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19 The angel answered and said to him, "I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news. 20 "And behold, you shall be silent and unable to speak until the day when these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their proper time."

21 The people were waiting for Zacharias, and were wondering at his delay in the temple. 22 But when he came out, he was unable to speak to them; and they realized that he had seen a vision in the temple; and he kept making signs to them, and remained mute. 23 When the days of his priestly service were ended, he went back home.

24 After these days Elizabeth his wife became pregnant, and she kept herself in seclusion for five months, saying, 25 "This is the way the Lord has dealt with me in the days when He looked with favor upon me, to take away my disgrace among men."

26 Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city in Galilee called Nazareth, 27 to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the descendants of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. 28 And coming in, he said to her, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." 29 But she was very perplexed at this statement, and kept pondering what kind of salutation this was. 30 The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; for you have found favor with God.

Last week we stopped sort of mid story. We considered fairly carefully what the angel announced to Zacharias. Incredible revelation and incredible joy! A son! And not just any son, but a miracle son who would come in the spirit and power of Elijah.

He it is who would precede the Messiah of Israel. Let's just quickly read through the angel's words to Zacharias for a quick review to set the context; *“Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your petition has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will give him the name John. 14“You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth. 15“For he will be great in the sight of the Lord; and he will drink no wine or liquor, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit while yet in his mother’s womb. 16“And he will turn many of the sons of Israel back to the Lord their God. 17“It is he who will go as a forerunner before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, TO TURN THE HEARTS OF THE FATHERS BACK TO THE CHILDREN, and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous, so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”*

A son. Joy. Gladness. Rejoicing at his birth by many. He will be great. In God's sight. Filled with the Holy Spirit. And he will be the forerunner who will prepare the nation to receive their Messiah by national repentance.

But we did not get to Zacharias response to all this good news. He's speechless with ecstatic joy . . . right.

No that was his problem. He'll be speechless later, but his immediate response is; I need some proof. I think you must have me confused with a different Zacharias and Elizabeth.

It's a bit comical for all of us with 20-20 hindsight who have never had an angel show up and speak to us. We would never pull this blunder. Or would we.

18 Zacharias said to the angel, “How will I know this for certain? For I am an old man and my wife is advanced in years.”

How will I know this for certain? Let me translate. I'm not convinced. I hear the words. But; how can it happen. I happen to know it's impossible.

The single greek word translated as the phrase *know-for-certain* in the new american standard translations text is ginosko. And it is the word that describes experiential first hand knowing.

It's the same word we'll see for example in Lk 1:34, "*And Mary [a virgin] said to the angel, 'How will this be since I do not know (ginōskō = sexual intimacy) a man?'*"

Paul uses the word in 1 Cor. 4:19 when he tells the corinthians who have a false leader who is boasting that he's the real deal and don't listen to Paul, and Paul writes to them; *18 Some of you have become arrogant, as if I were not coming to you. 19 But I will come to you shortly, if the Lord is willing, and then I will **find out** not only what these arrogant people are saying, but what power they have. 20 For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power....*

There the word is translated; *to find out*. It's experiential knowing as opposed to head knowledge.

What Zacharias is saying is How will this be possible for me. How can this translate from words into experience. Because, we've got a problem. I'm old. And Elizabeth, she's not so young anymore either.

And when we were young, we never could make it happen. Now age has complicated the process even beyond the original problem.

So Zacharias is saying, I hear the words, but I don't think it's

possible. Experientially.

His question is a little different than Mary's where she uses the same word. Mary is like, umm, I'm not married, and I know it takes 2 to have a child. How exactly is this going to work. She never questions that it is. She is only curious about the mechanics.

Zacharias on the other hand is telling the angel, this is impossible for me and Elizabeth to experience because we're old and there are other limiting factors. I know it's impossible.

Wrong thing to say to an angel. When an angel has been dispatched to give you the direct revelation of what God is going to do, it's never the right answer to say, sorry, this isn't going to happen.

