



“Be It unto Me according to Thy Word”

Show Notes & Transcripts

Podcast General Description:

Follow Him: A *Come, Follow Me* Podcast with Hank Smith & John Bytheway

Do you ever feel that preparing for your weekly *Come, Follow Me* lesson falls short? Join hosts Hank Smith and John Bytheway as they interview experts to make your study for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints’ *Come, Follow Me* course not only enjoyable but original and educational. If you are looking for resources to make your study fresh, faithful, and fun--no matter your age--then join us every Friday and Saturday.

Podcast Episode Descriptions:

Part 1:

What can we learn about discipleship? Dr. Gaye Strathearn explores the nature of discipleship, the importance of asking questions, and the differences between the Book of Luke and the Book of Matthew.

Part 2:

Dr. Gaye Strathearn continues to examine the importance of Mary, Elizabeth, Zacharias, and John the Baptist as examples of discipleship and covenant service.

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Part 1

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- 06:40 Characteristics of the Book of Luke
- 08:24 Theophilus
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Part 2

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- 1:08:29 End of Part II–Dr. Gaye Strathearn

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President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints
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Biographical Information:



Gaye Strathearn is a professor in the Department of Ancient Scripture and in the Ancient Near East Studies program at BYU. She has taught at BYU since 1995, including a year at BYU's Jerusalem Center for Near Eastern Studies. Dr. Strathearn received her bachelor of physiotherapy from the University of Queensland (Australia, 1982), a BA and MA in Near Eastern studies from BYU (1990 and 1992), and a PhD in religion (New Testament) from the Claremont Graduate University (2004). Her research centers primarily on New Testament topics, especially those of interest to Latter-day Saints.

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Hank Smith:	00:01	Welcome to FollowHIM, a weekly podcast dedicated to helping individuals and families with their Come Follow Me Study. I'm Hank Smith.
John Bytheway:	00:09	And I'm John Bytheway. We love to learn, we love to laugh, we want to learn and laugh with you, as together, we follow him.
Hank Smith:	00:19	Hello everyone. Welcome to another episode and a new year of Follow Him. My name is Hank Smith and I am your host. I am here with my New Testament expert co-host John Bytheway. John.
John Bytheway:	00:37	That's our guest. That's not me.
Hank Smith:	00:39	John, I don't think people realize, I don't think our audience realizes how long you've been studying the New Testament. That you've been a student of the New Testament for a long time. How long have you been teaching the New Testament?
John Bytheway:	00:51	Oh, let's see. I taught it when I was at BYU Provo for a couple of years, and then I started teaching again for three or four years up at the BYU Salt Lake Center and I just love it. It's so rich, so beautiful, and there's so much out there to help us understand it. So thank you for adding that. I'm not an expert, but I sure love it.
Hank Smith:	01:10	You are in my mind. You are an expert. So we have two experts with us today. We have my co-host, John Bytheway, and John, tell us who else is joining us.
John Bytheway:	01:20	Well, I'm excited to have Gaye Strathearn back again. Sometimes I wish people could hear what we were talking about as we were setting up our microphones, because I have already been taking notes from something Gaye just taught me. But let me just give a brief bio for those who don't remember. Gaye Strathearn is a professor in the Department of Ancient Scripture and in Ancient Near Eastern Studies Program at BYU. She has taught at BYU since 1995, including a year at BYU's Jerusalem Center for Near Eastern Studies. Dr. Strathearn

received her bachelor of physiotherapy from the University of Queensland in Australia, a BA and MA in Near Eastern Studies from BYU, and a PhD in Religion (New Testament) from the Claremont Graduate University. I love how widely read our experts are, Hank.

02:12 Her research center's primarily on New Testament topics, especially those of interest to Latter-day Saints. And we were talking before we pushed record about, every year there's a Sperry Symposium. We're going to talk about that in a minute, but the newest New Testament Sperry Symposium is called The Household of God, and Gaye wrote an article called Communal Settings for Meals in the New Testament, which I'm excited to read. Gaye, welcome. And can you tell us and tell our listeners a little bit about the Sperry Symposium? Because I know they've had it for years.

Dr. Gaye Strathearn: 02:45 Yeah, sure. Thanks for the welcome. The Sperry Symposium is in honor of Sydney B. Sperry. He was somebody who wanted to study Bible, and he went back to Chicago and got degrees there, and he came back to BYU and started teaching there. And he was one of the first that really melded academic training along with a spiritual approach to the scriptures. And so his impact on religious education has been really quite profound, and has influenced a lot of young scholars to want to go out and do likewise.

John Bytheway: 03:23 It's wonderful, because I have a number of Sperry Symposium books on my shelf, and if I want to go a little more in depth, somebody will take a topic like you did, Communal Settings for Meals in the New Testament, how interesting. And give us some more about that. So is it RSC Religious Studies Center publication?

Dr. Gaye Strathearn: 03:44 It is.

Hank Smith: 03:45 If someone went to rsc.byu.edu, they just need to click on Books, and the fourth one down is The Household of God. The 51st Annual Brigham Young University Sydney B. Sperry Symposium. You can get all of those. And there's a number of books. People might be surprised at the number of books that are available there at the RSC website.

Dr. Gaye Strathearn: 04:07 It's a Deseret Book co publication. So give credit where credit is due.

John Bytheway: 04:12 Yeah, they've done it together. And Hank, you're looking right at it. Some of those available in an electronic format as well.

Hank Smith: 04:19 You can get it in ebook right from Deseret Book or you can get it the hard cover. For the first time this year, we get to open up the New Testament. We are going to be in both Matthew one and Luke one today. Is there anything we need to know before we go into the New Testament? Is there anything that our audience needs to have in mind before they jump in, or should we just go right into these two chapters and let you do your thing?

Dr. Gaye Strathearn: 04:43 Well, you know me, Hank, I'm a context person, and so I can't do anything without thinking about context. So I think the first thing that's a good reminder is that we have four gospels, we know that, and Matthew and Luke are the only two who talk about the birth of Jesus. And we know that from our Christmas stories because we try and meld the two accounts. One of the things though I think is really important is to understand them in their setting. What is Matthew trying to teach us by including the birth of Jesus, and what's Luke trying to do? They have different audiences and they're talking about the birth of Jesus for different reasons. So I think it's really important to get a sense of those kinds of things. I think here we're going to start with Luke, because I think most of us take the Christmas story from Luke's gospel. And even though we're only looking at one chapter in Luke and one in Matthew, I think they're really, really important chapters that I love to read and to study and to think about.

05:47 Matthew and Luke are both going to concentrate on Jesus' ministry in the Galilee. That's different to John's gospel, who concentrates on his Judean ministry. And Mark is likewise, going to concentrate on his Judean ministry. If we open Luke chapter one to verse one, we get this introduction, and ancient texts introductions are really important. They really do set the scene for what the rest of the text is about, but they also tell us and give us a sense of what they're trying to do in writing this and connecting it to other writings out there. We learn a little bit about Luke and a guy by the name of Theophilus here. Starts off, "For as much as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us."

