



A CHRISTMAS MIRACLE

INTRODUCTION

Luke 1:26-38

In the movie, *It's A Wonderful Life*, the hero is George Bailey who is "a man who never quite makes it out of his quiet birthplace of Bedford Falls." As a young man he dreams of shaking the dust from his shoes and traveling to far-off lands, but one thing and then another keeps him at home -- especially his responsibility to the family Savings and Loan Association, which is the only thing standing between Bedford Falls and the greed of Mr. Potter, the avaricious local banker.

George marries his high school sweetheart, settles down to raise a family, and helps half the poor folks in town buy homes where they can raise their own. Then, when George's absentminded uncle misplaces some bank funds during the Christmas season, it looks as if the evil Potter will have his way after all. George loses hope and turns mean. He despairs, and is standing on a bridge contemplating suicide when an Angel 2nd Class named Clarence saves him and shows him what life in Bedford Falls would have been like without him.¹

In the movie's final scene, George's wife, Mary, gets all of the townspeople to donate money to replace all of the missing money. As the crowd starts to gather with wallets open, Mary shouts, "It's a miracle!"

It's A Wonderful Life is a heartwarming Christmas classic. However, the miracle that benefits George Bailey pales in comparison to the miracle that happened in Bethlehem 2,000 years ago. A virgin gave birth to the Savior of mankind. That's the true Christmas miracle.

Open it

1. What's your favorite Christmas tradition?

Read it

Luke 1:26-38

¹ <https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/great-movie-its-a-wonderful-life-1946>

Explore it

2. What made Mary an unlikely mother?
3. How does the angel describe Mary when he greets her?
4. What was Mary's reaction to seeing the angel?
5. What are five ways Jesus is described in verses 32-33?
6. Who else had a miraculous conception?

Apply it

Mary is described as “a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph.” In the ancient Jewish world, betrothal was like an engagement but it had the same legal status as marriage.² In our culture, engagement is still a time when the man or the woman can decide they don't want to move forward. In the first-century Jewish culture, when two people were betrothed, they were as good as married. The only way out was a formal divorce.

Nazareth was a rural village with a population of around 400 people.³ That's less than the capacity of the worship center in our Sugar Grove campus! Once it was discovered that the betrothed virgin Mary was pregnant, word would have spread quickly through the town. Everyone would have known that she wasn't married yet and they would have assumed she had been unfaithful to Joseph. In Israelite culture, this would have brought great shame on Mary, Joseph and her family. It could have even led to her death. In Genesis 38:24, a woman named Tamar is pregnant and when her father-in-law suspects she has been unfaithful to his son (the man she was betrothed to) he almost had her burned alive.

7. Describe the likely reaction of the people in Nazareth when they heard the news about Mary's pregnancy.

² Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, “Marriage, Marriage Customs,” *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 1408.

³ Michael Rydelnik and Michael G. Vanlaningham, eds., *The Moody Bible Commentary* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2014), 1556.

8. Have you ever been accused of doing something wrong, but you weren't guilty? How does this help you empathize with Mary?

9. How does it encourage you to know that God chose to use a simple Jewish teenager to bring King Jesus into the world?

Mary's response to the angel's announcement reveals her humility and honesty before God. She certainly never expected to see an angel and receive special favors from heaven.⁴ In Luke 1:42, Mary is described as "blessed...among women."

10. Describe a time when you reacted positively to unexpected news. How about a time when you reacted negatively?

⁴ Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 172.

11. How does God's sovereignty help you respond with humility when you get unexpected news?

There's no question that the virgin birth was miraculous! No human being could have made it happen. It shows that this was God's action. In a normal birth, humans participate with God in his creative act of making new life. However, in Jesus, God comes to earth to save humanity without "human choice or aid."⁵

12. What does Mary's miraculous pregnancy teach us about the power of God?

13. What does Christ becoming a human being show you about the lengths God was willing to go to save you?

⁵ John Wick Bowman, *The Letter to the Hebrews ; The Letter of James ; The First and Second Letters of Peter* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1982), 32.

14. What would you say to someone who doubted whether Jesus could really have been born of a virgin?

Look back at your answers to Question #5.

15. Which one of these titles or descriptions of Jesus resonates most with you and why?

The angel tells Mary “nothing will be impossible with God” (v. 37).

16. What is an area in your life where God worked, even though it seemed impossible?