

## CHRISTMAS – ARE YOU READY??

PCF, 15 December 2002

### INTRODUCTION

Only 10 days to go – are you ready??

- Shopping, food, presents, cards ...
- Or are you really ready? – prepared spiritually, full of faith, looking to God, aware of true meaning, ready to celebrate ...

What to talk about in this period just before Christmas?

Tell two stories, of two people in NT just before the first Christmas – see what we can learn from them as we wait for the 2000<sup>th</sup> Christmas!

### STORY 1, PART 1 – HOPELESS OLD MAN

Read Luke 1:5-25

Old man, barren wife, no heir, but serving God, both faithful and righteous

Angel comes to promise the impossible – “You will have a son...”

His reaction : “How shall I know this?”

Understandable – I’m too old, it’s too late

But overtones of unbelief –

Greek *kata ti gnosomai touto* = Where’s my evidence, prove it to me.

Struck dumb as punishment

### STORY 2, PART 1 – HELPLESS YOUNG WOMAN

Read Luke 1:26-38

Engaged teenager, powerless, nobody in society

Angel comes to promise the impossible – “You will have a son...”

Her reaction : “How shall this be?”

Also understandable – I’m too young, it’s too soon

But underlying faith –

Greek *pos estai touto* = How can this happen?

(i.e. she assumes it will, just not sure how)

“Let it happen to me just like you said”

Common themes and structure in two stories

[Poem “The Offer” by Mark Greene, Mary’s response]

## DIVERSION

Evidence in these two stories to indicate Jesus was born in October, i.e. Christmas is 3 months late.

- I Chronicles 24:3-19 - 24 divisions of priests, each taking 2 weeks to serve in temple
- Luke 1:5 – Zechariah belongs to division of Abijah
- I Chron 24:8 – Abijah are eighth, i.e. end of month 4
- Luke 1:24 – Elizabeth conceived after end of his period of service in temple, i.e. start of month 5
- Luke 1:26 – Gabriel visits Mary in 6<sup>th</sup> month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy, i.e. before end of month 10
- Mary conceives, Jesus is born 9 months later, i.e. before end of month 7
- Jewish year starts with Passover in month 1 (Leviticus 23:5), which is our April
- End of month 7 is therefore end of October, i.e. feast of Tabernacles (Leviticus 23:34)

Does this suggest that Jesus was born at feast of Tabernacles?? Is this significant?!!

Back to the stories...!!!

## STORIES 1 & 2, PART 2

Both stories have a common structure, they start the same :

- Angel visits (Gabriel), promises the impossible

Very different reactions

- Zechariah reacts with unbelief, Mary responds with faith

But note – both stories have same ending

- A baby is born : John (Luke 1:57-63) and Jesus (Luke 2:1-7, 21)
- In line with God’s promise and purpose, as a result of his miraculous intervention

God is sovereign, his word brings results, sometimes even despite our reactions

Read Isaiah 55:10-11

## APPLICATION – HOW ABOUT YOU?

In this pre-Christmas period, there are some questions for us to consider :

- Is God speaking to you? (YES!!) Maybe not through an angel, but definitely in some way
- Is he promising something you think is impossible? Saying he will bring something to birth through you (like Z) or in you (like M)? Something which would require his miraculous intervention to make it happen?
- How will you react or respond?
  - Like Zechariah, disqualify yourself, unbelief?
  - Or like Mary, open for God to do a miracle, expressing faith?
- Are you too old/too young? Can God speak to someone over 70, or to a teenager? Maybe you don't know how it could ever happen? But it doesn't depend on you – trust in God's ability, his sovereignty, his power to fulfil his promise, his will & his word.

Let's respond like Mary : I am your servant – let it happen to me just as you say.

## PRAYER