

# LET GOD ARISE!

## The Good Shepherd #1

Prayer Guide for Advent and Christmas • Rev. Dr. Don L. Davis



### Immanuel Is Come Matthew 1.18-25

#### Joy to the World

*Isaac Watts*

Joy to the world! The Lord is come;  
Let earth receive her King;  
Let every heart prepare Him room,  
And heaven and nature sing, and heaven and nature sing,  
And heaven, and heaven and nature sing.

Joy to the earth! The Savior reigns;  
Let men their songs employ;  
While fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains,  
Repeat the sounding joy, repeat the sounding joy,  
Repeat, repeat the sounding joy.

No more let sins and sorrows grow,  
Nor thorns infest the ground;  
He comes to make His blessings flow  
Far as the curse is found, far as the curse is found,  
Far as, far as the curse is found.

He rules the world with truth and grace,  
And makes the nations prove  
The glories of His righteousness,  
And wonders of His love, and wonders of His love,  
And wonders, and wonders of His love.

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## ***The Season of Advent: Immanuel Is Come***

### **John's Proclamation of a Baptism of Repentance and Forgiveness of Sins**

Luke 3.1-6 – In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of the region of Iturea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, [2] during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness. [3] And he went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. [4] As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, “The voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. [5] Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall become straight, and the rough places shall become level ways, [6] and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.”

Matt. 3.1-11 – In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, [2] “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” [3] For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said, “The voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight.” [4] Now John wore a garment of camel’s hair and a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. [5] Then Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan were going out to him, [6] and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. [7] But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? [8] Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. [9] And do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father,’ for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. [10] Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. [11] I baptize you with water for repentance,



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but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.”

Mark 1.2-8 – As it is written in Isaiah the prophet, “Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way, [3] the voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.” [4] John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. [5] And all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. [6] Now John was clothed with camel's hair and wore a leather belt around his waist and ate locusts and wild honey. [7] And he preached, saying, “After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. [8] I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

Acts 13.24 – Before his coming, John had proclaimed a baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel.

### **The Prophets Foretold of the Need for Preparation before Messiah's Appearance**

Isa. 40.3-5 – A voice cries: “In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. [4] Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. [5] And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.”

### **John Was Sent to Prepare the Hearts of the People for the Coming of Christ**

Mal. 4.6 – And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction.



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Luke 1.16-17 – And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, [17] and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared.

Luke 1.76-79 – And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, [77] to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins, [78] because of the tender mercy of our God, whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high [79] to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.

John 1.7 – He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him.

John 1.26-34 – John answered them, “I baptize with water, but among you stands one you do not know, [27] even he who comes after me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie.” [28] These things took place in Bethany across the Jordan, where John was baptizing. [29] The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! [30] This is he of whom I said, ‘After me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me.’ [31] I myself did not know him, but for this purpose I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel.” [32] And John bore witness: “I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. [33] I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’ [34] And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God.”



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**John Knew Himself to be Sent before Christ to Announce His Coming**

John 3.28-30 – You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, “I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him.” [29] The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is now complete. [30] He must increase, but I must decrease.

Matt. 3.11-12 – I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. [12] His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.

Mark 1.8 – I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.

Luke 3.16 – John answered them all, saying, “I baptize you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.”

Acts 1.5 – for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.

Acts 19.4 – And Paul said, “John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, Jesus.”

**The Coming of Messiah Will Be for the Broken and the Humble**

Isa. 2.11-17 – The haughty looks of man shall be brought low, and the lofty pride of men shall be humbled, and the Lord alone will be exalted in that day. [12] For the Lord of hosts has a day against all that is proud and lofty, against all that is lifted up—and it shall be brought low; [13] against all the cedars of Lebanon, lofty and lifted up; and against all the oaks of Bashan;



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[14] against all the lofty mountains, and against all the uplifted hills; [15] against every high tower, and against every fortified wall; [16] against all the ships of Tarshish, and against all the beautiful craft. [17] And the haughtiness of man shall be humbled, and the lofty pride of men shall be brought low, and the Lord alone will be exalted in that day.

Isa. 40.4 – Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain.

Isa. 61.1-3 – The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; [2] to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; [3] to grant to those who mourn in Zion—to give them a beautiful headdress instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit; that they may be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he may be glorified.

Luke 1.51-53 – He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts; [52] he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate; [53] he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent empty away. ■

### **Advent and Christmas: The Hope and Arrival of Messiah's Coming**

“WHO WOULD have thought that such things could be so?”

