

# Behold the Wonder



**Bro Kory Cunningham**

**Luke 1**

Some of you are so grateful that we are singing Christmas music, and some of you cannot wait until we stop singing Christmas music. There are two camps — love it or hate it. But I have noticed there are really three groups of people — there are those who love Christmas, those who hate Christmas, and there are those who tolerate Christmas. You might not know which group you are in but your friends know! Those who love Christmas absolutely love it. You are the one who plays Christmas music before Thanksgiving. You sing Christmas music and you just love it. Hallmark is always on, the tree is up before anybody else's, and you have put lights all over the house. You are already thinking about when things will go on sale at Walmart because you are going to buy more lights for next year. Everywhere you go, you are wishing people a Merry Christmas and it's December 2<sup>nd</sup>! It's the most wonderful time of the year. You give cookies, you bake stuff — you love Christmas. And then, there are some of you who just hate Christmas, not that you hate Jesus being born, but you just hate the whole celebration. You think it's commercialized, it's all about money; it's just it's a useless celebration that our culture made. You know Jesus probably born in the spring, so why are we even celebrating Jesus'

birth right now? You have all these conspiracies that Santa is an anagram for — you know what that's about — everywhere you go you are just like, let me tell you the truth, it's conspiracy, this is what's really happening. You don't like it at all. You tell your wife you wish we just never open any presents and we aren't getting the kids anything. If we do, it's going to be feeding a goat in another country or something; that's going to be our present to everybody. You are just revolting on the whole Christmas. You think every Sunday should be a celebration about the resurrection. You can't wait to get through it. Then, there are others who just tolerate it. You think it is what it is — it's Christmas, I'll wrap some presents, I'll show up to Grandma's house, eat some food, but I could kind of take it or leave it. So you probably find yourself in one of those categories, right? If you are sitting beside someone who has a Christmas sweater on, you know where they are at, right? If you get dirty looks for your Christmas sweater, you know where they are at.

But here is what I want this morning...no matter which group you are in, if you love it, hate it, or tolerate it, I want us to walk through Luke chapter 1 and let's take just the season out of the question, and let's all marvel for a moment. I want us to just wonder...that sense of how can this be? How did this happen? Is it really true that God became a man? I want us to wonder at the incarnation of Jesus Christ and here's what I hope it leads you to — no matter where you are in that camp, I pray that this week you will just have a week of wonder at the incarnation of Christ and you will worship the Lord this week, thankful for what He did. I just want to read the definition of wonder in case you don't know what it means to wonder. It is, "A feeling of surprise mingled with admiration." I love that. It's like surprise and worship. You are both surprised and you are admiring what has happened, and it's caused by something beautiful, unexpected, unfamiliar, and inexplicable. So you can't even explain it, you aren't even sure, you know what it is but it's this beautiful, surprise thing that you can't get over. You can't understand fully, but you just worship. That's what I want us to feel all the way through Luke chapter 1. And then next week, come back and in Luke chapter 2, we are going to see the birth of Christ. I want us just to wonder at this miracle that happened — God became a man to

save you from your sins. Let's read verse 35, chapter 1. This is an angel speaking to Mary.

## **Scripture**

***"And the angel answered her, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God.'"***

So again, the birth narrative is very familiar to us. You are probably going to read as you open Christmas presents. Sometimes because we are familiar we sort of yawn, but don't let your familiarity of the story cause you to yawn, let it call you to that mingling of surprise and admiration, that you just can't get over what God has done for you in this birth narrative. But this birth story starts on the first part of the chapter with an anti-birth story. In the anti-birth story, there are two people named Zechariah and Elizabeth and Elizabeth is barren. She can't have a child. So then, the first wonder that we are going to see is a barren woman is going to give birth to a son. That should cause us to wonder a little bit and we are going to see why that is true.