06:40 Let me just stop there for a minute. This is Luke telling us some interesting material here. Luke isn't the first one to write. Other people have already tried to, or have written down about the story of Jesus. Now, we don't know whether he's referring to

other gospels or whether other texts, but Luke isn't the first one to do this. They've made this declaration, "which are most surely believed among us." This is letting us know that Luke accounts himself as one of the communities of those who follow Jesus. He seems to be a gentile, and that's going to influence his writings because one of the things that he's really interested in throughout his gospel, and we're going to see this in chapter one, is, Luke wants to show that this message of Jesus is for everybody. It's a universal gospel, it's for Jews, but it's also for Gentiles, it's for men and it's for women, and it's for those who are rich and those who are poor, with an emphasis actually on the poor.

07:45 And then together, Luke's gospel is really showing Jesus reaching out to those who are normally on the periphery of society. So that's really important to him. This gospel is for everybody. And then verse two, he says, "Even as they deliver them unto us, which from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word." This may be saying that Luke was also an eyewitness of some of the things with Jesus. He certainly seems to be with Paul, but also, he's probably tracking down who were the witnesses to try and get this story from them.

08:24 And then verse three, "It seemed good to me also, having had a perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee, in order most excellent Theophilus." Now, we don't know very much about this Theophilus. It may be, many have thought that he is a patron for Luke. That was something that happened in antiquity. But the name, Theophilus, means friend of God or beloved of God. Even though it may have originally been written to an individual, I think it's clear that it was meant to be dispersed. And maybe it's meant to be dispersed for all those who are beloved of God, all of the Theophiluses around to help them better understand the message of Jesus.

Hank Smith: 09:13 So this Theophilus could be a guy who, when you say patriot, he basically paid for this to be done?

Dr. Gaye Strathearn: 09:19 Well, he supports Luke in his efforts to do it, whatever that means.

Hank Smith: 09:25 Yeah. But Theophilus could be any reader.

Dr. Gaye Strathearn: 09:27 Yeah. Which includes us, right?

Hank Smith: 09:29 Yeah.

- Dr. Gaye Strathearn: 09:29 Friends of God.
- John Bytheway: 09:31 What I found interesting was that in verse five, we have that giant capital T, so it's like the King James translator said, well these first four verses are an intro, and then we're really going to start in verse five.
- Dr. Gaye Strathearn: 09:44 This is where the story really begins. Yep, absolutely. We've talked about how Luke is interested in this being a universal gospel. So there's a couple of clues that give us a sense of that. Number one, when Luke does the genealogy, even though that isn't in this week's reading, but when he gives Jesus' genealogy, he goes, he starts, "The genealogy of Jesus originates with Adam." That's going to be different from Matthew, who we'll see later where he starts with Abraham. But Luke is writing to a universal audience for Jews and Gentiles. And so starting with Adam, who is the father of all humanity, is really important to him. So I don't think that that's just something that we gloss over too quickly. The story of Mary here in chapter one is also part of this inclusivity part of it. It sets up the scene for the rest of the gospel. So the story of Mary is really, really important in portraying that inclusivity. And we'll talk more about that as we go through.
- Hank Smith: 10:51 So Gaye, is this why I've heard it said before that Luke is like a historian, he's going after these eyewitnesses?
- Dr. Gaye Strathearn: 10:58 Huh, yeah. But you've got to understand that ancient history is not the same as modern history. I think it's unfair to judge Luke's version of history from what we think history is. He's doing it according to how they did history in the first century. They're quite happy to do things with, "I wasn't there to hear the exact sermon. This is probably what it sounded like." And so if he put sermons in people's mouths, that was a common occurrence in other ancient historians as well.
- 11:33 And see, the other thing about this I guess is that the Gospel of Luke is chapter one of a two-chapter book. It's a quirk of fate that the way the New Testament's set up is that we have Luke, and then we've got the Gospel of John, and then we've got Acts. But Acts is chapter two, and they're meant to be read together. There's lots of themes that run between Luke and picked up by Acts as well. Some of the stories, and they've got similar things going. So Luke chapter one is talking about Jesus in his Jewish context with the help of Rome, to be sure, and Acts then is how the gospel is then taken to the rest of the world. And it's not happenstance, I think, that Acts finishes off with Paul in Rome,

because now he's there in the center of the empire and gospel then would be taken to all of the empire from there.

- Hank Smith: 12:25 All right. So the sequel to the Gospel of Luke is the Book of Acts.
- Dr. Gaye Strathearn: 12:29 Absolutely. Yep.
- John Bytheway: 12:30 And I've heard that all my life, that Luke wrote the book of Acts. Does he say that in the book of Acts?
- Dr. Gaye Strathearn: 12:36 Yeah. And it's also written to Theophilus. Acts 1:1, "The former treatise," the Gospel of Luke, "have I made, oh Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and to teach, until the day in which He was taken up. After that, He, through the Holy Ghost, had given commandments unto the apostles whom He has chosen, to whom also he showed himself alive after his passion, by many infallible proofs," et cetera, et cetera.
- John Bytheway: 13:03 The idea that it was written to Theophilus is what ties it to Luke one.
- Dr. Gaye Strathearn: 13:10 Yeah. And him saying, "the former treatise."
- Hank Smith: 13:11 Perfect. So we've got this guy Luke and, correct me if I'm wrong here, Gaye, but Luke comes onto the scene, don't most scholars think after Jesus has been ascended into heaven, or does he know Jesus personally?
- Dr. Gaye Strathearn: 13:25 Well, that's a good question, and it is something of a debate. And I think that one of the parts here is in 1:3. So he's clearly in verse one, part of the community, verse three, "It seemed good to me also, having had a perfect understanding," and the language there has thoroughly investigated in light of the available evidence, but he's, "the understanding of all things from the very first." So does that mean he's studying what others have said from the very first, or has he had a part of it? Could be read and understood either way. We don't hear of him until here, and we certainly hear more of him in Acts in his relationship with Paul. He may have had more experiences than what we're aware of.
- John Bytheway: 14:10 The word perfect there, "a complete understanding," is that the way to ... It's not like, "I remember everything perfectly," but, "I have a complete understanding of what happened."
- Dr. Gaye Strathearn: 14:20 Yeah, I think that that's probably a good way of looking at it, yeah.

Hank Smith: 14:23 I'd like to restate and then have you carry on there. So our first five verses are Luke telling us who he is writing to and why he's writing, and he seems very confident that he has the absolute truth of what has taken place. He's got eyewitnesses and he's done a careful investigation. Did I get that right?

Dr. Gaye Strathearn: 14:43 Yeah, I think that that's a good way to look at it.

Hank Smith: 14:45 So then he starts the story in verse five.

Dr. Gaye Strathearn: 14:47 Yeah, this chapter is crafted really, really well. And one of the things that I like to do with studying is not just to read to get the story, but I love to ask questions of, why is the person writing? In other words, why are they starting with the story of Jesus and John? Why does Luke choose that? None of the other gospels start there, but what's Luke trying to do? What's he trying to teach us by doing that? And I also like to ask the question, why does he say it this way? Because I think wonderful things happen with asking those questions. So if I could just give an overview of chapter one and some of the things that are happening here, I think that that can give us a big story.

