

# The Gospel - Kingdom Citizen

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Christmas and citizenship: Is it possible to mix the two?

It can be a significant challenge to have dual citizenship. This is especially true for those who are citizens of a republic and a kingdom. In a republic one has a voice in what takes place in his/her life and state. Not so in a kingdom. A citizen of a kingdom must simply obey. One's life is lived either in submission or in rebellion. Mary, the Mother of Jesus Christ, understood this dynamic, as we see in the first chapter of the gospel of Luke. Her life is a model to consider:

“26In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, 27to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. 28The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you."

29Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. 30But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. 31You will

be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. 32He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, 33and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end."

34"How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"

35The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called<sup>[a]</sup> the Son of God. 36Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month. 37For nothing is impossible with God."

38"I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May it be to me as you have said." Then the angel left her."

Here is a picture of what it means to belong not to a republic, but to a kingdom. Not an earthly kingdom, but the kingdom of God. In many ways it is unnatural. Mary, in comparison with Zachariah, however, makes it look ordinary. We prefer being part of every decision that impacts our lives. We want to preserve our individuality, our freedoms, and rights. After all, we have our own agendas that need to be protected and carried out. If we are honest, we will acknowledge that God at times stands in the way or does not cooperate with our desires. What Luke gives us is an example of what it means to properly be a dual citizen.

## The Kingdom

What took place some 2,000 years ago was the result of a well-executed plan. It was a plan that the Old Testament writers revealed at different times and in diverse ways. It focused upon the coming of the Messiah. Isaiah referred to Him as Immanuel, Wonderful Counselor, Prince of Peace. Gabriel reminded Mary that the One she was to bear is relevant to history. History is not some random series of events, of people, time and space. History exposes the "God plan." What Luke speaks of concerns the core of the plan which focuses upon the furthering of a kingdom. What is the nature of such a kingdom?

"32He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, 33and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end."

Gabriel speaks of the Christ child taking the throne of His father David. This is a reference to God's answer to King David in the Old Testament (2 Samuel 7).

David lived and reigned approximately 900 years before the birth of Christ. As a young man, while working as a shepherd for his father, he was brought in from the field, and, to everyone's surprise, anointed King of Israel. But he had to wait before he could rule. Sometime later David served King Saul as a musician. His work was to bring comfort to the unhappy king. When war broke out against the Philistines, David volunteered his services as a warrior. His success in slaying Goliath is remembered even in secular circles today. But victory in battle comes at a price. The people of Israel exalted

David, resulting in a vengeful and jealous King Saul. David found himself on the run, living in caves until Saul and his son Jonathan died. David became king at the age of 30 and reigned for seven years in Hebron over Judah, and then for the next 33-and-a-half years reigned over all of Israel.

David wanted to do something for God in light of the enormous position of blessing he was experiencing. He existed in a state of peace while living in a palace of cedar. After the ark had been brought to Jerusalem, he was moved to build an appropriate structure for it: he desired to build a house for God--the temple. Yes, it was not for himself, but for the glory of God. This passion to see the temple built stayed with David until he died. But God was clear that the king of Israel would not have his way. He would not build the temple:

"When your days are over and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom. 13 He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. 14 I will be his father, and he will be my son. When he does wrong, I will punish him with the rod of men, with floggings inflicted by men." -2 Samuel 7:12-14

The prophet Nathan informed David of God's position on the matter. David was reminded that He was under the King of kings. God's response to David is often referred to as the Davidic covenant (Ps 89). God begins by saying, "Are you the one to build me a house to dwell in?" In other words, you are pursuing the wrong agenda. The

house would be established and built, but not by David; it would be done by his son, Solomon. But the reference to the throne that will be established forever is not speaking of Solomon. It is Christ, the Son of God, who will reign forever. This is what Gabriel was speaking of when addressing Mary. The Kingdom was coming in a fresh way. Mary would be the mother of this king.

## Character and Nature of Citizen Mary.

Luke gives us a glimpse of the true nature of Mary, a citizen of the kingdom. We are struck by the beauty of this woman living in Nazareth. Typically when the word beauty is used in reference to a person, especially a woman, immediately certain things come to mind regarding her appearance.

One might assume that her facial features have a certain proportion, her hair a certain texture and length. One evening while eating dinner at a home in Dubai, U. A. E., Debby and I noticed a photograph of an Arab woman. She wore the traditional face covering that allowed one to see only her dark eyes, which were most striking. Knowing nothing else we immediately concluded that she was beautiful. It was an opinion based purely upon the physical. We are oriented this way. Although the Bible does not ignore physical beauty, it speaks of another form of beauty.

Nowhere is the word beauty found in the Luke passage. And yet it speaks of Mary's beauty as defined, not by *Vogue* or *Cosmopolitan*, but by the Scriptures. 1 Peter 3:3-5:

3 Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes.

4 Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight.

5 For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful.

It was not physical beauty but the unfading beauty of a humble, gentle spirit present in Mary when Gabriel visited her. This is confirmed by her being receptive to God's will. She may not have understood all that was going to take place, but she wanted to submit to the will of her King.

"May it be to me as you have said" -v38

There are many examples in the Bible of people who had a hard time with what God wanted for their lives. Cain in Genesis 4 did not want to obey; Pharaoh in Exodus 9 would not listen; the Israelites in the desert went their own way in Exodus. 32; and Jonah, who was told to "Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it," took time off for a cruise. In each case the people understood God's will, but found it offensive. They acted as if God were intruding in their lives. Mary's response to God's rule and kingdom was so very different.

Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, informed Mary what would happen and its effect upon her:

"You will be with child" - v31

"You will name him Jesus" - v31  
"The Holy Spirit will come upon  
you" v-35

Where in this dialogue do we find Gabriel asking if all this meets with her approval? Is God not intruding upon her life? Maybe this is not what the citizen wants? If she has not already thought through the matter, she will soon find out that what is about to happen will bring great challenges. Mary could have said "find someone else; I have my life to live." She readily received it as if she had had a long period of time to adjust to such a drastic revelation. Mary's response characterized her entire life

What was important for Mary was not what she wanted in life, but what God wanted. That is a mark of beauty. "I am the Lord's servant" – v 38. The original here could be translated "slave," or "handmaid." Some object to the use of slave since it implies forced, involuntary service that may include harsh treatment. Most of us aspire to being a slave or servant. Wrong! We want our freedom. What are the characteristics of slaves or servants? They are attentive to their master's voice and work with the understanding that the accomplished results will be pleasing to the master.

Citizen Mary provides for all who trust in Christ a great example of what it means to be a part of God's Kingdom. She is willing to serve regardless of the conflict it causes within her life. She desires not her glory, but the glory of God.

## *-Reflections-*

1. Your plans and God's plan were not the same. How do you respond?
2. God sent the angel Gabriel to Mary as a means of communicating His will. How does God speak to you today?
3. What is it like to be in the kingdom of God, under the rule of Christ?
4. What frustrations are there in being in the Kingdom of God?
5. How do you respond to the sovereign rule of Christ?
6. To what extent is the world impacted today by the rule of Christ? What is the nature of His rule?