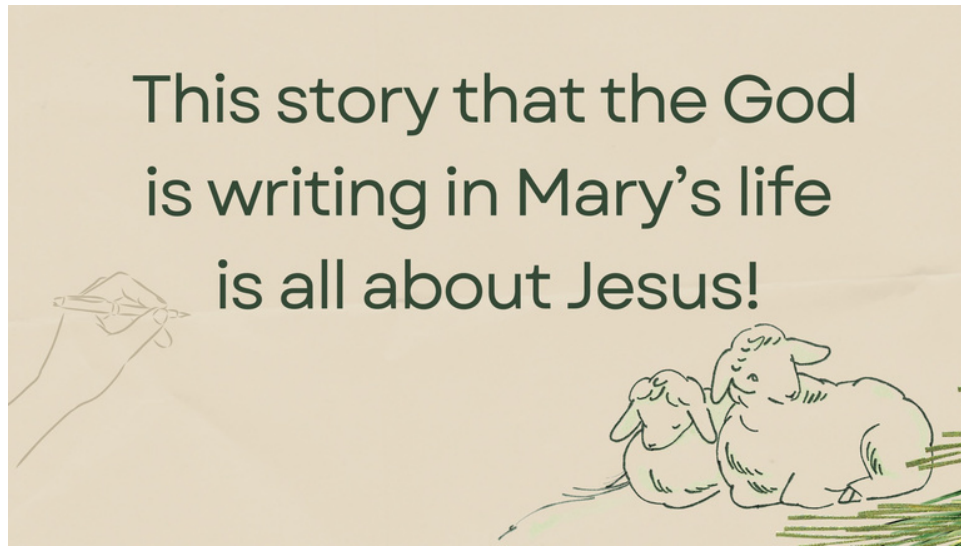
Matthew’s gospel clarifies the intention of the Jesus name’s meaning by adding in **Matthew 1:21** “...name him Jesus, for he will save (yasa) his people from their sins.”

Now this is important. “Yeshua” means “the LORD saves”. “LORD” that means “YHWH or Jehovah”. What Gabriel is saying to Mary is that her baby son, named “Jesus – Yeshua” is Jehovah – YHWH- LORD. Let me restate that, God himself, the LORD, will be Mary’s son. So it is the “LORD – Yeshua” that is coming as a baby to “save his people from their sin”.

And if that wasn’t mind blowing enough already for Mary, Gabriel adds a few more details about Jesus in **verse 32**.

This tells us why Mary's fiancé Joseph, being a descendant of David in **verse 27**, is important because it lines up baby Jesus to be the fulfillment of the promise of David's descendants eternal reign.

So stepping back and looking at this again as a story that God is writing in Mary's life - there seems to be a central emphasis of the story- and the central emphasis is Jesus. What that tells us is from a story telling perspective is that this story that the God is writing in Mary's life is all about Jesus!



As you can imagine, Mary just trying to take this all in, asks the obvious question in **verse 34** "How can this happen? I am a virgin!"

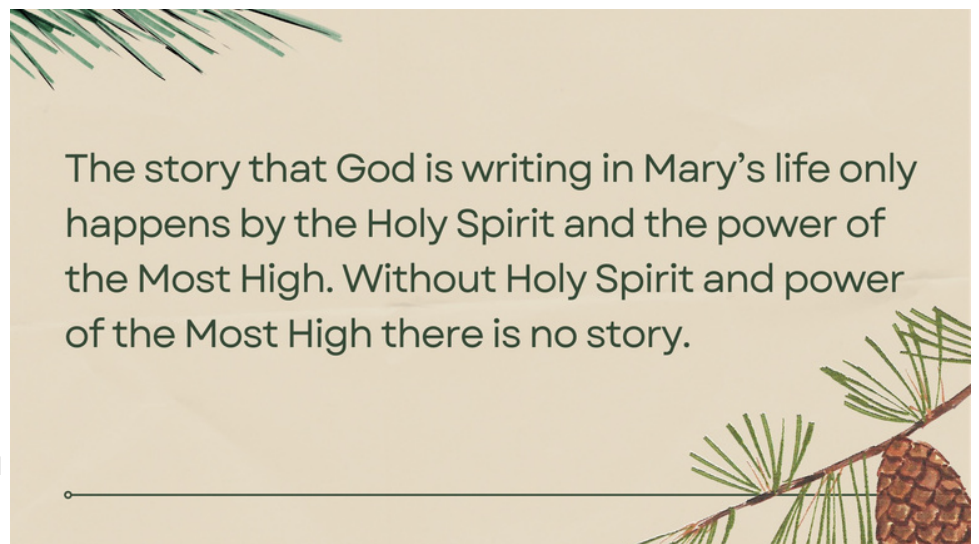
Leave it to a woman to ask the obvious question. Mary is a virgin, so yeah having a baby would be a problem wouldn't it?