We are going to set this up from verses 5–7, "In the days of Herod, king of Judea there was a priest named Zechariah, of the division of Abijah. And he had a wife from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. And they were both righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord. But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were advanced in years." So we have so we have a time stamp, it's in the days of Herod, king of Judea, so this is not a myth or fable. This is rooted in real history. This is Herod the Great, a very famous ruler. He was given the title as the king by the Romans, so he is a ruler over Judea, given authority by the Romans. He's building a lot of stuff; he rebuilds the temple. Herod the Great was not a very great guy. It is said he had murdered some of his wives and so he's got some problems.

You have a priest named Zechariah and he has a wife, and the Bible says they are righteous people. In other words, they are they are following the Lord. They are obeying his commandments. When they mess up, they are making sacrifices. They are doing the right things before the Lord. But then

it says Elizabeth was barren. We know she's not barren because of some sin or some cursing, because she's righteous and she's walking humbly before the Lord. She hasn't done anything wrong. This takes us back to Old Testament stories, right? We have Abraham and Sarah, they are advanced in years, and Sarah can't give birth. So there's a promise that she will have a baby and but she can't because she's barren. We see women throughout the Bible who are barren. Think about Rachel who was barren and Samson's mom was barren. Somebody has pointed out that anytime you see a barren woman in the Bible just wait, because God's about to do something. If there is a barren one mentioned in Scripture, just hold on, remember her name, something is about to happen. Hannah was barren, and then she had Samuel!

So the plot has been set up. But just notice where we are in the storyline in Luke's gospel — we are in right before Jesus's birth. If you go to the last book in the Old Testament, Malachi, that's the last time that God has spoken by a prophet and we have had four hundred years of silence. For four hundred years God's people have been going to the temple, they have been obeying the commandments, they have been trying to walk with the Lord, but God has not spoken to them. He has not shown up with the prophet. They have got all these promises in the Old Testament that God is going to send a redeemer, a king is coming, and they have been waiting for four hundred years. Generation after generation, they have told their kids the stories and they have died. They have told their kids the promises and they have died. Those kids told their kids the promises and they have died. So it's four hundred years of God not speaking and now we find that a priest has a wife and the wife can't give birth because she's barren and they are both old. They are both past the time of childbearing. So that's the plot.

Now, if you look in verses 8–17 we find Zechariah serving in his priestly duty. He comes with all of the other priests and they draw lots for who is going to go into the temple. His lot is drawn and he gets to go into the temple and light the altar of incense. This is a great moment he finally gets to do. He walks in and lights the altar of incense, and he has this moment where he's offering prayers and all of his guys are outside offering prayers.

While this prayer is happening, all of a sudden, in this space an angel shows up on the right side of the altar of incense and says behold, your prayers have been answered — your wife, Elizabeth, is going to bear a son. We can presume he was praying for Israel, probably praying for redemption, praying for the God promises, and then also maybe...*and God, could you give us a baby because my wife is still barren?* knowing this is moment to pray in the temple. And the angel shows up and says your prayers have been answered, your wife is going to give birth. So, the first thing we should just behold is a barren woman who can't have kids is going to give birth. This is going to be an intervention of God in this couple's life.

What we see next is Zechariah doesn't show faith, but instead he doubts. In verses 18–25, we are going to see he doubts, he's cursed, and then Elizabeth conceives a child. The angel says your prayers are answered, your wife is going to have a little boy, and his name is going to be John. Remember, God hasn't spoken four hundred years when this angel shows up and gives revelation to Zechariah, the priest in the temple. This is a moment of all moments. He has heard stories but he's never encountered something quite like this, and Zechariah's response to this angel is...*How can this be? No, this can't happen because my wife is barren and we are both pretty old.* His response to this revelation is that would be impossible, can't happen. You would want to just take a moment and be like...*Zechariah, you are a priest, right? You have read the older testament you know how things work. When God shows up and says something to a barren woman, God can do miracles!* I mean, he's been praying for a baby and the angel says you got your prayer answered and he thinks it can't be. Isn't that like us sometimes? We pray for things and we get answers and then we think that can't be God; it has to be something else.

