

THE GOSPEL MESSAGE

Volume 65, Number 1

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Publisher ~ Doug Twaddell

February, 2023

The Fruit of the Womb

Charles Fry

Luke chapter 1 reports the divine promises, delivered by the angel Gabriel, of the impending births of John the Baptist and Jesus of Nazareth. Both births were for God's purposes, fulfilling prophecies at a time chosen by God. Both depended on God's power. John's birth would be an answer to previous prayers (1:13) at a time when both his father, Zechariah, and his mother, Elizabeth, were old enough to have given up any expectation of natural conception (1:18). Jesus' birth would be even more remarkable, his mother being a virgin and the promised son being conceived by the power of God through the Holy Spirit (1:27, 34-35). The births were ordained by God to be six months apart, John's being the first (1:26, 36).

When Elizabeth became pregnant as promised, she stayed in seclusion for five months (1:24), pondering God's purposes, so there was no widespread knowledge of her pregnancy. Nevertheless, Mary learned of it because Gabriel told her. Luke reports that after Gabriel spoke to her, Mary got up and went "with haste" to visit her relative, Elizabeth (1:39), in the hill country of Judea. We don't know how many days it took for Mary to travel and greet Elizabeth, but it must have been only a matter of days, not weeks or months. We read that Mary stayed with Elizabeth "about three months" before returning home (1:56), and then "the time came for Elizabeth to give birth" (1:57), so Mary must have arrived while Elizabeth was still, as Gabriel observed, in her sixth month of pregnancy.

When Mary did arrive to spend the first three months of her pregnancy with her older (also pregnant) relative, Luke reports that Mary greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth "heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb" (1:41). Elizabeth at that moment was "filled with the Holy Spirit" (1:41). Her exclamation in verse 44 that upon hearing Mary's greeting, "the baby in my womb leaped for joy" is inspired not only by her perceptions but also by the Holy Spirit. Twice in this encounter (verses 41 and 44), we're told, matter-of-factly, that Elizabeth

had a baby in her womb. We discern, too, that the baby was influenced by God's Holy Spirit (1:15) and was excitedly moving, indeed leaping with joy.

Three months before he was born, John the Baptist was a baby filled with the Holy Spirit and leaped for joy in the presence of the Lord. And by "the Lord," Elizabeth clearly meant Jesus, in Mary's womb, referred to in verse 42 as "the fruit of her womb." We have a six-month-old "fetus," that is, a baby, in his mother Elizabeth's womb, leaping for joy because of the presence of an "embryo" a few days old in Mary's womb. An "embryo" was a person, identified by Elizabeth, full of the Holy Spirit, as "my Lord" (1:43). Mary was already, though only a few days pregnant, "the mother of my Lord."

In a world that largely ignores the unique individuality and intrinsic value of children in their mothers' wombs, it is extremely important that Christians nurture a Biblical, godly world-view of life.

Elizabeth loudly exclaimed, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!" (1:42). Scattered through the Bible are numerous references to children, singularly and plural, as "the fruit of the womb" (see Genesis 30:1-2 or Psalm 127:3-4). When Elizabeth blessed Mary and "the fruit of your womb," she blessed both mother and child. The child was the days-old developing embryo that was a living human being, Jesus "my Lord," who had been conceived in Mary by the power of the Most High through the Holy Spirit.

Like all of us who began in the womb and lived to be born, being ourselves "the fruit of the womb," Jesus' human life began when his mother's egg cell was fertilized with male DNA, creating a new unique cell (a zygote) with "all of the genetic

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information of a new individual organism" (quotation from Wikipedia article, "Zygote"). The fruit of Mary's womb, just a tiny cluster of cells, already was and always will be the individual named "Jesus" when he was born. He was already a unique human, made in the image of God, formed in his mother's womb as we were in ours (see **Psalm 139:13-16**, **Jeremiah 1:5**, **Isaiah 44:24**, for example).

When Mary was about three months pregnant, she went back home, and shortly thereafter, Elizabeth gave birth to John. Soon afterward, John's father, Zechariah, was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied (**Luke 1:67**). In that prophecy, Zechariah glorified God because he had "*visited and redeemed his people and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David...*" (**1:68-69**). Zechariah wasn't speaking of his infant son, John. This "*horn of salvation*" God raised up was "*in the house of... David.*" John, like his father Zechariah, was of the house of Levi, not that of David. It was Jesus, the not yet born child of Mary, in his third month of development in his mother's womb, who was described as the divinely upraised "*horn of salvation,*" glorified by Zechariah in inspired prophecy. The statement isn't in the future tense. Rather, the not-yet-born child at that moment growing in Mary's womb is that powerful fulfillment of prophetic promises, the Redeemer already sent by God.

In a world that largely ignores the unique individuality and intrinsic value of children in their mothers' wombs, it is extremely important that Christians nurture a Biblical, godly world-view of life. We need to perceive that the fruit of the womb, beginning with the initial formation of a new individual at conception, is a person given life and purpose by God. We are meant to cherish the fruit of the womb, honoring God's gift of life through procreation. Whether the world accepts it or not, Solomon rightly asserted that "*children are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb a reward*" (**Psalm 127:3**).

