

KINGTON BAPTIST CHURCH ONLINE NOTICE BOARD – 57

Then Mary said to the angel, 'How shall this be, since I do not know a man?'
(Luke 1.34)

The angel's response to the question Mary asked was altogether different from the rebuke he gave to Zechariah after his question. The reason for the different response is that the two questions were entirely different. Zechariah's question revealed his unbelief; Mary's question came from her believing consternation. Gabriel's reply and Mary's final response, her complete submission to the word of God, help us understand her question.

Mary's question reflected her searching and meditative nature. She pondered on the meaning of Gabriel's words and of God's miraculous purpose in her life. In the future Mary would remember all that was said and seen by her; she would gather these things together and ponder them in her heart. Comparing one word with another, one event with another, she would meditate on these things and what they might mean.

Mary's question is an indication of how well she understood the angel, and that she also understood the birth he announced would be soon – before she would be married to Joseph. She understood, however dimly at this time, that this birth would be a supernatural birth of a supernatural child. She understood that it was to be a birth unlike any other birth. She understood it was to be a virgin birth – but, unsurprisingly, she was unable to imagine how this would come about.

Her question already recognised the answer that Gabriel was about to give her, that with God nothing would be impossible. At this time she had no understanding of how this miracle-birth would occur but already believed implicitly all that Gabriel was telling her.

'The youthful village girl, engaged in her humdrum daily duties, shows a faith far more responsive to this far more startling message than the aged priest Zechariah in the holy place of the temple in the atmosphere of the sacred presence.'

Mary had been assured by the archangel that the Lord was *with* her – and that he was *with* her in remarkable ways. The words – *the Lord is with you* – take us to the heart of this mysterious meeting of Gabriel with Mary. How wonderfully the Lord was *with* Mary – and in so many ways! This *witness* of God and his people is the heart of the whole experience of God's grace in our lives. God had been *with* Mary throughout her life, in the preparation of her fullness of grace. God was *with* her as Gabriel stood before her – Gabriel stood in the presence of God. God was *with* her as the Holy Spirit came upon her, graciously overshadowed her – bringing about the conception of

the Christ child, as light passes through glass. God was *with* her in the life she conceived, the eternal God, God the Son was *within* her.

This meeting between Mary and Gabriel has another depth of meaning: it is the first revelation of the triune face of God in human history. It was now that the angel Gabriel, who stood in the presence of God, announced to Mary not only the miracle of the incarnation but the mystery of the Trinity; he revealed to Mary the 'Christian name' of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Trinity was with her, and in these moments revealed himself to her. This is of momentous significance. This was another unique privilege given to Mary at this time, confirming and sealing her uniquely privileged position in God's purposes of revelation and salvation.

Gabriel unfolds these truths to Mary in three stages: i] *the Lord is with you – you have found favour with God*; ii] *you will conceive and bring forth a son, he shall be called Son of the Highest*; iii] *the Holy Spirit will come upon you*. Each stage in the unfolding of this deepest of all mysteries followed the believing response Mary made. In each case her response opened up the disclosure of a new truth. 'This trinitarian revelation is not only inseparably interwoven with the Son's incarnation: it is also inseparable from the obedient response of the praying believer.' (Hans Urs von Balthasar) Truth is made known to the mind that is turned prayerfully to God.

Gabriel speaks in turn of each Person of the Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He tells Mary that each divine Person will be *with* her in three entirely different ways. But he also reveals to Mary *the one single purpose* of their united action. This is the very nature and activity of the Holy Trinity. Through this miraculous thing God would do with Mary she is drawn into intimate relationship with the three divine Persons *individually* and with the Trinity in *unity*. Through the grace of God, Mary is *with* God, held *within* the circle and fellowship of the Trinity. Mary experiences a fulfilment of the promise of grace and blessing given to all who believe – that we shall be forever *with* the Lord!

Jesus answered and said, 'Anyone who loves me, keeps my word; and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.'
(John 14.23)

The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one – I in them and you in me. (John 17.22)