So here you have an angel on the side of the altar saying God is answering your prayers and here's the answer — your wife is going to have a baby boy, and Zechariah says how can this be, how will I know? I love Gabriel's response. If you look at verse 19, Gabriel's answer is "I am Gabriel." That's his response. In other words...*I am an angel sent from the Lord, Zechariah, how many times this happened to you? It's been four hundred years and*

*I'm showing up to you in the temple to answer your prayer, and you are asking, are you sure? This should have given it away — I'm an angel who you are afraid of because I can kill all of you — I'm a being from Heaven, this is your clue. I'm an angel from God and I'm saying it's going to happen.* Do you know what he should have said? *Oh, I have never seen an angel before so, I'm going to go and take the angel's word and believe what God has just said.* But because he disbelieves, he's actually cursed, and Gabriel tells him he is not going to be able to talk until the baby is born. And so he walks out, he can't talk, presumably he can't hear because they have to get his attention a lot. Everybody knows something happened in the temple — he saw a vision, he saw something, and there was this murmuring around the temple. Something happened but they weren't sure what it was because he can't talk about it.

Then Zechariah goes home, and Scripture says that his wife becomes pregnant. For five months, she hides out. She hides out because it's so overwhelming, it's so wonderful, so marvelous, so unexplainable, and so extraordinary, such a miracle that she can't quite go into public yet and say, "I'm pregnant!" It would be like, "That's cool. How did that happen? Are you sure?" "Yup, watch my baby bump." She is just so overwhelmed. Now, we should take a moment and just wonder; that mingle of surprise and admiration, surprise and worship of a God who can take a barren womb and bring life as part of his redemptive story. We see this wonder of a barren woman is going to give birth to a son!

But then, we see a greater wonder proclaimed — a virgin will give birth to a son. I love how Luke is telling the story...*I know you guys were like, "What?" when I told you a barren woman who is old is going to give birth to a son. Now, I'm going to tell you a virgin is going to give birth to a son.* There is a greater wonder that is happening through the virgin birth. Look with me in verse 26, "In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth." Now the story is going to pick back up. Gabriel is going to visit another place and he goes to a city of Galilee named Nazareth. When we hear Nazareth, we think of course, that's where like Jesus' parents were from. We know Nazareth. We are familiar with that, but the people hearing the story when he said an angel's

going to leave God and come to Nazareth, they would be like, "Where? Where's that at?" They would have picked up their iPhone and put Nazareth in maps. And then, when it showed the coordinates, they would have said, "Are you sure? It looks like there is a gas station and maybe two houses; I think they got the wrong address. It doesn't sound like the right place." It would be like somebody living in Nashville gets this news that an angel shows up and goes to Hardin. They would say, "Where? "Hardin—it's in Kentucky." "Are you sure it's not somewhere close to Nashville or New York or LA?" Nazareth would have been like Hardin, it would have been a little tiny town that nobody goes to. You only make it there if you get lost and you ask for directions, and you leave and go somewhere else. This is Nazareth — Gabriel is going to leave God and head to this town of Nazareth.

There's going to be king born in Nazareth, and here's what it says in verse 27, "...to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary." Gabriel goes to this certain house and he goes to a certain woman who is betrothed to a certain man, and this woman is named Mary. Just in this one verse, we have heard twice that she's a virgin, so that's a really important thing that the angel wants us to know. God wants us to know that Mary was a virgin and she is betrothed to her soon-to-be husband, Joseph. It was like an engagement but a little bit stricter because it was a legally binding agreement. If you get engaged, you can break it off pretty easily. It's just the awkward — do I give you the ring back, or do I keep it? If you are betrothed to somebody, you actually have to divorce them to break it off. So, this means that they were committed to one another but they hadn't had the honeymoon yet. She is still a virgin and they haven't come together yet. Now, Joseph is of the house of David, and a hearer of this account knows who David is. We know who David is. He was the king of Israel, but not just a king of Israel, that king after God's own heart, that king who had promises. The promise is that he would have a son from his line who will be a forever king. So, Joseph is in that kingly line and he is betrothed to a woman named Mary.