Gabriel responds to this problem with an answer that has confounded the scholars and critics for millennia... **verse 35-36** What does that mean?

So in essence there won't be a human father of Jesus like there was with Sarah's son Isaac, or Elizabeth's son John, rather Mary will become pregnant by the Holy Spirit and the power of the Most High. Matthews gospel in **Matthew 1:20 NASB** literally says "conceived" by the Holy Spirit. This is one of those places in the bible we just accept by faith - it has no explanation.

Here is what we do know - Jesus being born of a virgin, conceived by the Holy Spirit through the power of the most high is a radical change from what God set in motion **Genesis 1:27-28** for procreation. This is man and woman coming together and being fruitful and multiplying. And God blessed that! Everyone born after that A&E moment came through that same brilliant design.. man and woman coming together...being fruitful. Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David... all of them and everyone after came from that design.

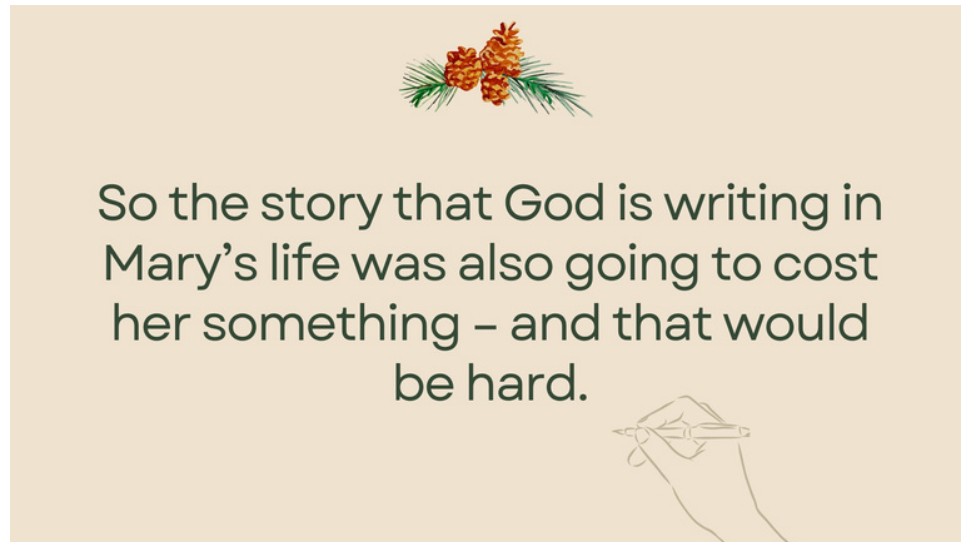
But not in Mary's story... her son Jesus was going to be different. Jesus would be the product of a different relationship than described between male and female in Genesis 1:27. Luke 1:35 says that Jesus will be born of a virgin by the Holy Spirit and the power of the Most High. And that is why Jesus will be Holy and be called the Son of God! If Jesus was going to save the world as Gabriel said he would, then Jesus would have to be different.