15:34 Luke is going to start his account of Jesus, not with Jesus, but with Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, Zacharias and Elisabeth. And then he's going to tell the story of Mary. And in both occasions, we are going to get this annunciation that Zacharias and Elisabeth and Mary are both going to have a child in unexpected ways. And so there's this prophecy of that. And when Luke is telling the story, he's very intentional about how he tells a story. So the story of the prophecy of John's birth and the story of the prophecy of Jesus' birth, he's intentionally put them in parallel form.

16:17 For example, both stories start with the parents being introduced and they're not anticipating a child. That is followed by, in both stories, an appearance of an angel. Both of them is Gabriel, we'll talk more about him. The response of both Zacharias and Mary is that they are troubled, and the word is intentional there. They're both told by Gabriel, "Do not fear." They're both promised that they will have a son. They're then both told what the name of the son is going to be. And then we have that both of these children are going to be great. Zacharias and Mary both ask the same question, "How's that going to happen?" Even though Zacharias gets a negative view of it in a way that Mary doesn't, but I think they're both legitimate questions in my book. They're both given an answer, "I have sent to announce this to you, and the Holy Ghost shall come upon you." Then both are given a sign. Then we have a contrast,

Zacharias's forced silence and Mary's spontaneous answer. And then we're told Zacharias and the angel went away.

17:23 So I've wondered why is Luke doing this? Why does he want to set these two stories up so carefully? And I think in part, it is to show, and to help us as readers, to understand the relationship between Jesus and John long before we ever get to the baptism. And that becomes crystal clear. But this idea that John is to be a forerunner for Jesus, that their births will be in parallel, just as their missions will be in parallel. So it's to help us get thinking here, and that it is the extension of the history of Israel, that we've had from the beginning. But one of the things that I really like is not just thinking about how are they the same. Sometimes, how are they different really stands out in important ways, and teaches us some important things.

18:16 Let me just give you two examples. The stories both start with the parents introducing and they're not having a child. But they're not having a child for very different reasons. Elisabeth is barren, but she has a child. Now, the fact that she's going to get pregnant is miraculous, but has that miracle ever happened before in Israel's history? And we can think particularly of Abraham and Sarah, we can think of Jacob and Rachel. We can think of the parents of Samuel and Samson. This is a miracle. There's no doubt in my mind that Luke wants us to see it as a miracle, but it's not a miracle that is unique.

18:54 But then in contrast, Jesus' parents are also not expecting a child, but it's for very different reasons than that of Zacharias and Elisabeth, because Mary is unmarried and she's a virgin. The fact that she's going to get pregnant is also a miracle, but it's not a miracle that has been done before. And then the second thing is, notice how the angel talks about these children. When he is talking to Zacharias about John, "He shall be great before the Lord." But when Gabriel talks to Mary, it is, "Jesus will be great." Period. His greatness is not dependent on some other being. He is great, period. John is great before the Lord. And so that's telling us, although their births and their ministries parallel, they're not equivalent. And we're going to see, John is going to defer to Jesus because, "I'm not worthy to even unlatch the shoes of His feet, kind of thing."

Hank Smith: 19:58 That's verse 32, "He shall be great in the sight of the Lord," versus Jesus, "He shall be great." I like that. I've never seen that connection.

John Bytheway: 20:07 Yeah, I just feel like there are so many things that are hidden in plain sight in the scriptures. The fact that you are saying, "Look

at the parallel." This was a crafted chapter. He just didn't sit down and start writing, but he maybe thought about it, outlined it. "How can I make this elegant and beautiful, and symmetrical?" They spent time on these things, and I like seeing stuff like that.

Dr. Gaye Strathearn: 20:29 Yeah. I always tell this to my students when they're writing papers for me, "I can tell if the paper is written the morning that it was due, but take some time to think about what you're saying and how you're going to say it." And Luke certainly does that. He's a master at that.

John Bytheway: 20:44 Yeah. And this is a long, this is 80 verses, so when I first look at the lesson plan, just one chapter? Well, it's a pretty long chapter.

Dr. Gaye Strathearn: 20:53 Yes.

John Bytheway: 20:54 A few important things going on here.

Hank Smith: 20:56 So connecting Jesus and John before the baptism, I'd never thought of that either, Gaye, bringing them together long before they meet at the Jordan.

Dr. Gaye Strathearn: 21:04 Yeah. It gets us thinking about it. And I think that there's a lot to say here about Zacharias and this experience here, culturally in what's happening. These events are put in history by Luke saying, "In the days of Herod, the king of Judea, we have Zacharias, a priest of the Course of Abia." If you understand Hebrew Bible stuff, that's significant, because in Chronicles, when they're describing priesthood, they're talking about how there are 24 courses of priests, and that Abia was one of those. And so each of these courses, two weeks in the year, they would come and work at the temple. Besides the great feasts, these are the ones who were doing the daily sacrifices and the workings of the temple.

21:55 Zacharias here is part of this daily experience of what the priests were doing in the temple. He's probably in the holy place, and is lighting the altar of incense for the day, and that incense before the veil that's splitting us off from the Holy of Holies is to represent the prayers of Israel ascending into heaven. I think what's happened, although it's not in the text, he's doing this to represent all of Israel and their prayers to God. But I think maybe he had his own prayer going on here, given what happens next. And his prayer, I think, was praying to God, even still, that he and his wife could have a child.

- 22:39 Verse six I think is really important. "Zacharias and Elisabeth were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and the ordinances of the Lord blameless." That's going to be an important thing in both stories, actually. But I think one of the things that it's saying here is, the fact that Zacharias and Elisabeth were childless did not mean that they were in some way sinning.
- Hank Smith: 23:09 Maybe Luke's making that clear for us, that this trial was not a result of some sort of sin. We see that in the Gospel of John, "Who did sin, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"
- John Bytheway: 23:21 They were always looking for law of retribution type of a thing, and glad you brought that up, Hank, that no, sometimes trials happen to good people. Here's Luke saying they were both righteous.
- Dr. Gaye Strathearn: 23:33 The lesson that I take from this is God promises us great things, but he doesn't always promise that they're going to happen immediately. And sometimes, people can have really, really righteous desires, but the blessings of those righteous desires aren't always fulfilled immediately. And here we have two very, very righteous people, who have waited how many years? Is it 10, or is it 20, or is it 30? I don't know the answer to that, but they're aged probably at a time when most people would've given up on the opportunity of it. In God's timetable, the blessings come.
- 24:16 I think that that's hard sometimes, to wait, and think, "Why is God blessing other people and not me?" My patriarchal blessing said this, but it hasn't happened yet. So why does God wait so long sometimes? Why does He force us to wait? Why is waiting upon the Lord so important? And I don't know, I can't speak for Zacharias and Elisabeth, but I wonder whether there are things that we learn in the waiting. Sometimes the waiting forces us to our knees in ways that we haven't done previously. With a prayer that's not rote, but is coming from the depths of our soul. And I believe that God sends us angels. It might not all be Gabriel, but he does send moments to us where we have experiences that we know God knows us.
- Hank Smith: 25:14 Yeah, thy prayer is heard. What a fantastic insight, Gaye, and interesting that Luke starts off with a barren couple. Here's this great, good news, this beautiful gospel, and it starts out with a big trial.