Now we get into the details. We know that she is a virgin, and then we get some more information in verses 28–29, “And he came to her and said, ‘Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!’ But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be.” So we have the angel who greets her as “favored one,” which means graced one. In other words, the Lord is showing her grace, He is with her. Mary does the same thing Zechariah does. She is terrified! Whenever you see an angel show up in the Bible, people are never like, “Oh, you are cute.” They are like, “Oh, you could kill me! Am I dying?” She is terrified, and we should think about her being in absolute terror and horror. Imagine if during your quiet time, you said your prayers, you read your verse, then you open your eyes and an angel is before you saying I got a message for you. You would be like, “AHHH, get away!” We would be afraid. But the angel says to her, verse 30, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.” Again, that word favor is grace. It's not that Mary has been better and done better than all women, no the Lord has given her grace just like He gave Noah grace. Noah wasn't better than other males. No, God gave Noah grace, and He's given Mary grace. He's going to use her for a special purpose. She's been favored. She's been chosen by God. If you are a Christian, you have been chosen by God. You have been given favor. You have been given grace if you are a Christian.

Then, in verse 31, it says, “And behold...” Just behold this. I know we are kind of like, oh yeah this is that birth story — angel and virgin and all that stuff. Don't listen to it like that. Don't read it like that. Think about how she would have heard these next words. The angel has to say, behold, like get ready, buckle up — you are not going to believe this! He says, “And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call His name Jesus.” You are going to conceive in your womb and you are going to bear a son. You are going to name Him Jesus...Jesus, that Old Testament name Joshua. Joshua means savior, the one who's going to save — Jesus, the one who's going to save. But she's a virgin...so somehow, this little virgin girl is going to give birth to a son, and His name is going to be Jesus. She's trying to process this and the angel begins to tell us who Jesus is.



Let's just behold and wonder at who Jesus is for a moment. Notice in verse 32, "He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High." This baby is going to be called great and He's going to be the Son of the Most High. Now, think about how true that actually came to be that Jesus would be called great. We are a group of people that showed up on a Sunday morning (our day off of work for most of us), and we came here to sing songs to a guy named Jesus, who we believe is God. I mean, He's great. Two thousand years ago, a girl living in a gas station town with nothing going on, and God shows and said you are going to have a baby and the whole world's going to worship Him; He's going to be great. Two thousand years later, people are joining together and singing praises to His name! Why? Because He's the Son of the Most High. He's going to be a baby but He's not just any baby, He is the Son of the Most High God.

Notice what it goes on to say, "And the Lord God will give to Him the throne of His father David, and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His Kingdom there will be no end." So, this baby's name is Jesus, the one who saves. He's going to be great. He's going to be the Son of the Most High, and also He's going to have a throne, the throne of David, that promised throne all throughout the Old Testament. When He sits on that throne, nobody is coming after Him. He doesn't have a son that succeeds Him; He is the final king. He is the forever king who is going to reign forever over the house of Jacob, which is code for God's people. He's going to rule forever over God's people. That's who the baby in her womb is and that is who He is going to be.

So, take a little moment and just wonder at who Jesus is — He's God, King, ruler, He's great, He's the Son of the Most High, and He's born of a virgin, which makes Him like us but also unlike us, as we are going to see in just a moment. He can be the mediator who bridges the gap between God and man, but we just need to take a moment and wonder about this and also wonder what it means, because if Jesus is the forever King, that has implications for your life. See, a lot of people around this time, there's articles that come out, there's blog posts that comes out, there's documentaries on Netflix showing that Jesus really wasn't born of a virgin, that it's just kind of this myth; it's just a story that Christians made that up.

I think one of the reasons that people are so panicked over this idea of a virgin birth...well, I will just let N.T. Wright give his comments. He says this, "Perhaps, some of the fuss and bother about whether Mary could have been could have conceived Jesus without a human father is because deep down we don't want to think there might be a king who could claim this sort of absolute allegiance." See, we want to dismiss that whole virgin birth thing because if it's true, it has implications on our lives. If the virgin birth is true, if Jesus is God who became a man and He's the forever king over the forever universe, guess what that means for you and me? We have one option, and that is to follow and worship Him. The only response is obedience. So, if we don't want to obey Jesus as King of the universe, then we have to explain away why the virgin birth may or may not have really happened. If it didn't really happen, then Jesus is just a good guy, with good morals and good thoughts and we can follow Him or not. It doesn't really matter. Whatever you want to do is great for you. But if Jesus is God who came as a man and says repent and follow me, we have no other choice than to do so. We have to follow because He is the King of the universe who's going to rule over the universe forever — and that is exactly who Jesus is.