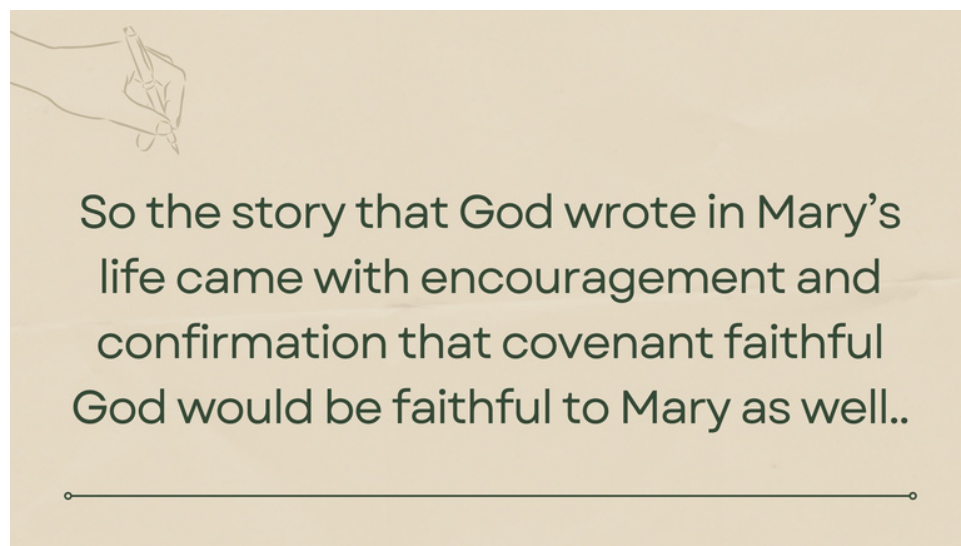
Again from a story writing perspective the story that God is writing in Mary's life only happens by the Holy Spirit and the power of the Most High. Without Holy Spirit and power of the Most High there is no story.

Now one of the things Mary being pregnant by the Holy Spirit meant for her life immediately was that she would become pregnant before her marriage to Joseph. That is taboo. Consequently Mary would live her whole life being accused of something...premarital sex, or unfaithfulness, something. Imagine carrying that burden.

So the story that God is writing in Mary's life was also going to cost her something - it would cost Mary her public honor, and cost her family their honor. Because Mary was pregnant before she was wed, family and community would always look at her with judgement and ridicule. And that would be hard.



In **verse 36..** Mary's story circles back to elderly Elizabeth who is now pregnant in her sixth month. The inclusion of Gabriel telling about Elizabeth's miraculous pregnancy is intended to be confirmation to Mary. Elizabeth's miraculous story was intended to be encouragement and confirmation that God will be faithful in writing Mary's miraculous story too. So the story that God wrote in Mary's life came with encouragement and confirmation that covenant faithful God would be faithful to Mary as well.. How often do we need confirmation that God is faithful? When I hear and see your stories that God is writing in your life, it gives me confirmation in the tough times to keep trusting the story that God is writing in my life.

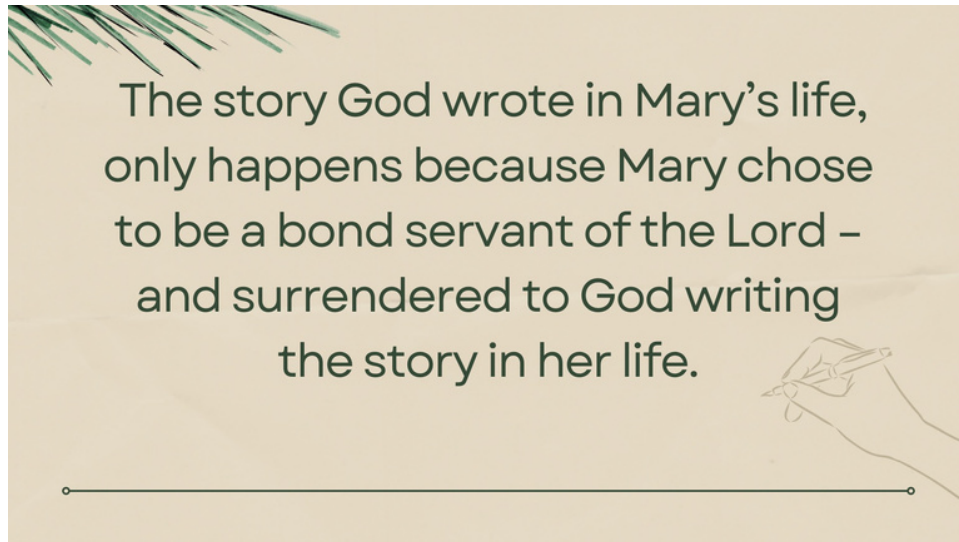


And Gabriel summarizes that confirmation of God's covenant faithfulness for Mary in **verse 37** - with this popular verse. Read it out loud with me. "For nothing is impossible with God."