That is a conflict between what God said, and what you think you know. I have been chuckling at the angels response for weeks. Think you want to have an argument with an angel? Think again. The angel is just the messenger. In reality you're arguing with God, who sent the angel.

Zacharias gets a firm response; *19 The angel answered and said to him, "I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news.*

Bam. Still want to argue about what you think is impossible?

When people have a dis-agreement, a conflict, and they argue about what's going to happen, there is always rank involved. Authority and submission. We encounter that throughout life.

I was arguing with my boss about something one day, and since I'm pretty pig headed, he finally said, You WILL do it, with the

unsaid being, or you won't work here anymore. He pulled rank. I did what he said.

And that's what's going on here. Zacharias says; How will I ginosko this. How will I experience this, because, you don't understand, we're old and I happen to know it's physically impossible on several levels.

And Gabriel pulls rank on him. You want to argue about this? *“I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news.*

We could laugh and say, never argue with an angel, but that wouldn't quite be correct. Because Paul will say, after the gospel has been revealed, the "once for all delivered to the saints faith" as James would call it, Paul tells the Galatians in 1:8

8 But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, let him be accursed!

Joseph Smith should have argued with whatever angel it was that gave him a gospel different from Paul's gospel written for us, for all time. We do argue with angels. Fallen angels. Demons. False gospels.

The written Word of God, once for all delivered to the saints, trumps even angels. But in this case, Zacharias was outranked because this gospel was in the beginning process of being revealed, God had sent His messenger, and Zacharias didn't believe the message.

Zacharias needs a little more proof. How will I know?? Here's how;

20 “And behold, you shall be silent and unable to speak until the day when these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their proper time.”

Gabriel says, I'm going to solve a couple of problems. You think you need a miracle so you'll believe? Here's a miracle. I'm going to zip your mouth shut before you say anything else even dumber.

It was a case where being dumb solved the problem of being dumb. Think about that for a minute. It's like the scene in the movie Beetlejuice where the lady has to say beetlejuice 3 times to undo something the guy is doing and she says it twice and Beetlejuice puts a zipper on her mouth with padlocks.

Didn't see that movie?? If I keep coming up with dumb illustrations maybe it will happen to me. Anyways, Zachariah got his miracle, and apparently he believed Gabriels words which were in effect, God's words. Gabriel just being the messenger.

21 The people were waiting for Zacharias, and were wondering at his delay in the temple. 22 But when he came out, he was unable to speak to them; and they realized that he had seen a vision in the temple; and he kept making signs to them, and remained mute.

He was in the holy place longer than what would have been ordinary or necessary for that task, and the people were curious about it. What happened to Zack? He should have come out by now.

And when he does come out, something miraculous has occurred. He can't speak. He's become a mute. And a game of charades begins where Zacharias is trying to relay what has happened inside the room

An angel. A vision. A message. A son. A baby. An important baby! I wonder if it occurred to them that this was the first visitation, the first miracle, the first evidence of a silent God in 400 years?

And I love the next verse. Our work ethic these days is sort of hyper-reactionary compared to this next statement. One little thing out of the ordinary happens and we stand down, go home, big emergency.

23 When the days of his priestly service were ended he went back home.

A significant miracle has occurred. Quick, somebody call the publisher. We need to take this guy on the road and get this trumped up enough so that we can get a good price for the movie rights.

Not in Israel. Zacharias simply goes back to work and finishes the assigned days of his priestly service. Elizabeth can find out when Zacharias gets back home.

They're hillbillies. They live about 40 miles south of Jerusalem in the hill country of Hebron. So it wasn't like Zacharias could text Elizabeth and let her know what just happened. He waited for his service period to be completed, and then he would have walked 40 miles back to Hebron.

24 After these days Elizabeth his wife became pregnant, and she kept herself in seclusion for five months,

Elizabeth and Zacharias were class acts. We are told they were righteous in the sight of the Lord.

Most commentators simply surmise that the 5 months of seclusion are mostly because Elizabeth isn't the type to speak boastfully about what God is accomplishing having chosen her and Zacharias. She didn't go up and down the block bragging.