- Dr. Gaye Strathearn: 25:27 Yeah. Well, it shows that God's in control. He's in charge of what's going on. Even though Zacharias may have thought otherwise, or Elisabeth.
- John Bytheway: 25:37 I think sometimes we think of, and maybe we can talk about this backstory a little bit, that the Jews in an apostate condition and yet, here is Zacharias, in the temple, and he is called very righteous here, and the temple is a righteous place, and Jesus wanted to protect it back then as well.
- Dr. Gaye Strathearn: 25:54 Yeah. I think for Luke's gospel in particular, the temple is important. Sometimes I think we are really quick to judge the Jews. "Well, they're living the Law of Moses, but hey, we are living the higher law, so we are more important." I think that the Law of Moses was a really, really positive thing. I don't have negative feelings about this at all. This is God taking people where they're at and helping them to learn about him. Paul talks about the Law of Moses as a school master, to bring us to Christ, and that means somebody who takes people who aren't of age yet, and helps guide and direct them until they can step up and stand for themselves, spiritually speaking. And I don't know about you, but I don't think I'm of age yet, spiritually speaking, I have so much to learn. I've learned some things, but the more I learn, the more I realize how much I do not know of the things of eternity.
- 26:55 And so the Law of Moses was meant to help people progress, and we should be grateful for that. So people were trying to do the best they could with what they had. And I hope God does look after them, because I hope he thinks of me and works with me and my imperfections as well, so that I can become what only He really sees and understands. And I'm making mistakes all of the time just trying to do better, but I fall regularly. And so that's what this message is all about, taking us in our imperfections and helping us grow. And that's just as true in Judaism as it is in Christianity.
- John Bytheway: 27:32 And I feel like, with the temple there, that even though it's not they're totally righteous or totally wicked, this was an honor for Zacharias to be in the temple. The Lord acknowledged the temple as a holy place. Jesus did when he came, he cleansed the temple. There were different levels of righteousness, I guess, but Zacharias was honored and this was the priesthood. And if we say that they're totally apostate condition, that's probably wrong. If we say they're totally righteous, that's probably wrong. But the temple was an important place to them. Am I saying that okay?

Dr. Gaye Strathearn: 28:05 Yeah, they're like us. We're somewhere in between. Trying to move forward.

Hank Smith: 28:11 Gaye, so he gets to work in the temple just two weeks of the year?

Dr. Gaye Strathearn: 28:15 Yeah. And it may have been a once in a lifetime. I've heard some people say it may have even been a once in a lifetime, because there are so many descendants now, of Levi.

John Bytheway: 28:26 And I've heard people say that it was an assignment that they drew lots for, and it's way subtle, but maybe that's what verse nine means, according to the custom of the priest office, his lot, well, he got it this time. Maybe had been waiting for a long time to get this assignment, was excited to get it. Is that possible?

Dr. Gaye Strathearn: 28:45 Oh, I think so. The drawing of lots was really quite a standard thing. Began to call it, who's going to be the new member of the 12 in Acts one? It's by lots. We see this in Quran, they do things by lots as well. So this is their way. Then it's in the hands of God. He decides which one is chosen.

John Bytheway: 29:02 And so maybe it was, because they needed Zacharias to be in the temple so that the angel could appear to him. This was all meant to be, but maybe as you said, Gaye, not the timing that they expected, perhaps.

Dr. Gaye Strathearn: 29:13 And it does remind us also that the temple is a revelatory place for Zacharias, and he's working on behalf of all of Israel. But the fact that he has his own personal prayers and desires and wishes from God, and that God is going to answer the community prayers. He will, but he's also going to think about the individual. And Zacharias here is a really important part of the individual part of the revelatory experiences in the temple.

Hank Smith: 29:44 About halfway through the manual, it says, "If you find yourself having to wait for a blessing, or if it seems that God isn't hearing your prayers, the story of Elisabeth and Zacharias can be a reminder that he hasn't forgotten you." As Elder Jeffrey R. Holland promised, "While we work and wait together for the answers to some of our prayers, I offer you my apostolic promise that they are heard and they're answered. Though perhaps not at the time or in the way we wanted, but they are always answered at the time and in the way an omniscient and eternal compassionate parent would answer them."

- 30:16 Now I ask these questions, how did Zacharias and Elisabeth remain faithful? Look at them, they're in the temple. Do you find yourself waiting for a blessing? What do you feel the Lord expects of you while you wait? And you said, they could have given up by this point. Sounds like he's still praying for it, because the angel says, "Thy prayer is heard." They're still waiting for their blessing.
- Dr. Gaye Strathearn: 30:37 And we're going to have the similar thing in chapter two with Simeon and Anna. They've been waiting for a long time as well.
- John Bytheway: 30:43 Is that an old saying, "God is seldom on time, but He's never late"? It's meaning He's not what you think is on time, but he's not late. He knows exactly when is the best time to come, like Elder Holland said.
- Hank Smith: 30:57 Where should we go next, Gaye? What do you want to do next?
- Dr. Gaye Strathearn: 31:01 I think it's 14 and 15. Gabriel is going to tell Zacharias a little bit about John. 15, "He shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink. He shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb." This language indicates that, like Samson and Samuel, John may have been a Nazarite as part of a Nazarite vow that we read about in numbers. But the other thing I want us to see here, "He shall be filled with the Holy Ghost." If we are talking about themes that run throughout the gospel and acts, this is a huge one. The importance of the Holy Ghost and what great things happen because of the Holy Ghost and being filled with the Holy Ghost. And I think it's also a gentle nudge and reminder of what's going to happen when John is in Elisabeth's womb when Mary comes along as well. We'll talk a little bit about that.
- Hank Smith: 32:01 And just as a reminder, a Nazarite vow, was this a way of setting yourself apart for a time period, to consecrate yourself to God? Am I thinking of the right thing?
- John Bytheway: 32:11 I think Samuel's mother did that before he was even born. Is that-
- Dr. Gaye Strathearn: 32:15 Yeah. So we learn about it in Numbers chapter six. And this is a way that non-priestly Israelite could become holy. And it's usually for a set period of time. It's not a lifetime thing, but four, it might be six months, it could be for longer period of times. So verse three talks about the vow of a Nazarite, "He shall separate himself from wine and strong drink. No razor come upon his head, and he shall be holy, and he shall ..." Don't touch dead

bodies, et cetera, et cetera. So you separate yourself from the world for a time when you can concentrate on relationship with God and trying to become holy as he is. Holy. Paul also seems to have had part of a Nazarite vow later on in Acts as well.

