

Appointed with Attitudes

“Then the Lord answered me and said:

Write the vision

And make [it] plain on tablets,

That he may read who reads it.

For the vision is yet for an appointed time;

But at the end it will speak, and it will not lie,

Though it tarries, wait for it;

Because it will surely come,

It will not tarry.” -- Hab 2:2,3

We live in appointed times. After nearly 2000 years of waiting, we are in appointed times. Sometimes, that just stuns me. Consider what an awesome deal it is to be appointed for these days!

Israel has been reborn as a nation, Jerusalem is under Jewish control, the rapture and the tribulation are approaching, the EU is the emerging world power, knowledge is exploding, times are waxing worse and worse, an environment similar to the days of Noah and Lot (i.e. extreme violence, sexual perversion, self absorption, etc.) is becoming increasingly pervasive, Jerusalem is a ‘cup of trembling’ for all nations, on and on it goes, just as the scriptures foretold.

And here we are in the thick of it! What does that then mean? Unless our heads are stuck in the sand, we must ask, ‘What then are we called to?’ What attributes, what attitudes,

what appointment must we hold? Fortunately, the Bible, as always, has the answers --

For nearly two thousand years, they had waited as a people – from Abraham’s time they had waited. In fact, if you went back to the first promise, the ‘proto-evangelicum’ in Gen 3:15, you could number perhaps as many as one and a half million days. Waiting for what? What promise? For the coming of the Messiah, specifically, his first coming.

And here was this young woman, probably in her early to mid teens – Mary. Think about it – how many millions of Hebrew women over nearly two thousand years had desired to bring forth the Anointed One? After so long, after so many, who in their right mind could dare to believe it would be her? Think of the cultural and mental pressure to reject such a notion as too special, too fantastic to be imparted to anyone ‘ordinary’.

Yet in Mary we can observe a character that I’ll suggest is worthy of our own special consideration for like her, we’ve waited nearly 2000 years and we are in great expectation of Christ’s coming.

Turning to Luke chapter one, let’s look at verses 34 to 53 and we’ll note eight specific attributes and attitudes on Mary’s part from which we can learn. First though, the angel Gabriel delivers the message of the immaculate conception – that is, the virgin birth, as well as the giving of the baby’s name – Jesus. He says, *“He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give 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.” (Luke 1:32,33)

Then Mary replies, *“How can this be since I do not know a man?”* Our first observation is her **purity**. God is looking for such purity in his children – *“Blessed [are] the pure in heart: for they shall see God.” (Mat 5:8)* However, as children of Adam, we are naturally impure in character. We are drawn by various lusts into vanity and depravity. But as Peter wrote, we should *“... gird up the loins of [our] mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto [us] at the revelation of Jesus Christ; As obedient children, not fashioning [ourselves] according to the former lusts in [our] ignorance: But as He which hath called [us] is holy, so [we should] be holy in all manner of conversation (conduct);” (1Pet 1:13-15)*

Yet, Satan is working overtime to push his filth our way and sad to say, it’s working. If in all honesty, you consider the moral climate of the community of believers even a generation ago, what is accepted as ‘not too bad’ today is clear testimony to our decline. God grant that we change our ways.

In verse 38, Gabriel asserts, *“For with God nothing will be impossible,”* to which she replies, *“Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word.”*

What beautiful **submission** to God! Now, we talk submission to the will of God, but Mary here is opting for a life of real hardship – what will her betrothed husband say? What will the family and neighbors think? The old saint

Simeon, in the temple told her later, *“...and a sword shall pierce through your own soul also”*. Submitting to God is far more than church attendance and tithing; we all know that. The life of submission to God’s will is at times a life of suffering, *“For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake;” (Phi 1:29)* May we be likewise willing.

In verse 45, Mary’s cousin Elizabeth (who was pregnant at the same time with John The Baptist), in greeting her says, *“Blessed is she who **believed**, for there will be a fulfillment of those things which were told her from the Lord.”*

Mary had **faith in God’s word**. This is in contrast to the reaction of Elizabeth’s own husband Zacharias, a priest who, when given a similar message from Gabriel, stumbled in faith. Mary believed!

Now, you can try to explain away her faith by thinking that the appearance of Gabriel must have been just awe inspiring or some such notion, but perhaps that’s the very reason we see Zach’s failure earlier in this chapter. (Gabriel spoke to him also.) Angel or no, it had been nearly two millennia! Get this now, she actually believed in her own virginal conception and that her child would be the Messiah. She didn’t ‘work it up’ or ‘talk herself into it’. Apart from the resurrection, this is arguably the most exceptional faith in all of scripture.