Now, Mary asked the obvious question. How is this going to work? Because we have seen several times that Mary is a virgin. And so Mary's putting together that this is not going to be a honeymoon baby but Joseph's going to be out of the picture. It says in verse 34, "And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?" So, she gets what he's saying to her that this is not going to happen with Joseph; it's going to happen apart from Joseph so there's going to be no dad. She is saying if it's only me, how can I have a baby? Now, first century people didn't know quite as much as we know about reproductive technologies but Mary knew that to have a baby it takes a mom and a dad. She and Joseph, we are not married yet, she's still a virgin, so she wants to know how that is going to happen. We have all this reproductive technology so we have all these different ways to mix and match, but if you see a human baby, no matter how it got here, you can know for sure two things are true — that baby has a dad and a mom. Always, in every case, a baby has a mom and a dad because that's all human beings get here. That's how biology works. That's

how God made it to work. Now, we are going to find Jesus has no earthly dad, which is going to make Him like us but also uniquely different from us. This is what we marvel as the incarnation of Jesus Christ.

So, we are going to get the wonder explained as the angel explains to her how this going to happen. Now, we would probably want like more details, maybe like a science manual on exactly how the egg is going to get fertilized. We don't get a scientific explanation but we see that bottom line this is not going to be human effort; it's going to be divine action. That's what we see in the virgin birth. This is not human effort. Don't go get Joseph. Don't try what Abraham and Sarah did and go get Hagar. No, you don't need anybody else. This is something that God is going to do to you. Notice what we see in the text. Verse 35 says, "And the angel answered her, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God.'" He tells her it's going to be the Holy Spirit and it's going to be the Most High, who I think that's God the Father. So, Holy Spirit, God the Father, this is going to be a miracle that happens to you. This is going to be a divine intervention, a supernatural conception. This language of the Holy Spirit will come upon you, you can think about back in Genesis when the Holy Spirit hovered over the waters of creation, bringing chaos into order. We see this idea that the Most High will overshadow her. It's sort of that language of the Shekinah Glory Cloud coming over the temple. God's presence was there. In some way the presence of God and through the power of the Holy Spirit, she is going to get pregnant and there's not going to be an earthly dad because God is going to be His Father. And so, we get this doctrine of the incarnation that God became a man. It reminds us of John where he would say, the Word...the Word existed with God, the Word is God, forever God, created the world. So, Word was with God and the Word was God, and then the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. The second person of the trinity, the Son of God, who is the eternal Word, became a man in the womb of Mary. God became who He hadn't always been, a man, to save us. Now, this is really important because Jesus comes out of a womb, not out of a burning bush. That's really important. Jesus didn't appear out of burning bush just walking and talking as an adult. They would think He looks human, but clearly, He's not because He just

walked out of burning bush. It would be like an *appearance* of a man walking among us, but not really a man like you and I. That's not how Jesus got here. Jesus didn't walk out of burning bush; He came out of a womb just like you, which means He is just like you. He had His mama's DNA. He would have His mama's skin color. He would have been a Jewish boy from the line of David. He is human just like we are human, *fully* human. But he had no earthly dad, which means at the same time He is also fully God — fully man and fully God. That's what we embrace as the church. That's what we embrace as our only hope for redemption, that Jesus is both fully God and fully man, because if He is not, He can't be our mediator. But because He's fully God and fully man, He can be our mediator. He can represent us because He's like us, and He can represent God because He's also unlike us, meaning, He is divine. He can go between God and man to mediate perfectly for us. He can bring us back to God the Father because He is both God and man.