- Hank Smith: 33:07 Awesome. And it says, I mean, this is almost like a patriarchal blessing, "Many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God." He is making a people prepared for the Lord, as says in verse 17.
- Dr. Gaye Strathearn: 33:21 Yeah, I like 15, 16, 17. This is not unique to me, I got it from somebody else, although I don't know who, but when the church talked about the three purposes of the church, perfect the saints, missionary work, and redeem the dead. I know we've expanded that, but 15, 16, 17 may be able to be understood that way. So perfecting the... John being filled with the Holy Ghost, "Many of the children of Israel shall turn to the Lord," missionary work, and, "He shall go before them in the spirit and power of Elijah to turn the hearts of the children," et cetera, et cetera, could be seen as temple work as well.
- John Bytheway: 34:00 I love stuff like that. Some of the closing words of Moroni, he just hits boom, boom, boom, the threefold mission, as President Kimball used to call it when he says, "Strengthen thy stakes and enlarge the place of thy tent." He uses the Isaiah language for it, and today, as you said, Gaye, President Monson added to take care of the poor and needy. It's been really beautifully articulated in our latest handbook, The Work of Salvation, "Live, care, invite, unite." Live the gospel of Jesus Christ, care for those in need, invite all to come unto Christ, the missionary work component, and unite families for eternity. And it's fun to see that. I'm so glad you pointed that out, to see this is the work of salvation, hasn't changed a lot.
- Dr. Gaye Strathearn: 34:46 Okay. So can we jump into Mary's story now? This is the part that really gets me excited, so you might have to get me down off the shelf there a little bit. As I think about the story of Mary, and as I work with and teach it to my students, there's a couple of things that I want them to think about in this story. Number one, I hope, is whenever we read the scriptures, but particularly in this one, try and put yourself in the shoes of the person that you're reading about. Don't study the scriptures from afar. Don't be in the grandstand, looking at what's going on in the field. Get down on the field and become a part of this experience. So I ask students as we are reading through this, to put themselves in Mary's place and position, trying to imagine what this might have been like for Mary.

- 35:41 And I say, "This is something that I want both men and women to do in the class. This isn't just something that the women should be thinking about." Because this story is outlining the experience of Mary, but I think it also gives us some really, really interesting clues of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. I would argue that Mary is the first of Jesus' disciples in mortality. Let's start in verse 26. So this is after Elisabeth has conceived, and then verse 26 it says, "And in the sixth month of Elisabeth's pregnancy, the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee named Nazareth." Now, I always pause there.
- 36:29 So we've mentioned Gabriel, who's the angel who also appeared to Zacharias. But these are the questions I ask, "Why Gabriel?" Joseph Smith is reported to have said that Gabriel is another name for Noah. And so if that's true, and I believe that it is, then why not just say, "And Noah came"? Why Gabriel? And so I want to know something about the name Gabriel. And in Hebrew, Gabriel means a mighty man of God. I like that. Because it suggests to me God doesn't just send anybody to Zacharias and to Elisabeth, he sends a mighty man to them. This suggests to me how important the story and the message is to God. So I see Gabriel as a title, as much as a personal name, and he's sent from God unto a city of Galilee named Nazareth.
- 37:28 Well, here's the second place I stop and going, "Well where's Nazareth? What does it mean? Why is all of this happening in Nazareth? What do we know about Nazareth in the first century?" It's in the Galilee in the New Testament. At times, it was a nothing place, in many respects it's small. A small village. In fact, if you go to Nazareth today, scholars have excavated down to the first century village. We're probably not talking a city but a village. And we can see houses and streets that date back to the first century. And I don't know about you guys, but that just gets me really excited. The thought of, these are the places where Jesus hung out with, that as a young child, he's running the streets and all of those things that we don't hear much about in the scripture.
- 38:16 Why is this story taking place in Nazareth? It is a nowhere place. It is unimportant. Why isn't this happening in Jerusalem, where the temple is, where the priesthood is and the priests? Why is it happening in Nazareth? Why in this small village is it happening? But he comes to Nazareth, to a virgin, espoused, to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David, and the Virgin's name was Mary. She was probably never called Mary, her name was probably Miriam. That would be the Hebrew name. Mary is the Greek former of it. Joseph is of the house of

David. Virgin's name is Mary. I'd like you to imagine what might be going on in Mary's mind here.

39:03 She's probably very young. Women got married a lot younger than they do today. People could become engaged as young as 11 or 12. That's eek for us in our day and age, but it was normal for them in their day. So that we can anticipate that she's young here. So how would this young girl be experiencing, then all of a sudden, I don't know what she was doing, but this divine messenger, Gabriel, comes to her and says, verse 28, "Hail, thou art highly favored. The Lord is with thee, and blessed art thou among women." Now, the Joseph Smith translation has a different reading of this verse. We don't find it in the footnotes and it's not in the back of the book where we have the longer versions, but nevertheless it's there. So this is how it reads. And just see if you can follow along in the King James, what's the difference? What do you see here? So Gabriel says in the JST, "Hail, thou virgin who art highly favored of the Lord, the Lord is with thee for thou art chosen and blessed among women." Do you notice any difference?

Hank Smith: 40:18 The word chosen is definitely not in the Luke account.

Dr. Gaye Strathearn: 40:22 And so my question is, so what does that mean? Why is Mary chosen? She's not from the temple aristocracy, who you might expect this to come from. She's not in Jerusalem, she's in this backwards podunk place. Why would he choose Mary? And honestly, if she's that young, I don't know how much of her life experience would be, that God's saying, "Oh, you should be chosen." So for a Latter-day Saint, that leaves, this is a premortal chosenness, blessedness kind of thing. I have a couple of quotes from Elder Bruce R. McConkie. They're oldies, but I love them and so I keep coming back to them.

Hank Smith: 41:09 We don't mind oldies here at followHIM.

Dr. Gaye Strathearn: 41:12 Yeah, this has had a big impact on me. So this is what Elder McConkie says, "Can we speak too highly of her whom the Lord has blessed above all women? There was only one Christ, and there is only one Mary. Each was noble and great in the preexistence, and each was foreordained to the ministry he or she performed. We cannot but think that the father would choose the greatest female spirit to be the mother of his Son, even as he chose the male spirit like unto him to be the Savior." And then he goes on and says, "We should hold up Mary with that proper esteem, which is hers."

41:55 I love that statement because I think, when do we think about Mary? December? But how often do we think at other times about her and what she's doing and what we learn from her? I think we miss out because we don't take the time to really think about this young woman and what she teaches us. And again, I'm going to ask the question about discipleship. What can I learn about discipleship and my personal discipleship by thinking about Mary and her experiences?

Hank Smith: 42:28 And her response.

Dr. Gaye Strathearn: 42:30 Yes. So if she's chosen because she was maybe amongst the noble and great ones that Abraham sees, but she's not going to understand that at this point, at least. Verse 29, "And when Mary saw Gabriel, she was troubled at his saying." And I've wondered what she troubled about. Is she troubled that an angel is speaking to her? "Who are you talking to? Who, me? Why me?" Or is she afraid ... The ancients believed you enter into the presence of a divine being that you would get zapped because of their glory. And going into the presence of divine was a dangerous proposition for the ancients as they understood it. And so she's troubled at the saying and cast her mind, meaning she's considering in her head, she's reasoning, what manner of salutation this should be. "Why is he talking to me? Why is he saying that I am blessed among women? Why am I chosen from all of the women in Israel?"

