

Longing for a Savior

Luke 1:26-28 - 26 In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, 27 to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. 28 And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!"

When did this Happen?

- "in the 6th month" = The 6th month of Elizabeth's pregnancy (Luke 1:24-25)
- Year: 4-6 BC

The Political Situation

- Israel is subjugated by the ungodly, pagan Roman Empire
- Israel has not really been free and independent since the great kings of the Bible (600 years ago)
 - 597 BC: Babylon invaded, 1st wave of Jewish exiles taken to Babylon
 - 538 BC: 1st exiles allowed back into Israel
 - But they're still dominated and controlled by foreign powers:
 - The Babylonians
 - The Medes
 - The Persians
 - Alexander the Great and the Greek Empire
 - The Seleucids (Named for one of Alexander the Great's sons)
 - The Romans
- Under the Seleucid Empire (Greeks)
 - Greek language and culture dominate
 - Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175-164 BC)
 - ephiphanes = Greek title meaning "God Manifest" or "The Glorious One"
 - Built a gymnasium and a citadel taller than the temple
 - Late Dec. 167 BC: The Abomination of Desolation
 - Antiochus IV set up a statue of Zeus in the Temple... many believed this was what Daniel called "the Abomination of Desolation" (Daniel 11:31)
 - Antiochus IV gained control of the Temple treasury
 - People were commanded to make sacrifices to the Greek gods
 - Forbade circumcising babies, on penalty of death
 - Writers wrote about the piles of murdered bodies of "mothers with their circumcised infants hung around their necks."
 - Maccabean Revolt (164 BC)
 - Led by Judas Maccabeus ("The Hammer")
 - Quote: Judas Maccabeus – "They are coming against us in full-blown insolence and lawlessness to destroy us, our wives, and our children, and to plunder us; but we are fighting for our lives and our laws, and we will crush them before our eyes; do not be afraid of them."
 - The Jews revolted, cleansed the temple, and forced the Seleucids to cooperate with them a little more
 - The result: the Jews got some freedoms restored... and the Greeks learned to work through puppet kings to placate the Jews
- Hasmonean Dynasty
 - The Greeks utilized Jewish puppet kings in Israel, the Maccabees (who became the Hasmoneans)
 - They claimed the kingship + priesthood (though they were neither Levites nor in David's line)
 - They oppressed their fellow Israelites by cooperating with the Greeks (and later Romans) to tax them

- Under the Romans
 - 63 BC: Romans took control, offending Jews by entering the Temple.
 - Romans oppressed Israel just as the Greeks had done
 - 47 BC: Caesar installed Antipater, a descendant of Esau, as procurator of Judea... and Antipater appointed his son Herod (Herod the Great) as king over Judea
 - Israel's kings were now not even Israelites but Edomites submissive to Rome
 - Israel's priests were not of the line of Aaron and were politically motivated

The Religious Situation

- Hasmonean Kings and Priests:
 - Spiritually bankrupt puppets of the Greeks who oppressed the people
- Sadducees:
 - Wealthy, influential pragmatists with links to the priesthood and loyalties with Rome
- Essenes:
 - Apocalyptic Jewish “monks” who escaped the corruption of society to dwell in the desert seeking God in purity
 - Taught that a great final battle between the “Sons of Darkness and Sons of Light” was coming, with the archangel Michael leading the way
- Pharisees:
 - The rabbi teachers of Israel, walking the middle road between the hated Hasmonean compromisers and the wild-eyed, apocalyptic Essenes
 - They loved the law of God
 - Quote: Thomas Cahill (author *Desire of the Everlasting Hills*) – “They would not be pushed out of society; they would live normal lives as normal men but with a reverence for the Law more elaborate than anyone had ever attempted before them.”
 - Pharisee = from Aramaic for “separate ones” = Probably called this by their enemies
- Zealots:
 - A radical subset of the Pharisees who began about this time
 - They preached extreme nationalism and the overthrow of the Romans, at times resorting to violence
 - Quote: Josephus (Jewish Historian) – “[The Zealots] have an inviolable attachment to liberty, and say that God is to be their only Ruler and Lord.”
- Sicarii:
 - An even more radical subset of the Zealots who used violence to fight Rome
 - Carried sicae (short, curved Roman knife)
 - They dispersed into crowds during festivals, snuck up behind their targets (Romans or collaborators), and quietly killed them.

Who Is Gabriel?