After 5 months, things get pretty apparent. You can't hide what's happening then. Elizabeth would have known the story of Manoah and his wife, the parents of Samson, and how the angel specifically told them that he would be a nazirite from birth.

Judges 13:3 The Angel of the LORD appeared to the woman and said to her, "It is true that you are barren and have no children; but you will conceive and give birth to a son. 4 Now please be careful not to drink wine or strong drink, and not to eat anything unclean. 5 For behold, you will conceive and give birth to a son. And no razor shall come over his head, because the boy will be a Nazirite, set apart to God from the womb, and he will begin the deliverance of Israel from the hands of the Philistines."

The angel gave them specifics even during the pregnancy to not do anything that was ceremonially unclean, and to have no alcohol or strong drink. Elizabeth would certainly have been adhering to that same instruction.

Elizabeth seems to go inward with her joy in the Lord, not outward.

saying, 25 "This is the way the Lord has dealt with me in the days when He looked with favor upon me, to take away my disgrace among men."

There's something classy about that. If Zacharias and Elizabeth had gone on the road show circuit like we see in today's evangelicalism, it diverts glory from God who does the miracle, to

the recipients instead

Elizabeth and Zacharias wait quietly for God to reveal this miracle child and glorify himself. Elizabeth doesn't make it known that her stigma of being childless has ceased . . . miraculously.

26 Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city in Galilee called Nazareth, 27 to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the descendants of David; and the virgin's name was Mary.

Now in the sixth month from when? Six months into what God is doing. Six months since the 400 year silence was broken and God again visited His people, Israel. Six months since God had sent Gabriel to announce that the forerunner of the Messiah would be born miraculously to a childless and barren couple.

Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city in Galilee called Nazareth.

Nazareth has a lot in common with Tonopah. It lies up the slope from the sea of Galilee. It lies equi-distant from the mediteranean sea and the sea of galilee.

And at this time in history, Nazareth was a backwater place of no particular importance. A place in the dry hills. Like Tonopah.

John the apostle begins the narrative of Jesus interacting with His disciples in chapter one this way;

44 Now Philip was from Bethsaida, of the city of Andrew and Peter. 45 Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found Him of whom Moses in the Law and also the Prophets wrote— Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." 46 Nathanael said to him,

“Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?”

Nathaniel wasn't being cheeky in John 1 when he asks; Can any good thing come out of Nazareth. The chances that anyone important could have originated in Nazareth are similar to the surprise we would have if some world shatteringly important person came from Tonopah.

So, fasten your seat belts. God loves to do mighty works in the most out of the way places.

Gabriel is sent to Nazareth and I'm sure he probably had to look it up on Google earth. Where is Nazareth?

27 to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the descendants of David; and the virgin's name was Mary.

This is our introduction to the mother of Jesus. She lived in Nazareth. She would have been a teenager during this time of engagement to the man Joseph.

We are told that Joseph was in the kingly line of David. So is Mary.

Matthew's gospel is Joseph centric as to lineage. Luke's gospel is Mary centric.

The two genealogies split and go different directions, because Luke is all about Mary and Matthew is all about the line of Jewish kings.

Also, take note, we have already been told two times that Mary is a virgin, and a bit later she will express that again in terms that are impossible to say, *Oh, that just means a young woman.*

In Israel at this time, you didn't get to pick your mate, it was done for you, and engagement was a promise of a future marriage that lasted a year or more. During that span, the girl is considered as married, she is the responsibility and under the care of the bride groom, but the marriage isn't consummated.

We do it just the opposite these days. I won't say any more about that, except maybe in my old age, I see the wisdom of how it was accomplished in Israel.

28 And coming in, he said to her, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you."

There is a sermon just in those words. But you need a better preacher!

Every human, every created person, will have an audience with God at some point. It's all over the Bible. God is judge, we are judged.

That is unavoidable.

Paul tells us; 9 Therefore God exalted Him to the highest place and gave Him the name above all names, 10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father....

