

How Would You Handle a Miracle?

“What would it take for you to believe that Jesus is God made man?” I asked my schoolmate years ago. “If God would just do a miracle just for me, I would believe!” he said.

However, miracles often do *not* lead to belief. Take the Christmas story, for example. We usually credit the account with only *one* miraculous birth, while in fact, there were *two* miraculous births—and they did not always lead to belief on the part of the witnesses.

Miraculous Birth #1: Zechariah’s Son

One would expect the aged, godly Zechariah to be the first to believe in a miracle. After all, he had seen God’s good hand in his life for decades. As a faithful priest, year after year he had the privilege of offering sacrifices and worshipping the Lord at the temple.

One day, he had an even greater privilege—the chance to enter the Holy Place to offer incense on the altar next to the Holy of Holies. Yet there, to his amazement, the angel Gabriel appeared to him! The angel announced that his wife Elizabeth would bear a son—and not just *any* son. Their son would actually prepare the people to accept the Messiah himself, who would follow shortly after their son, John.

Zechariah said to the angel, “How can I be sure this will happen? I’m an old man now, and my wife is also well along in years” (Luke 1:18 NLT).

Imagine that! Imagine telling God’s angel that he cannot deliver on what he says. “Then the angel said, ‘*I am Gabriel!* I stand in the very presence of God. It was he who sent me to bring you this good news! But now, since you didn’t believe what I said, you will be silent and unable to speak until the child is born. For my words will certainly be fulfilled at the proper time’” (1:19-20).

So here, God predicted a miraculous birth since Elizabeth “could not” have a baby. In fact, as a barren woman, she couldn’t bear a child even in her younger years.

Miraculous Birth #2: Mary’s Son

Unlike Zechariah, the “seasoned” man of God, young Mary was a “newbie.” Only a teenager, she was faithful to God, but had fewer years to see God’s faithfulness to her. The miraculous conception of John the Baptist gave Elizabeth great amazement, but the miraculous conception of Jesus gave Mary great alarm. “Who would ever believe that I am the first virgin to give birth?” Mary could have thought.

But how did Mary respond to this wonderful yet rather inconvenient news? Mary asked the angel, “But how can this happen? I am a virgin” (1:34). These were not words of doubt. It was a request for clarity on God’s method. Her humility was seen in her response, “I am the Lord’s servant. May everything you have said about me come true...” (1:38).

Further, when God explained that Mary’s conception would occur through the Holy Spirit, she did not end up dumb like Zechariah. Unlike Zechariah’s mouth being closed, Mary’s mouth was opened even further for prophecy! After visiting her cousin Elizabeth, Mary uttered one of the most amazing and theologically significant statements of God reaching down to man in Scripture (1:46-55).

Contrasts Between Two Announcements

	<i>Zechariah</i>	<i>Mary</i>
<i>Miracle</i>	“Too old” for a baby	“Too young” for a baby
<i>Answer</i>	“How can I be sure?”	“How can this happen?”
<i>Confusion</i>	Doubted God’s word	Asked God’s method
<i>Result</i>	Ended up dumb	Ended up uttering praise
<i>Disgrace</i>	Removed after birth	Caused by birth

What About You?

The Christmas story comes to us every year with the regularity of Singapore’s constant rain. Perhaps we have a similar attitude about Christmas as we have about rain. Though we need water for life itself, when it falls at inconvenient times, we complain about it falling from the heavens.

The two births of Advent are miraculous yet inconvenient. We can too quickly lose the wonder of the stories, similar to Zechariah, who missed the wonder of John’s birth due to his doubt. This resulted in months of inability to speak God’s praises.

In contrast, Mary’s simple faith is admirable. This fits Luke’s purpose in his gospel to present Jesus not as the *Jewish* Saviour, but as the *universal* Saviour. Luke’s gospel often highlights Christ’s grace towards women and other outcasts of society. Mary lacked Zechariah’s many years of godly living, yet in humility, she accepted God’s inconvenient but marvelous plan for her to be humanity’s one and only virgin mother. As a result, rather than being prevented from praise as was true of Zechariah, Mary used her tongue to praise His name.

May we also see God’s grace in these miracles and praise God before others in response.