43:34 And then the angel says unto her, "Fear not, Mary, for thou hast found favor in God." And so I wonder again, how would I react in this situation? I would love, actually, to have a divine being come to say that I have found favor with God, even in my imperfections. This is a really, really poignant moment. This isn't something to read over quickly. "And behold, thou shall conceive in thy womb and shall bring forth a son." Well, again, what do you think Mary's thinking here? Is this weird to her? She's engaged. I could imagine her saying, "Yeah, all right, I'm about to get married. Of course that's what happens when you get married. I'm going to have a son." But then, "You shall call his name Jesus." This I think is probably one of her first things goes, "Whoa, I think something else is going on."

44:33 Jesus in Hebrew means salvation. So John's name was gift, Yohanan, gift. But not salvation. So that I think might have given her a clue. "And he shall be great, and shall be called the son of the highest, and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father, David." Now, Mary would've understood this, "The throne of his father David," is language saying, "Your son is going to be the Messiah. He's not going to be just some any

other kid coming along." Something really important is happening here. And he carries on, "And he shall reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom, there shall be no end." That is also Messiah language. So even though Gabriel doesn't come out and say your son is going to be the Messiah, he gives all of the language that even a young Jewish girl would've understood.

45:37 So again, I think, "How's she feeling about this? What's this doing to her? What's going through her mind here? And so it's not a shock to me, "Then said Mary unto the angel, "How shall this be? Seeing I have not known a man?" I'm not married yet. How is this going to happen? So here's my first principle of discipleship. Disciples of Jesus Christ ask questions. It's okay to ask questions. Questions invite revelation. Questions help us to learn more than we know now. And so her question, "How shall this be?" I think is a really quite reasonable question, given the circumstances and all of the things that she has heard. But she voices her questions, and it's a good thing to do so. And Gabriel recognizes the importance of questions, "And the angel answered and said unto her, "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee."" And I want to stop here.

46:39 This for me is my second principle of discipleship. God asks his disciples to do things that we don't even conceive of how it's possible to do. And the answer, "How is this be?" I mean, I don't think Mary's the only person who's asked that. We've already seen Zacharias do it, but I ask it. I read my patriarchal blessing and some of the promises there and I sit there thinking, "How is this going to be?" My patriarchal blessing says that, "You will have, a priesthood holder will desire to take you to the temple, you'll have children, da, da, da, da, da," and I go, "How will this be now? I just turned 60." The answer here, I think, from Gabriel, is really, really important. And it's for all disciples. "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee." That's how we get through all of the trials and the tribulations and the difficulties of life, because the Holy Ghost will be with us.

47:38 In my ward, a number of years ago, it was a young ward, had just been formed. One of the members was called to be the pianist in primary. She had been having lessons, I think, for two months. And here she is being called as the pianist. And I can imagine her saying when the bishop extends that call, "How can this be?" But President Monson's, "Whom the Lord calls, he qualifies." And I was just so impressed with this woman who went to work, "Okay, I can't do this, but I'm going to do it anyway, because I've been called." And she went to work hard. She worked hard on trying to develop her skills playing the

piano. And the Lord magnified her in ways that she couldn't imagine. Why? Because the Holy Ghost comes and empowers us in such important ways if we give him the chance, by willing to have the faith to step up and say, "Yes."

Hank Smith: 48:42 I love that. This is a great principle of discipleship. Ask questions and realize that the Holy Ghost is going to be the answer. You said that's how we get through it. That's how we get through the difficulties. I really like that. Thank you, Gaye.

Dr. Gaye Strathearn: 48:56 And then he goes on and says, "And this is specific to you, Mary. And the power of the highest shall overshadow thee, therefore also that holy thing which is to be born of thee shall be called the Son of God." So again, she's being reiterated. Initially, Gabriel said the son of the highest, but now specifically, he's not just going to be the Messiah, and this is one of the places where it's a little bit different in terms of Christian understanding of Messiah. But he shall be called the Son of God. And here's the sign. What's the sign to Mary is that Elisabeth has also conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren. So if anybody knows what you are going through, God has not left you alone, but there's somebody who else who God has touched in a miraculous way, who can maybe help you with this.

Hank Smith: 49:50 You almost see the look on Mary's face like, "Wow." And the response from Gabriel is, "For with God, nothing shall be impossible."

Dr. Gaye Strathearn: 50:00 That is my next principle of discipleship. It doesn't matter, if we are disciples of Jesus Christ who asks questions but have the faith to move forward, nothing, nothing is impossible for God. And believing that is, I think, a really important part of, "That's what disciples do." Because God can do the impossible. Because he's not like us. And having all of those experiences, then, we get one of my most favorite verses in all of scripture. "And Mary said, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord." Now the word handmaid here is *doulé*.

50:40 Probably its basic translation is slave. And we don't like that word in the political realm that we live in today. But this is what she's saying here, "I am willing to be a slave to God. Not because he's forcing it on me," I think. But here is her willingly saying, "I choose you. I choose to say yes." Even though I can imagine that Mary couldn't see the end from the beginning here. I don't think that she, I would imagine, fully understood the implications of what is happening here and how this would

impact her life. But even not knowing, she said, "Here I am. Be it unto me according to thy word."

- John Bytheway: 51:26 I'm glad you bring this up. I like for my young adult sisters in my classes to hear Mary give consent. It almost sounds like she could have said, "Nevermind," but she was saying, "Yes, I will do this. I will do what I was chosen to do." And so I appreciate that verse and I've got that marked as well, that she is, "Okay, thanks for explaining that to me. I am willing."
- Dr. Gaye Strathearn: 51:52 Yeah. And then it says, "The angel departed from her." Now, I think that's a really interesting thing too, because you have this tremendous experience, and then the angel leaves. And so what does that mean? That means she's left to herself. How do you respond to something like this?
- John Bytheway: 52:12 What do I do now?
- Dr. Gaye Strathearn: 52:14 Yeah. And how do I go home and tell mom and dad about this? Remember, we've talked about Nazareth as a small community. What's everybody else going to think, once she starts showing? How are they going to respond to her? Is she going to be ostracized or is she going to be embraced? Some of the costs of being a disciple of Jesus Christ. And do we often think about that, because we just read through the story in here in terms of what the cost Mary paid to say yes to this calling from the Lord? But God has not left her alone. He's already pointed her to Elisabeth. And so the next verse is that she got up and she went into the hill country with haste, into the city of Judea. This is about 100 miles away. And she went into the house of Zacharias and saluted Elisabeth.
- 53:09 And it came to pass that when Elisabeth heard the situation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb in fulfillment of what Gabriel had told Zacharias, and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost also. It's not just John, but it's also Elisabeth, because she's a righteous person. And so if we are thinking here about discipleship, and now let's put that in the context of Luke's gospel. Luke's gospel is saying that this gospel is for everyone. And so look what we have here. Who are the first disciples of Jesus? We have a very young Mary, and we have a very old Elisabeth. And we even have somebody who hasn't been born yet, John the Baptist. So now we've got men and women involved in this disciple experience of witnessing who Jesus is, even before he is born.
- 54:03 For me, this sets up, again, Luke's gospel, how this gospel is for all ages across the spectrum, and for people who live in small

podunk towns or in wildernesses, out on the periphery. This gospel message is for them. And in fact, it starts with them. And while we might reasonably assume why Mary, who on earth would know that Mary, who would pick Mary from Nazareth? But the message is God knew Mary, and God knew who she was, and God had a calling for her that nobody in her village, I would imagine, would ever have thought was happening. But God knew her and he reached out to her and invited her to be a part of one of the greatest stories in eternity.