Such a phrase is usually spoken when, in the face of unlikely, improbable, or unforeseen events, we witness what is deemed to be incredible. The Church Year, with its beginning with the seasons of Advent and Christmastide, always causes the devout to stand in awe at the mighty events which



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surround the birth of the Lord, our Savior and Redeemer, Jesus of Nazareth. Miracle and wonder are ingredient in the beginning of our annual spiritual journey – the divine mysteries of God’s incarnation upon earth becomes the subject of liturgy, song, and celebration. And always, it is accompanied by phrases like: “Who would have thought that such things could be so?”

This year, we intend to follow the rhythm and themes of the Church Year, the Story of God’s saving work in Christ which has stood at the center of the Church’s theology, worship, spirituality, and mission from its beginning. For centuries, the Christian Church has employed the seasons of the Church Year as a means of focusing on the promise, incarnation, passion, resurrection, and second coming of Jesus Christ. Following the Jewish tradition of celebration and festival rooted in Old Testament worship, Christians have used these seasons as a means of marking time, of establishing moments for remembrance, festivals, and holidays, as a way of worshiping God through the Story of Scripture, the hope of glory in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Used at least in part by virtually all traditions of the Church (including Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican, and Protestant traditions), the Christian Church Year highlights and follows the prophecy, manifestation, and ministry of Jesus. The unfolding events on the calendar become an opportunity for worshipers to hear the prophets herald his coming, to kneel at the manger, to worship Christ with the Magi, and to hear his teaching to the multitudes. Through these events we see our Lord triumphantly come to Jerusalem, stand accused in a sham trial before his foes, be crucified with thieves on Golgotha, and rise from the dead on the third day! From his ascension to the coming of the Holy Spirit, from his exaltation to the mission of his Church in the world, the Church Year reminds us of that Story which in fact is the Greatest Story Ever Told – the hope of salvation in Christ for the world.



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### **A Providential God Acting in World History**

The Story of Christ reflects our belief in a God who is sovereign over all things, who works all things in heaven and earth according to the counsel of his own will, and ensures that all things will occur in sync with his ultimate plan. The Story of Advent represents the culmination of the Story that began in the Garden and will end in the New Jerusalem. The God of creation is also a God of covenant; the God of Israel is also the God of the Church; and, the God of the Second Coming will become the God of a new heavens and new earth. The hope of this amazing promise for us begins with this remarkable story, with a four-week remembrance and anticipation during the season of Advent. Advent faces backward and looks forward simultaneously, both remembering the events leading to the incarnation of Christ during the First Coming and anticipating with reverence and expectation the Second Coming of Christ. The dual focus means that Advent both begins and ends the Christian Year, (Isa. 9.1-7, 11.1-16; Mark 1.1-8). This dual focus is reflected in our lectionary readings of the Bible during this season. God's prophets foretold his Coming through the Old Testament prophets, with angels announcing his birth to Mary and the shepherds, all experiencing God's promise with the arrival of Messiah in Bethlehem.

The Advent season covers a four-week period, each with its own unique focus and emphasis:

*Anticipation: 1st Week* – The Advent wreath reminds us of God's eternal love, without a beginning, without an end. The candles remind us of Christ's light coming into the world. We light the first candle looking forward to the coming of the Messiah, Emmanuel, God-with-us.

*Annunciation: 2nd Week* – We light the second candle to announce the birth of the Savior King, as the angel Gabriel announced to Mary, and the angels announced to the shepherds.



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*Affirmation: 3rd Week* – We light the third candle recognizing the fulfillment of God’s promise of our salvation.

*Arrival: 4th Week* – We light the fourth candle in celebration of the arrival of the baby, born in a stable at Bethlehem, whose name is Immanuel, God-with-us.

In order to enter into this season, and frankly, to enter into the proper spirit of intercessory prayer for the city throughout it we must understand how critical heart preparation is for experiencing the coming of Messiah into our lives and churches.