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Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; Before you were born I sanctified you; I ordained you a prophet to the nations.

Jeremiah 1:5

Keep Your Heart

Blake Stanley

Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life (Proverbs 4:23).

The heart is referenced over 750 times in the Bible. In most instances, it is not referring to the organ that pumps blood throughout our body. More often, the Bible uses the heart as a metaphor for something different inside of us. Not something physical but what you might call the essence of a person. The very core of a person's character or their nature.

When God looks at a person, when He takes a measure of who they are, it is at the heart that He looks. God says as much when He sent Samuel to anoint David king in **1 Samuel 16:7**. As Samuel examines the sons of Jesse, he first looks to their physical appearance, but God corrects him,

Do not look at his appearance or at his physical stature, because I have refused him. For the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.

In examining the heart, God is not measuring beats per minute or looking for irregular rhythms. He's looking into the person to see who they really are, their character, what will define their actions, choices, and priorities. The heart bears the truth of who we are to God.

This is likely the reason for the instruction in **Proverbs 4:23**, quoted above, and other passages to keep our heart. To keep means to tend to. In other places in the Bible, this word is used to describe a watchman whose job is to look outside the walls for threats. To keep is also used to describe the management of crops. In one instance, in **Isaiah 27**, God is metaphorically speaking of the children of Israel as a vineyard. He talks of keeping His vineyard: watering and caring for it, removing briars and thorns so that the good vines may grow.

Painting these pictures puts together what it means to keep the heart. As a watchman, we are looking into the world for danger. What things out there threaten what is inside? What could damage my character, dull my conscience, and pull me in such a way that I make poor decisions? Just as we are looking outside, we are also looking inside, as we would tend

a vineyard. What is in my heart that needs to be removed? What needs to be cultivated to allow for growth?

The heart, as the Bible uses the term, is highly impressionable. The Bible describes this metaphorical heart as something that can be written upon. It can keep and retain things. It can bind things to itself. It can lust, deceive, and motivate. It can be applied to a task or set upon a path. That has happened to each of our hearts. Each of our hearts is inscribed upon, it is retaining, it has bound itself to something, it is motivating us to action and setting us upon a path. That has been done by what we have let into our hearts and what we have allowed to cultivate there.

If we want to follow the Lord, make the right decisions, and be on the right path, then we need to write His words on our hearts. In doing that, the dangers become more apparent and what needs to be rooted out becomes clearer. The path we should take is revealed. These things will also have a compounding effect. When we act upon something in our hearts, it's like we are engraving that thing a little deeper. This can happen with righteousness as it can with sin.

- **Proverbs 15:14**, *“The heart of him who has understanding seeks knowledge, but the mouths of fools feeds on foolishness.”*
- **Proverbs 15:28**, *“The heart of the righteous studies how to answer, but the mouth of the wicked pours forth evil.”*
- **Proverbs 18:15**, *“The heart of the prudent acquires knowledge, and the ear of the wise seeks knowledge.”*

These passages show that knowledge, righteousness and understanding have a way compounding. He who has understanding seeks knowledge. He who has a righteous heart studies. A prudent heart acquires knowledge. When we get our heart to the right place, it wants to lead us further on the right path.

This will only happen with effort and honest introspection. It is tempting to be more concerned about looking good than being good. It's the earthenware covered with silver dross that **Proverbs 26:23** speaks of or the whitewashed tombs Christ used to describe the Pharisees in **Matthew 23**. They look good on the outside, but the content – the heart – is cheap, ugly, and rotting. Even with the shiny veneer, the sometimes subtle effects of the sin in our hearts will come to bear. The good deed left undone or the indifference that results in inaction. The pride that causes strife. The selfishness that causes us to put

ourselves first. The disinterest that leads us to not being involved or to not give the Lord's work the time, energy or effort we should.

Keep your heart. Watch for dangers and do not let them in. Tend to your heart like you would a vineyard. Find the sin, however subtle, and root it out. And work to write the Lord's word upon it.

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Here and There

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The church in **Braymer, MO** has not been receiving announcements for church meetings. For those who keep these records, please change the church's mailing address to:

Braymer Church of Christ
% Jerry Gorham
PO Box 124
Braymer, MO 64624

The **church of Christ on Smart Road, Greenwood, MO**, is pleased to announce several upcoming events. The congregation plans a **special study for ladies** on Saturday, March 11. The study begins at 8:30 with lunch provided. All ages are welcome. For more details, please check:

<https://smartroadcoc.org>

On April 15-16, the congregation plans a **special study for teens**. Evangelists **Tad Morris** and **Wade Stanley** will be the teachers, Lord willing. Please check the church's website above for more information.

The congregation plans to host a **one-week meeting** during the week of **July 23-28**. More details will be available in future months.

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Special Meetings

2023 Meetings

March 18-19.....Section Church of Christ (Osage City, KS)

April 15-16.....Teen Meeting, Smart Road, Greenwood, MO

The Gospel Message

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