- Hank Smith: 55:00 And he didn't leave her alone. I love this idea of bringing her to Elisabeth. I remember President Benson saying, "God will raise up friends for those who turn their lives over to him." And this seems to be one of those moments where he raises up somebody, because she's so validating to her and she could be a mentor to her.
- Dr. Gaye Strathearn: 55:16 Yeah.
- John Bytheway: 55:16 Wouldn't you want that? Being as young as you suggested she may have been, how nice to have someone who was a mentor friend. That's a good point.
- Dr. Gaye Strathearn: 55:26 I like to use this story as an example of what Relief Society can be, should be. Women of all ages coming together in a community, that strengthen each other in our personal journeys that we have with the Lord. Relief Society needs young people, and it needs people who are a little bit further down the line of life. Because each of us has something to give to strengthen others. And if we think that, "Relief Society isn't for me because, well, that's just old people, that's where my mother goes," or something like that, we've missed a really, really important opportunity here to have that strength and support and help in difficult things that we go through. And I don't know what priesthood quorums are about. I imagine that there are similar things there as well, but this is about a young woman being strengthened and guided by a woman, a more mature woman, who God has prepared so that she would not be alone during this process.
- John Bytheway: 56:35 Exactly. Yeah.
- 56:39 Please join us for part two of this podcast.



- John Bytheway: 00:00:01 Welcome to part two with Dr. Gaye Strathearn. Matthew chapter one and Luke chapter one.
- Dr. Gaye Strathearn: 00:00:07 The next thing I like is verses 46 down to verse 55. This has a technical term, it's known as the Magnificat. Magnificat is just Latin for means to magnify, and it's given that name because in these verses, we have Mary's response to this great experience in her life. How did Mary feel about this? So, come with me as we go through this. And Mary says, "My soul doth magnify the Lord. My spirit hath rejoiced in God my Savior, for he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden." In other words, he's picked me. I'm a nowhere person from a nowhere place. Why does he pick me? But because he has, behold from hence forth all generations shall call me blessed, for he that is mighty has done to me great things, and holy is his name. And his mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation.
- 00:01:21 Now in both Hebrew and Greek, the word fear is not like a Halloween fear, but it is the fear of entering the presence of God, because we understand and reverence that he is something so much more than us. And the other thing I like about here is Mary acknowledging God's mercy. I don't know about you, but I've heard it said a couple of times or more that the God of the Old Testament is a God of justice. The God of the New Testament is a God of mercy. And I don't like that, because if you read the Old Testament carefully, what did the people there think of him? Repeatedly, they're talking about his mercy. And Mary, as young as she is, is acknowledging that God is a God of mercy. He hath showed strength with his arm. He hath scattered the proud and the imagination of their hearts. He hath put down the mighty from their seats, perhaps those who thought that the Messiah would come through their lineage or through their family, and he has exalted them of low degree. Me.
- 00:02:28 He has filled the hungry with good things and the rich he has sent empty away. He has helped his servant Israel in remembrance of his mercy, as He spoke of our fathers Abraham and to his seed forever. To me, I'm seeing here is Mary, even as

young as she may have been, she has a sense of the Abrahamic covenant and what that means. And she's the realization that what is happening here is, and she's going to be a part of the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant. But look at these contrasts between the strong, the rich, and the people of low estate. This sets up, as I mentioned before, the Gospel of Luke where God is going to choose the poor, the women, the people of lower estate to play a part in the rolling forth of the kingdom of God. His message is for all people, and in this story here of Mary, we see all of that taking place in really beautiful and powerful ways, I think.

John Bytheway: 00:03:32

I once put Mary's Magnificat next to Nephi's Psalm in second Nephi four and was surprised how similar they were. Both of them say they're highly favored, Mary in a state of exaltation and Nephi in a state of "O wretched man that I am," but both of them went to God in those circumstances, which I loved. And when I circled the pronoun that Mary's not saying, "I, I, I, I." She's saying, "He's done this, he's done this, he's done this." And Nephi does the same thing. "He has preserved me upon the waters of the deep. He has done this, he has done this." And I thought, "Isn't that interesting to see where they went in times of both great joy and in times of feeling wretched as Nephi did, they both went to God and found strength there?"

Dr. Gaye Strathearn: 00:04:27

I love that because this morning as I was thinking through this, I guess it hasn't jumped out to me before, it goes on then and talks about the birth of John the Baptist and then we get Zacharias, also gives this Benedictus, this praising of God in his experience. And he's also doing things like emphasizing God's mercy and the covenant and Abraham, and seeing what's happening not just with Jesus but with John, how we also have this fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant. So, as I think about this and think about, "Okay, what am I going to learn from Mary about what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ?" I think the last thing, that principle of discipleship I think about here, is how do I praise God of all of the great things that he has done in my life? Are there ways that I sing his praises from the rooftops to all who can hear?

00:05:31

And I've thought about that and thought, "Okay, so maybe I should sit down and write down or declare publicly to anyone within the sound of my voice that God is good. That he knows me even though I'm a no one, that he has a plan for me. And if I can just have the faith in him and his omnipotence, and that he sees things in eternal ways that I can't get my head around, am I willing to step up to the plate and be like Mary and say to him, 'Here I am, Lord. If you need someone to help in some way in

this kingdom of God, pick me.' Am I preparing myself to be able to do that?" But declaring to all that I draw my line in the sand, here I stand. I am a disciple of Jesus Christ. I choose him even though I don't know all of the answers.

- 00:06:46 I have lots of questions, but it's that stepping up and saying, "I'm willing to be a part of this kingdom. I want to be a part of this kingdom, and use me in whatever way I can do, even in just minuscule ways to help the kingdom move along the kingdom of God here on earth." I can do a better job at finding ways to praise God for all the blessings that has come into my life.
- Hank Smith: 00:07:15 That's beautiful, Gaye, and Mary isn't shy about it, is she? She is willing to tell Elisabeth all that she feels in her heart. I love that the Lord brought them together and how validating that Elisabeth is. "Whence is this to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me," and then Mary does not hold back on how she feels. I think that's beautiful. And then, you mentioned Zacharias. I'm noticing this theme of the Holy Ghost again.
- Dr. Gaye Strathearn: 00:07:40 It's really important in Luke.
- Hank Smith: 00:07:42 There it is in verse 15, again in verse 35, verse 41, verse 67. Every character of Luke chapter one is filled with the Holy Ghost at some point.
- Dr. Gaye Strathearn: 00:07:52 And the idea of mercy comes through also. It's repeated even in John's Benedictine.
- Hank Smith: 00:07:58 I'm trying to do what you asked us to do and say, " Okay, why is Luke starting this way?" And maybe something that Luke is preparing us for is this isn't going to be the story you think it's going to be. The Lord isn't going to use the characters you think he's going to use. He's going to use people that are going to surprise you, because so far, everyone who's been used is a surprise. This older couple, this young girl. Maybe Luke chapter one prepares us for the rest of Luke, which is watch out for surprises.
- Dr. Gaye Strathearn: 00:08:27 Because God knows you, and he'll find you wherever you are and whatever your situation. Am I ready to step up and say, "Yes?"
- Hank Smith: 00:08:35 I've always loved this baby blessing from Zacharias to John. He's had nine months of not speaking to think about it, so it better be good. And it is, especially when he speaks to John himself. This is verse 76. "Thou child shall be called the prophet of the

Highest. Go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways." And he says, "Through the tender mercy of our God," this is verse 78, "The sunrise hath visited us." What a beautiful baby blessing, how tender that Zacharias came around. I don't know exactly why he was struck dumb because he didn't believe, but he does now.