I want to just let some of our church fathers put some definition to this idea of who Jesus is because of the virgin birth. We have the church council of Nica of 325 AD. They put together statements about who Jesus is. There were a lot of heresies of who is Jesus — Is He this? Is He this? Is He like God but not God? Is He like human but not human? So they put statements together so that we could speak about who Jesus is. Here is what they said they believe, "And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds; God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God; begotten, not made, being of one substance [homoousios NOT homoiousios] with the Father, by whom all things were made." I put the Greek words in parentheses so you can distinguish "one substance." It's homoousios versus homoiousios. They had two options on what they could put for "one substance." The first option is homoousios, which means exactly like same substance. Or, they could pick homoiousios, which means *of like* substance. In other words, He's kind of like God but He's also not God. He just resembles God. This is what the early church fathers debated over and they said it couldn't be homoiousios because He's not *like* God; He *is* God, the exact nature which Hebrews proclaims and the Bible proclaims. So they chose homoousios, which means He is the exact same nature and substance. He is fully God and

that's what we believe as Christians, that He is "fully God, with the Father by whom all things were made." So, just in case you are not clear — all things were made by Jesus. Jesus is not a created thing; He made all created things. Why did He then come into this world through a virgin's womb? Why would God do that? Why would God become a man? Notice what they say next, "Who, for us men for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary, and was made man; and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; He suffered and was buried; and the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures; and ascended into heaven, and sits on the right hand of the Father; and He shall come again, with glory, to judge the quick and the dead; whose Kingdom shall have no end."

It was like...*Hey Mary, I know you are a virgin. You are going to give birth to a little boy and you are going to name Him Jesus, and He's going to be like you, He's going to be human — but He's going to be unlike you, He is also going to be God.* Jesus is one hundred percent human, one hundred percent God; he is the Godman who is our perfect mediator who can actually accomplish redemption for us. He can die our death because He is man. He can bring us back to God because He is God. He is our perfect mediator, our perfect salvation. Why would God assume a womb? To come on a rescue mission for us, that's why. That's the good news of the gospel, so let's just keep just wonder all throughout this text.

Notice in verses 36–37, "And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. For nothing will be impossible with God." So we have this wonder of God, but how can this be? Well, nothing is impossible with God. This is a divine thing. This is a God thing. We should just wonder a little bit that the truth is nothing is impossible with God. See, God can take a barren womb and bring life. He can take a virgin womb and bring birth. Do you know what He can also do? He can take a dead heart and give it new birth by believing in Christ. Nothing is impossible with God. Some of you are thinking...*Yeah but you don't know me, you don't know my sin, you don't know my past.* I don't — but God does and nothing is impossible with God. You are not too far gone. You are not too far away. God can redeem you

through the cross of Christ because nothing is impossible with God. So just wonder at that, have that mingling of excitement and adoration of God can do all things and He can actually save your soul.

In verse 38, we see Mary's wonderful response, "And Mary said, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her." What a great response. You think well of course you would say that if God wants to do this through you, but think about Mary. She is actually giving up some of her life. Mary is planning a wedding; she's got dreams of kids, but with Joseph not apart from Joseph. By the way, Joseph finds out and he wants to divorce her in Matthew's account and the angel shows up to Joseph and says...*Hold on, chill out. This is what's really happening.* Think about her reputation. She's going to the well to draw water as an unmarried woman who is pregnant. That doesn't bode well in the first century, so her reputation is tarnished, her future is tarnished; she has no control over her future. She is going to bear Jesus and it changes her whole life, and she says, let it be so — whatever you want from me, God, I will do. That is just a great Christian response to God's Word. When we hear God's Word, what do we do? Let it be so — I know it's going to be hard, I know it's going to change my life, it's not going to be my way it's going to be your way, but let it be so. She just heard that all of the promise of the Old Testament is going to find their yes and amen through the baby in her womb, and she says yes, let it be so, I am your servant.