### **God’s Sovereign Lovingkindness on Vivid Display**

Since the Fall of human beings in the Garden through the deliberate and unfortunate deception of the devil, God has been working to redeem his creation, to rescind the curse, and restore creation to his kingdom reign. His sovereign will and plan centers on the promise to bring a Seed from the lineage of Abraham who would restore God’s kingdom rule to the world, and we know this Seed to be Jesus of Nazareth from Galilee, the Christ and Lord of all. God’s entire sovereign plan centers on the promise of his comings into the world, the first time to offer himself as a sacrifice for sin, and the second to consummate his work through judgment and restitution of all things under the rule of God. From the beginning, God’s desire has been to form a new humanity with Christ Jesus as its head and Lord, a body of believers from every kindred, tongue, people and nation made up of both Jews and Gentiles. This new body is the trophy of God’s sovereign grace, evidence of his matchless grace to the principalities and powers above (Eph. 3.3-11).

Likewise, through his own Son, our God has determined to reintegrate and transform the entire cosmos, stripping the devil’s control and authority of the fallen, chaotic cosmos (Rom. 8.19ff.), and setting all things right again



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under the sovereign sway of him who is the root of Jesse, the righteous Branch, who will restore all things at his return (Eph. 1.9-12; Phil. 2.9ff.; Col. 1:20; 1 Cor. 15.24ff.). With the incarnation of his Son in the world, God has inaugurated the Kingdom of God in this present age, and soon and very soon, Christ will come again to extend this present reign to the very boundaries of the created order. All the prophets bear witness that God's chosen servant, the Messiah, would come and establish his Kingdom, that Immanuel (God with us) would come, and that the Kingdom of God would appear and endure forever (e.g., Isa. 11.1-9; Dan. 2.44; 7.13-27).

As we ponder the coming of the Christ into the world, let us admit and acknowledge that in Jesus, the babe of Bethlehem and the Child of Mary, all the great messianic promises of the Governor-to-come have been fulfilled. Scripture's singular and dominant theme, the appearing and reign of this Sovereign Son who would reign over and in the Kingdom of God forever, has come to pass in Christ. As the sovereign Lord of history, he will overthrow every one of his enemies, especially the trinity of chaos, Satan, sin, and death. Ultimately, every foe that has spoiled creation will be overthrown and placed under the feet of him whose will cannot be thwarted, who laughs at humankind's puny efforts to spoil his majestic and cosmic plan (Ps. 2.4). Even the folly of their opposition, he reverses and uses for his own glory and will (cf. Prov. 16.4; Rom. 11.34-36; Acts 4.25-28, quoting Ps. 2.1f.). We await the gathering up of all the great promises of God at the summation and end of history as John's great apocalyptic vision reveals: the Lamb will overthrow all who oppose him, and will set up a Kingdom that will never fade away. This grand Story begins its telling in the worship of the Church with the seasons of Advent and Christmas.

### **The Nativity Story: Matthew's Version of Jesus' Birth**

Matthew's account of Jesus' birth is both concise and striking. The few words used by the apostle do not limit its grandeur and wonder. Read below the following reproduction of Matthew's account of the Savior's nativity:



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*Matt. 1.18-25 – Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. [19] And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. [20] But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. [21] She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” [22] All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: [23] “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel” (which means, God with us). [24] When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, [25] but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.*

After his introductory sentence, Matthew provides a stirring and tight rendering of Jesus’s entrance into the world. He tells us that when Jesus’ mother Mary was “betrothed” to Joseph, before they came together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. Though miraculously conceived, Joseph struggled with whether or not to break off the marriage, and take the steps toward their private legal separation, being unwilling to make her a public example, exposing her to shame and disgrace (Deut. 22.23, 24).

In the midst of considering these matters, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream assuring him that he should not hesitate to take Mary as his wife for “that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit” (v. 20). The angel announced to him that Mary would bear a man-child, and his name would be called Jesus, for he would save his people from their sins. And finally, Matthew suggests that this entire episode took place as a fulfillment of the Scripture in Isaiah 7.14 concerning a virgin bearing a son,



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and the child being named “Immanuel” (which means, God with us). Matthew ends his account with Joseph awaking from sleep, and obeying the angel’s counsel, taking Mary to be his wife and having no sexual relations with her “until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus” (v. 25).

Here is the context for the greatest single birth of any human child ever born. The humble beginning of our Lord’s entrance into the world is extraordinary – its humility, lowliness, and demure character. A virgin daughter of Israel, on the precipice of being accused as an adulterer, becomes the bearer of the God-man, whose coming is the fulfillment of that which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet Isaiah. A virgin was found to be with child of the Holy Spirit, and she brought forth a son whose name would be called Emmanuel, “God with us.” This child is the fulfillment of God’s sacred oath to provide a Seed from Abraham’s stock, from the Davidic line, who would be none other than the Christ, God manifested in the flesh, the one true Lord and Savior of the world.