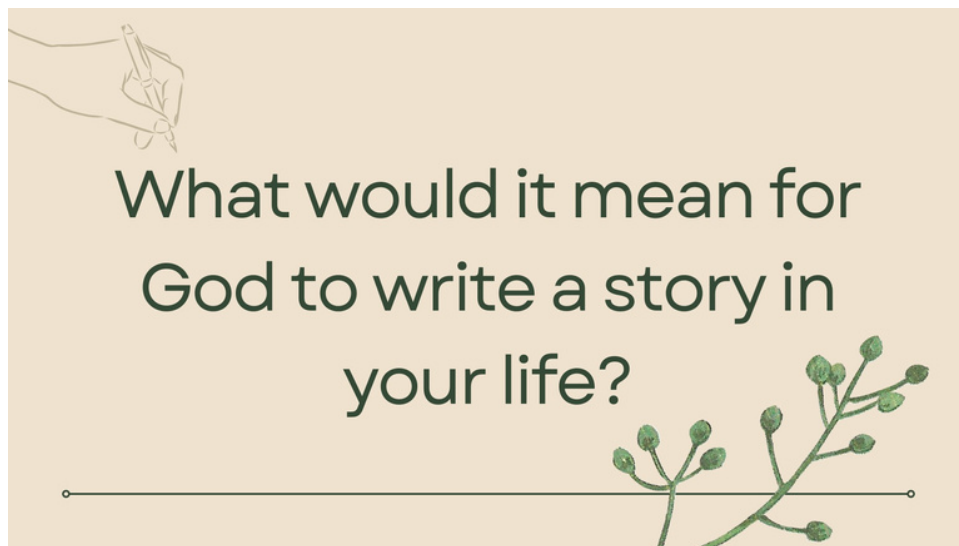
At this point Gabriel is done, he has said all that he was sent by God to say to Mary. Now it's up to Mary to choose with what she has heard from Gabriel.

After the sudden appearance, the confusing and disturbing words, after hearing about a incomprehensible virgin birth, that her son would be savior of the world, and that it would cost her something.. knowing that it would be hard - how does Mary respond to God's story?

Mary responds beautifully in **verse 38**, and I see her in my mind saying this with a humble bow. I like it better in the NASB. **Verse 38 NASB** Mary responds with presenting herself to Gabriel as a "bondservant of the LORD" - fully surrendered - "may it be done to me according to your word." A "bond-servant" is a servant who has been given or has earned their freedom and chooses to give their freedom back to their master for life. They choose that! The story God wrote in Mary's life, only happens because Mary chose to be a bond servant of the Lord - and surrendered to God writing the story in her life. "May everything you have said about me come true."



What would it mean for God to write a story in your life? Here is what we can generalize and apply from this text about stories that God writes in people's lives.



1. Mary's story was uniquely hers - God writing a story in your life will likewise be uniquely yours. Written for you!
2. We saw God's sovereignty and orchestration of events and people involved in writing Mary's story. God writing a story in your life will also involve God's sovereignty and orchestration.
3. God writing a story in your life may mean that the story starts suddenly, and unexpectedly and maybe "confusing and disturbing" and result in "fear". Not all of God's stories start that way...sometimes they start slowly, but many of them do start suddenly.
4. As we saw that Mary's story was connected to other stories in God's word, this tells us that God writing a story in your life means that your story will be connected to God's word.

The longer your story or stories are written by God the more you will see your stories intertwined with the truth of God's word. God's thoughts, his heart, his actions, his truth, his power becoming your story.

5. In Mary's story we saw that the main emphasis of the story was about Jesus. God writing a story in your life means that the emphasis is going to be all about Jesus. The focus, the main emphasis will be on Jesus, not you.

6. We saw in Mary's story that what God accomplished only happened by the Holy Spirit and the power of the Most High. God writing a story in your life means that what God wants to write in your life will only happen by the "Holy Spirit and the power of the Most High". If this statement was not true, then anyone could write their own story. But if you are going to have God's story in your life, what God does in your story will only be by the "Holy Spirit and the power of the most high".

7. In Mary's story it cost her something in the immediate... it cost her and her families honor, their reputation. That was hard. God writing a story in your life means that it may cost you something as well, and it may be hard. For the most part we do not know in advance the path God takes us on, nor do they know that path's degree of difficulty. But what we can be sure of, if God takes you on that path, you can be sure that God's covenant faithfulness will see you thru the hard and difficult.

8. We saw Gabriel encourage Mary by telling her about God's faithfulness to Elizabeth. God writing a story in our life means that God will provide you confirmation of his faithfulness to carry you through by you seeing and hearing other people's stories that covenant faithful God is writing in their lives. Church family your testimonies and stories matter! Your story may be what someone else like Mary or me need to hear.