And then, we see Elizabeth's wonder. In verses 39–45, when Mary shows up baby John leaps for joy in her womb, and Elizabeth puts it together that this is my Lord in your womb. She just wonders at what's happening. Then we see Mary's song of wonder and I encourage you to read that when you get home, verses 46–55. I love when she says, "For He who is mighty has done great things for me." God is mighty and He has done a great thing in her life, and she says, "...and holy is His name." So she responds in worship. Then, we get the town's wonder in verses 57–66. When John is born, the town says, "'What then will this child be?' For the hand of the Lord was with him." Like, who is this kid going to be? And the answer is

He's going to be the forerunner of the Messiah, the hand of the Lord is upon him. He's going to be the one that points people to Jesus.

Lastly, we see Zechariah's prophetic wonder. Zechariah starts prophesying about his boy, John, and what he is going to let the world know about Jesus. Let's pick it up in verses 77–79. Here's what it says about what John is going to do, "...give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God, whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace." So, he is going to give knowledge of salvation and forgiveness based on the tender mercy of God. How is John going to do this? He's going to point people to Jesus. He's going to point me to the Savior. He's going to show them the sunrise. Those living in darkness, those who are in the shadow of death — they are going to see the tender mercy of God through the person of Christ and they are going to respond to the gospel.

There are perhaps some of you here who are still in darkness. You are still in the shadow of death. Even in the Christmas season, you are living in darkness, you are in the shadow of death; you are apart from God. Just listen to what Zechariah says — Jesus came to show us the tender mercy of God. I love that line — the tender mercy of God. If you are a sinner, cling to Christ and do you know what you will experience? The tender mercy of God. Not judgment, not ridicule, you will experience, from God, His tender mercy because that's why Christ came. He assumed a virgin's womb and He was born into our sin-cursed world to break your curse and to bring you back to God. It was His tender mercy that brings you out of darkness and out of the shadow of death. He is here to redeem you, so what we should do is just be in wonder, just be in awe.

As we think about this whole chapter put together, what our goal should be this week is to make it a week of wonder. I don't know which camp you are in, if you love Christmas, hate Christmas, or tolerate Christmas. We are not talking about some celebration at grandma's house; we are talking about a week we are setting aside to think and wonder and marvel at the birth of Jesus Christ. So this week, let's pursue wonder over Christ and

what He did and who He is. So I want to give you five things quickly in pursuing a week of wonder.

1. Wonder that God became a man.

Actually, spend some time marveling, beholding, and processing the reality that God became a man. That is shocking. That should have you terrified and also excited and thankful that God became a man.

2. Wonder that Jesus came to redeem you from your sins.

That's what Christmas is about. God became a man to redeem you from your sins, so behold that this week, and just wonder at that. Go all week long thinking God, how is it true? How can it be that my God would die for me? How is that true? I was a sinner. I was wretched. I was rebellious. I was running, but Jesus came and assumed the womb and then a tomb to save me from my sins. That should cause wonder, excitement, admiration, and worship in your life.

3. Nothing is impossible with God.

And that includes saving you. That includes saving your friend, your grandma, your coworker, whoever you know. Nothing is impossible to God, so just hold that in wonder this week. Whatever you are going through, whatever you are praying for, whatever that thing is you just don't think can happen — nothing is impossible for God, so believe.

4. Jesus is the forever King.

Actually wonder at that a little bit. He rules over you, He has demands over your life and your life should be spent in allegiance to Him, walking with Him, following Him, making much of Him. He's the forever King and He's your King right now if you are a believer.

5. Wonder at Mary's response.

This week, wonder at Mary's response and ask yourself how can you respond the same way? This idea that whatever word comes to you from God this week, whatever God is calling to you, whatever God puts on your heart, that your answer would be, I'm your servant, whatever you want God, let it be so. If you are a believer, you have also been favored just like



Mary. You have been chosen, you have been graced, and now you have a purpose. You have a something to do from the Lord. So your response, just like Mary, upon God's Word is I am your servant, let it be so. Though it is hard, though you might not want to, let it be so because you love Him. Let that be this week. Let us have a week not of normal Christmas things, not of normal Christmas celebrations, let us have a whole week of just wonder where every day we can't get over the fact that God became a man to take care of our sins so that we could live with Him forever. Let us pursue a week of wonder because who Christ is.