With that unavoidable truth in place then, the most important business every person can ever conduct is to ask, how is it that Mary was able to be greeted with news from the God of creation that begins with the words; *"Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you."*

And the greek words hold a clue for us. *Chaire kecharitōmenē,*

which means; Greetings you who are favored with grace.

Mary and Joseph are classy folks. We'll see that over and over, sweet people. But, they are Adams children, same as every one else. They are sinners, like us.

The angel Gabriels greeting is explicit with the idea of grace. Unmerited favor that God showers upon His elect. We are sinners, but God pours out his favor, his unmerited favor on people who deserve wrath. We call that grace. A little acrostic I've never forgotten. G_R_A_C_E God's Riches At Christs Expense. It's a good one.

Mary had a heart of submission and love for God. And God favored her. She was like Daniel in ch. 10 when the angel visits him and says: "*O man of high esteem, do not be afraid. Peace be with you; take courage and be courageous!*"

What would it be like to have an angel tell you that you are of precious value to God, and He is with you, He is on your side. And yet on this side of the cross, the positional truth, even if it isn't fully practical truth yet, the positional truth is that we are IN Christ.

Paul says, *for your life is hidden with Christ, in God*. I am in Christ, and whatever favor God has for His own Son, is also mine. I am hidden in Him.

And just here we have to stop and embrace a controversy thanks to our catholic brethren.

The best of the oldest manuscripts discovered after the latin vulgate version do not have the words *Blessed art thou among women*.

Now that was true! No one will argue that, but it isn't in the original manuscripts. It was added later. Why?

If you look at the verb tenses and meanings of the original words, it's clear that Mary, like all of us, is the recipient of favor. The recipient of grace.

But Rome has built an idolatrous religion out of her, saying that this text makes Mary a deity, and that she is the dispenser of grace.

That isn't honest. It isn't here. Mary is wonderful, a special person, but she is special because God sovereignly chose her to belong to Him, and for the favored task of bringing the Son of God into this world.

Mary is special in just the same way that every recipient of God's grace is special. He sovereignly chooses us, and He declares us righteous. We are favored by grace. God pours out His grace, His righteousness on us, in His Son, and Mary states in her magnificat that she is dependent on the Saviour, just like every other fallen person.

Mariology is idolatry. It takes eyes off of the real Saviour and puts them on an idol instead.

Mary was indeed Most blessed among women, because she obediently submitted to the task of bringing the Son of God into this world.

Mary will stand with us, one of the redeemed, having been purchased out of this world, like every other believer. But she uniquely is the only one who can say, God favored me with the most blessed privilege of His birth. That truly is special. But she will stand with all the saints and glorify God, like every one of us,

as the recipient of unmerited favor.

She stands in the same grace as you do, and I do, purchased by her own Son, which is unique to her alone.

29 But she was very perplexed at this statement, and kept pondering what kind of salutation this was. 30 The angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary; for you have found favor with God.

Our natural reaction to miraculous things that happen outside of our little sphere of normal consciousness is fear. This is the true paranormal. The stuff on TV is phony. It exploits a real interest that humans have to see and experience the world beyond the world of our 5 senses.

In a way, all of that TV baloney cheapens the fact that there really is a spirit world with angels and demons. And when Gabriel shows up, trust me, you would experience fear.

Not much we can do about that. But beyond that, the words you want to hear are very simple. *“Do not be afraid, Mary; for you have found favor with God.*

You can put your name in that sentence where Mary's name is. This is what you need to hear. You have nothing to be afraid of, *insert your name*, for you have found favor with God.

And we can find favor with God, when we trust in His Son, Jesus to forgive our sins and to be Lord of us. Mary's secret is in vs. 38. We'll look at it again next week. But just quickly, this is where that all important favor is rooted deeply.

38 And Mary said, “Behold, the slave of the Lord; may it be done to me according to your word.” And the angel departed from her.

The doulos of the Lord. Slave is the right word. He owns those who find His favor. Mary is in submission to the one who owns her and loves her. She says, like any slave would say to a master, may it be done to me according to your word.

What a sweet slavery. How fabulous to be owned by the one who spoke the worlds into place, and who directs His favor to His own.