Today, the concept of faith has been so twisted and abused that many are simply afraid of it. We’ve been told to have faith for that new Mercedes or other material things that in no way further the kingdom of

God. Devastatingly, we can come to think that faith in faith is what we need or faith in some televangelist's claims or faith in some repetitious prayer. But the Bible simply says, "So then faith comes by hearing the word of God." (Rom 10:17)

And God is looking for such faith – to simply take Him at His word. But with so much credence given today to knowledge and the myriad philosophies of man, to the politically correct and religiously aberrant, it's no wonder Christ, in speaking of His coming for the church asked, "And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though He bear long with them? I tell you that He will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless when the Son of man comes, shall He find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:7,8) Oh, may we be found with faith!

In verse 46, Mary responds to Elizabeth, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior." Here is the **worshipful heart** of the one who is in true relationship with God. Her focus is not on herself, but rather, she is just really into the goodness of God.

Today, Mary would be tempted to write a book (or a newsletter! Ha!) or to go on a speaking tour or appear on Focus on the Family. The church in general has become quite obsessed with self promotion – 'success' and size for the sake of size; being a stand-out as opposed to standing fast. But Mary magnified and rejoiced in her Savior, not her self. May God give us such a heart!

In verse 48, she says, "For He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant; for behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed." Mary was **humble**. Humble. At the very time, under the very circumstance in which our character usually shouts, "Whoopee, look at me, ain't I somethin'!" she is resplendent in her humility. This is the great danger for all whom God uses – missionaries, ministers, misters and misses -- to slip into the notion that because God used me, I must now be something, someone just a bit more spiritual and special than others – to let spiritual pride rot the good fruit God wants to bear. We forget that 'God's way up is down' and that 'the greatest shall be servant of all' in His kingdom. This is not just a cliché, it's truth!

In verse 49, she exudes, "For He who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is His name." Contrary to our contemporary attitude of entitlement, Mary is genuinely **thankful and in awe** of God's nature. You know, it just really kills the flesh to express thankfulness. Oh, we generally can render a "Thank you" when necessary, but to demonstrate on an on-going basis a true heart attitude of gratefulness is a fundamental part of godliness and it's pretty rare.

Truth is, you and I are not entitled to anything good. The only reason any good comes into our lives is because God is good. For that reason alone, He causes all things to work together for our good, even the things we see as disastrous. God grant that we may recognize His hand at work in both our 'hills

and valleys' and as a consequence be thankful.

In verse 50, she continues, "and His mercy is on those who fear Him from generation to generation." Wow! Here's the most blessed woman of scripture expressing that she **needs mercy!** And God has given it to her. Mary wasn't perfect and she knew it!

It's one thing to accept God's grace – that is, to get what you haven't earned, what you don't deserve. It's all together another matter to acknowledge your need for mercy – to know that you're not getting what you do deserve – judgment, death and hell. Does that sound harsh? The mature Christian is the one who knows his/her desperate need for mercy. It's good to be a seeker of truth, but an acceptor of the truth is the one whom God seeks. We need mercy. We need a healthy understanding of our depravity apart from Him.

This is again, completely contrary to our nature which defends itself against all, that thinks it's always the other guy's fault somehow, that rushes down the road yet hates the one who cuts in front, that rarely sees the hand of God in any difficulty. 'Mercy? That's for the guy in next pew!' we can think.

In verse 53, she concludes, "He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He has sent away empty." Now we're not talkin' bacon-cheese burgers here! Nothing for the belly. This speaks of the Spirit of God – to be filled to overflowing with Him. Jesus added, "Blessed are the **poor in spirit** for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." (Mat 5:3) And, "Blessed [are] they

which do **hunger and thirst** after righteousness: for they shall be filled." (Mat 5:6)

Mary was **hungry**; she was **poor in spirit**. In contrast, the church of Revelation commonly known as typical of the last days church is criticized by the Lord for saying inwardly, "... I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing" to which Christ warns, "... and know not that you are wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." (Rev 3:17)

In the book of Daniel, the Antichrist is said to destroy many through "peace" but the word is appropriately translated "prosperity" or "ease". The attraction to this worldly ease and prosperity is the mortal enemy of spiritual hunger. May God grant us a healthy desire for the things of His kingdom over what the world offers.

So these are eight attributes and attitudes appropriate for the great appointment – the great appearing of our heavenly Bridegroom. Purity, submission to God's will, faith in His word, sincere worship, humility, thankfulness and awe, acknowledging a need for mercy, and true spiritual hunger -- these are the ways worthy of our Savior.

May we each catch the vision of this appointed time and day. May we look to and hasten the coming of our Lord (2 Pet 3:12). May we be ready and found worthy when His trumpet sounds (Luke 21:36). May a Sword (the Word of God) pierce our own souls, and may we follow the wonderful example He's given us in dear Mary.