Mary’s submission to the Lord’s will and Joseph’s openness to the Word of God from the angel reveal their readiness, their depth, their amazing level of *preparation* for what the Lord had in store for their lives in light of his plan. In getting the world ready for the coming of his Servant, the Messiah, he used these two humble, ordinary people to give birth to his Son. The entire event of our Lord’s entrance is anchored on the unconditional availability and humility of two people that no one in their day recognized as the key players in the climatic advent of our God into the world. Who would have known that Mary and Joseph would be given this honor? Who can but see how God uses the most humble people who have made themselves ready to be used by him? Through their submission, the Prince of life was born into the world. Through your submission, he will be born anew in the hearts and lives of others who see the Savior’s life in you and hear his message through



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you. You need only to be available, to be prepared, to be ready, to be healed, cleansed, and to be made open.

### **Yield to the Lord, and See the Christ Born Anew!**

This entire year we hope to learn what it means to follow the Good Shepherd as he leads us in the living Way of the Kingdom. The Lord needs not your strength or wisdom, and has no use for your power or cleverness. All he requires from us is what Mary and Joseph gave him so many years ago: our sacrifice, brokenness, submission – our full yielding to the will of God, in spite of our lack of knowing what he wills, how it will turn out, what’s in store for us after we say “Yes” to his leading, and where we go as a result. Regardless of the price and the path, we must choose, like Mary and Joseph, to follow the Lord wherever he leads us, and trust that he will accompany on the path of his will, granting us the grace and strength to endure all that is involved with full obedience to him. This is the message of Advent: the Spirit of God will birth the living Lord within us and through us if we give ourselves to him without condition or qualification, to be, do, and go anywhere he leads in sync with the radical humility of the Son (2 Cor. 3.18). Here is power, here is fruit, and here is life – preparing the way before the Lord in order that he might work through us, and act on behalf of his Kingdom with power and love.

### **May Immanuel Come and Abide with Us**

As we begin this Church Year season, comforted by the promise of the Good Shepherd’s faithful and protective leading, let us yield ourselves afresh to the Holy Spirit in order that, like Mary and Joseph, the sovereign God of history might make history through our lives, showing to our family, friends, and neighbors the glory of the living Christ among us. Who would have thought that the virgin daughter Mary, exposed to the possibility of shame and rejection, would simply quietly yield to the Holy Spirit, and through that yielding, the Christ child would be born in her? May we so humble ourselves before the Lord this Advent and Christmastide that Immanuel would again come and abide with us, that God would come and



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dwell in our hearts, and through us, the way of Messiah's coming would be revealed through our lives.

“Who would have thought that such things could be so?” ■

### **The Season of Advent: Immanuel Is Come**

As we enter into this new Church Year season, let us open ourselves afresh to the leading and infilling of the Holy Spirit, the One through whom our Lord was conceived, and through whose divine power the God-man was born. Only as we yield without condition or qualification to the Holy Spirit can we become the kind of vessels in whom the Messiah will be born, and through whom his glory and honor will be seen. Immanuel comes through the yielded virgin daughter, broken before her Lord who conceives the Messiah within her, and through whom he comes into the world. May we too, with full assurance of faith, so surrender to the leading of the Holy Spirit in order that the same Lord might be seen in us, and through us, come to be seen and heard among our friends, family, neighbors, and associates.

*Matt. 1.22-25 – All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: [23] “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel” (which means, God with us). [24] When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, [25] but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.*

### **Biblical Principle of the Season: Yield to the Spirit, and Let Immanuel Come and Dwell among Us**

Starting our journey together following the Good Shepherd, whose voice we hear and whom alone we follow, let us yield fully to the Holy Spirit's leading during this Season of Advent and Christmastide. May God so prepare us and so transform us that, like the virgin Mary and the betrothed



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Joseph, our obedience and readiness may be employed by the Lord to see the Messiah, Immanuel, be born into our worlds.

*Matt.1.18-25 – Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. [19] And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. [20] But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. [21] She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” [22] All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: [23] “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel” (which means, God with us). [24] When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, [25] but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.*

### **An Example of This Season’s Teaching: Mary**

*Luke 1.27-38 – to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. [28] The angel went to her and said, “Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.” [29] Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. [30] But the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. [31] You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. [32] He 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, [33] and 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*



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*virgin?” [35] The 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 the Son of God. [36] Even 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. [37] For 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.*



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