- “Gabriel” = Hebrew for “man of God”
- “angel” = *aggelos* = messenger
- Gabriel Appeared to Zechariah (Luke 1:11-18)
 - Luke 1:16-17 – 16 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 1:19 - And the angel answered him, “I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I was sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news.
- Gabriel Appeared to Daniel (Daniel 8-9)
 - Almost 600 years ago, Gabriel appeared to Daniel, a Jewish exile in Babylon

- Daniel 8 – c. 550 BC: Daniel’s vision about the coming kingdoms of the Medes, Persians, and Greeks
 - Daniel 8:17 - So he [Gabriel] came near where I stood. And when he came, I was frightened and fell on my face...
- Daniel 9 – 539 BC: Daniel realizes that Jeremiah prophesied the end to the exile should come soon.
 - Daniel 9:20-21 - Gabriel appears and tells Daniel that God heard his prayers
 - Daniel 9:24 - Seventy weeks are decreed about your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin, and to atone for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal both vision and prophet, and to anoint a most holy place.
- Luke 1: Nearing the end of the prophesied 490 years of oppression, God sends Gabriel to earth to announce that it’s show time

Anticipation of a Coming Messiah

- When Gabriel appeared to Mary, people were expecting a fulfillment of Daniel 9:24
- Messianic Prophecies in the Old Testament
 - From Genesis to Malachi, the OT is filled with prophecies of the coming Messiah
 - Psalm 110:1-5 - 1 The Lord says to my Lord: “Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.” 2 The Lord sends forth from Zion your mighty scepter. Rule in the midst of your enemies! 3 Your people will offer themselves freely on the day of your power, in holy garments; from the womb of the morning, the dew of your youth will be yours. 4 The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind, “You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.” 5 The Lord is at your right hand; he will shatter kings on the day of his wrath.
 - Isaiah 9:6-7 - 6 For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. 7 Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.
 - Isaiah 11:1-5 – 1 There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit. 2 And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. 3 And his delight shall be in the fear of the Lord. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide disputes by what his ears hear, 4 but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; and he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked. 5 Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist, and faithfulness the belt of his loins.
 - Jeremiah 23:5-6 - 5 Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. 6 In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called: ‘The Lord is our righteousness.’
 - Micah 5:2 - But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days.
- There Was An Abundance of False Messiahs
 - At no other time in Israel’s history were there so many people claiming to be the Messiah
 - At Least 18 Potential Messiahs in Jesus' Day
 - Theudas Christ (Acts 5:36)
 - Judas the Galilean (Acts 5:36)
 - “The Egyptian” (Acts 21:38)
 - Barabbas (Mark 15:7)
 - The Jewish Historian Josephus names others:

- Hezekiah, defeated by Herod in 47 BC
 - Theudas, Hezekiah's son
 - Simon of Perea
 - Athronges the Shepherd
 - James and Simon, sons of Judas the Galilean, crucified by Tiberius Alexander c. 46 AD
 - Menachem, another son of Judas the Galilean
 - Eleazar son of Dineus
 - Eleazar son of Jairus, commander of Masada, of the family of Menachem
- Everyone Expected a Messiah
 - Luke 3:15 - ... the people were in expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Christ
 - Matthew 11:3 - John the Baptist asks Jesus if he really is the Messiah
- There Was Even Expectation Outside Israel
 - Sibylline Oracles (~500 BC)
 - Lived in a cave near the Greek city of Neopolis (Naples)
 - Prophesied mostly doom and gloom, death and destruction, and the cyclical nature of reality
 - Quote: Sibyl - “And then God will send a king from the sun who will stop the entire earth from evil war... and he will not do all these things by his private plans but in obedience to the noble teachings of the great God.”
 - Virgil (70-19 BC): Roman Poet
 - Some of his writings are so similar to prophecies about the Messiah that they were taken as such during the Middle Ages... but they are probably speaking poetically about the Roman Emperor Augustus
 - He talks about a king who will “put an end to our wretched age, from whom golden people shall spring”
 - Quote: Virgil - “Without being called, the goats shall return, their udders swollen with milk. The herds shall have no fear of lions... The serpent shall be no more, and the poison-plant shall perish, but Assyrian spice shall spring up everywhere.”
- Quote: Thomas Cahill (author *Desire of the Everlasting Hills*) – “...beneath the surface differences of each culture... there beats in human hearts a hope beyond all hoping, the hope of the hopeless... the hope of those who... seem to be waiting in vain, a hope – not for [a mere earthly king or] emperor... but for [The] Just One.”

The “400 Years of Silence” are Broken

- What are the 400 Years of Silence?
 - Throughout Israel’s history, God raised up men and women to speak on his behalf.
 - The last prophetic word was from the prophet Malachi in 430 BC
 - For 430 years, Israel has heard nothing directly from God
 - When Gabriel appeared, God began speaking again
- The last time God spoke was through the prophet Malachi in 430 BC
 - Malachi 4:5-6 – 5 Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes. 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.
 - And then, 430 years later, Gabriel appeared to Zechariah and declared that these words were about John the Baptist, who prepared the way for Jesus, the Coming Messiah
 - And 6 months later, Gabriel appeared to Mary with news that the Messiah would come through her

Luke 1:26-33 - 26 In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, 27 to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. 28 And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" 29 But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. 30 And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. 31 And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. 32 He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, 33 and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

How Should We Respond?

- Jesus wasn't born at Christmas, but this is a great time to remember what His birth means
- I want to challenge you to do 4 things this Christmas season:
 - 1. Give thanks to God that Jesus has come!
 - 2. Long for the Savior to come in your life like the world was longing for the Messiah to come into history.
 - 3. Long for the day when Jesus will return.
 - 4. Shout from the rooftops that the answer the world has been looking for is here.