9. In Mary's story we saw Gabriel tell Mary "For nothing is impossible for God". God writing a story in your life also means that "nothing is impossible for God". Nothing!

10. And just like in Mary's story, God writing a story in your life means that the story only happens because you chose to be a bond-servant of the Lord, you surrendering to the LORD and the story God wants to write in your life. This surrender is an active choice to trust God's covenant faithfulness as he writes a story in your life.

Knowing now what we know it means for God to write a story in our life - that brings us to a place of choice. Will you be like Mary and actively chose to be a bond-servant of the Lord and trust God and his covenant faithfulness in writing a story in your life?



Will you be like Mary and actively
chose to be a bond-servant of the
Lord and trust God and his
covenant faithfulness in writing a
story in your life?



SUPPLEMENTAL

NOTES:

Luke 1:26 Elizabeth's name "Elisheva" means "My God is My Oath". "Sheva" may be a subtle link to Abraham and Isaac's miraculous story who both named a well Beir-Sheva celebrating God's faithfulness.

Zechariah's name means "Yahweh Remembers" or "The LORD has remembered." Both his name and Elizabeth's names fit together in Mary's story where God remembers and is faithful to fulfill his covenant promises.

Luke 1:33 mentions Jacob. Mary's story further confirms the connection to the promised son of the covenant by mentioning Jacob, the father of Israel, who is the son of Isaac.

Luke 1:46-55 Mary's change in perspective. After Mary surrendered to God and God writing the story that he wanted to write in Mary's life, a beautiful thing happened. Mary was given a new perspective from which to see her story. Mary was able to look on all that God was sending her, doing to her, accomplishing through her, as hard and confusing, and disturbing and scary it was, with a different perspective. Because God was writing the story, Mary could look on her story through the lens of what God was doing in the world – a much bigger story. Her new perspective is evident in the song Mary wrote in **Luke 1:46-55** called "Mary's Magnificat" where Mary praises the LORD and talks about eternity.

What is the link between w Mary's pregnancy story, Elizabeth's pregnancy story and Sarah's pregnancy story?

As we have seen in **Luke 1:26-38** there are clear links in Mary's story to the Genesis accounts of Sarah and her miraculous pregnancy and birth of Isaac. So let's contrast Sarah son Isaac, son of the promise, who came from a miraculous pregnancy (Sarah was elderly) Isaac the son of promise – heir of the covenant -to Mary's son Jesus, also a promised son, who came from a miraculous pregnancy – but different miracle because Mary was not elderly but a virgin.

Now we have to go back to **Genesis 3:15** to see the framework for this comparison. The question of **Genesis 3:15** that the rest of the Old Testament pursues answering is "Who will be the seed of the woman that will crush the head of the serpent?" The successive stories in Genesis of the seed of woman succumbing to the deception of the serpent, failing over and over, generation by generation, show us that the seed of the woman who will crush the head of the serpent was clearly NOT any of the characters in the Genesis stories. Not Seth, not Noah... Noah, his sons, not Abraham, nor Isaac, Jacob, his sons, nor was it David the mightiest warrior King ever, or David's son Solomon the wisest man ever, etc... And that holds true of all Old Testament biblical characters all the way leading up to including Elizabeth's son John. None of them were the seed of the woman that could crush the head of the serpent. So who would that be?

If there was going to be a "seed of the woman who would crush the head of the serpent" it is clear it would have to be a "different" lineage.

In **Luke 1** Mary is presented having a miraculous pregnancy as a virgin in contrast to Elizabeth whose miraculous old age pregnancy is in the likeness of Sarah's miraculous old age pregnancy. Here's the thing, Sarah's seed created by the union of male and female (**Genesis 1:27**) never produced the snake crusher. So the contrast that is presented between Elizabeth, elderly and pregnant, and Mary, a pregnant virgin, is important. This contrast means that the son born to virgin Mary was going to be and needed to be different from all the son's born in the lineage of Abraham and everyone after.

SUPPLEMENTAL

NOTES:

The difference in the lineage of Abraham happened through the virgin birth and the conception by Holy Spirit. This miraculous conception resulted in Jesus being Holy (**Luke 1:35**) Which then in his holiness made it possible for Jesus, YHWH incarnate, to not succumb to the serpent - **Luke 4**. Jesus then went on to be the seed of the woman who will crush the head of the serpent through the cross and through the resurrection.