Dr. Gaye Strathearn: 00:09:15

Yeah. And sometimes I think God is going to hold us accountable, but often he does that in ways that allow us to learn and grow in the process. I don't know about struck dumb, why that in particular happened to Alma the Younger as well and to other people, but I have wondered whether not being able to hear or speak means that your other senses are heightened, and whether this allows for Alma the Younger or for Zacharias the spiritual sense, even though he's righteous, to be heightened to a new level. The other thing I think is really fun about this is in my mind, verse 59, so this is the eighth day after John is born. The family all gathers together, because this is an important ritual in Judaism. We see it as like a baby blessing, yes, but this is for the young child to be circumcised, and this is when he's going to get his name given.

00:10:18

Everybody expects that it's going to be Zacharias after his dad, but one of the things that I love is that Doctrine and Covenants 84 suggests that there's something else really quite supernal happening during this time that Luke doesn't mention. In 84 verse 28, it says, talking about John and how he leaped in the womb, "For he was baptized while he was yet in his childhood and was ordained by the angel of God at the time he was eight days old." So, this is happening at the same time as his circumcision and being given his name. So at eight days, and he is ordained unto this power to overthrow the kingdom of the Jews to make straight the way for the Lord before the face of his people, and to prepare them for the coming of the Lord in whose hand is given all power. This was a sacred supernally important experience for both John and his parents.

John Bytheway: 00:11:27

This always brings up an interesting question of John the Baptist. I think I've read commentaries that say, "Does that mean he's ordained to the priesthood, or was it more ordained in a more general sense to this forerunner Elias calling that he's going to have? Did his father give him the priesthood, or did he get that from the angel, or was the ordaining more of a different kind of ordaining?" What do you think?

Dr. Gaye Strathearn: 00:11:54

I think that's a really good question. I think Latter-day Saints today have a more specialized interpretation of the word ordain that was used in antiquity. We attach it very much with

priesthood and receiving priesthood to a priesthood office. But in the scriptures, that's used much more broadly. Elder McConkie talking about 84, he says it's not talking about being ordained to the priesthood, but it's talking about to what follows, to this power in terms of the Elijah experience. Paul uses the word that's translated as ordained, and the word in Greek literally is the raising of hands. So we would understand that as sustaining rather than an ordaining, so it's a much broader term than what we use today.

- John Bytheway: 00:12:44 That's helpful, thank you. I think what's fun for me is to think of John who was filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb in verse 15. It just seems like he hits the ground running, and it seems like when Jesus chose his apostles, they were like, "Wait, what are we doing?" And Peter was constantly being tutored and corrected, and all of them were I suppose. There's not a greater prophet than John, because he knew from the beginning what was going on. And I get that sense that the apostles had a slower learning curve.
- Dr. Gaye Strathearn: 00:13:17 And this is just my reading of it, I think for Jesus, John was kind of like his Rock of Gibraltar. He could trust John, that John would be there, that John would be supporting, that John would be sending his disciples, because he receives disciples before Jesus does and sending them off to Jesus and things like that. And it seems to me that we have this growing learning curve for the other disciples, and it doesn't seem to be until after the death of John the Baptist that we begin to see Peter step up to the plate. So we have John's death, and then you see Peter being willing to jump out of the boat and walk towards Jesus. And then, we see Peter giving his Caesarea Philippi, "Thou art the Christ" situation. So it seems to me, at least on some level, once John's gone, Jesus needs these apostles to step up.
- John Bytheway: 00:14:13 Well, I like that.
- Dr. Gaye Strathearn: 00:14:14 ... To help him, to be there for him.
- Hank Smith: 00:14:16 How interesting that Elisabeth was there to be the rock for Mary and that John is there to be the rock for Jesus. The relationship continues.
- Dr. Gaye Strathearn: 00:14:24 It's wonderful.
- John Bytheway: 00:14:26 There's a Joseph and a Hyrum. I don't know if that applies, but it's interesting the pairs that he sent them in.

Hank Smith: 00:14:32 I don't know why but I've never seen these two parallel stories before in Luke, but he wants these two babies connected. That's just fantastic. You'd think I'd seen this after a couple of decades teaching, that you wouldn't be able to show me something brand new, but here I am. I was focusing on the couple instead of the babies. When I taught, I always focused on Elisabeth and Zacharias and Mary, and didn't focus on these two babies being told in parallel stories. So I'm going to use that in my classes from here on out. Really grateful.

Dr. Gaye Strathearn: 00:15:04 And look how Luke finishes the story of John in verse 80. "And the child grew and waxed strong in spirit." So where do we see something similar to that? At the end of...

John Bytheway: 00:15:16 Luke two.

Dr. Gaye Strathearn: 00:15:17 Chapter two with Jesus. He increased in words and stature in faith with God and men." The language isn't the same, but the idea is. He grew, he waxed strong in the spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his showing onto Israel.

John Bytheway: 00:15:31 When I see that word "waxed," and I don't know what the Greek is for waxed, but it always helps me to think of when you go to Nauvoo or to a historic site, and they show how they would dip a string into the wax and then let it dry, and then dip it in again and then let it dry. And it was this little layer by layer growth, and that always helps me when I think of "They waxed strong," they grew slowly. One of the things that I think is often a topic is their understanding of what the Messiah was going to do. Was it to deliver political Israel, or was it to deliver the house of Israel?

00:16:08 Well, I've always loved verse 77, part of the Benedictus I guess, "To give knowledge of salvation unto his people..." Saving them from the Romans?" "Salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins." That's the kind of salvation that is coming. And I think that's interesting that remission of sins is specifically mentioned there. Not redeeming Israel in the sense of from the Romans. I put in my margin, not military conquest, but remission of sins. We've got tougher enemies than the Romans.

Dr. Gaye Strathearn: 00:16:42 Whenever I teach New Testament, I like to spend some time looking at the development of Messianic thought in Judaism, what they were thinking about. And there's this passage from the Psalms of Solomon, which is a mid first century BC document.

- Dr. Gaye Strathearn: 00:17:00 And I love this because it gives me a sense of just before Jesus was born, what are they thinking about when they're thinking about Messiah? Let me read it to you. "Behold, oh Lord, and raise up their king, the son of David. At the time which you choose, oh God, to rule over Israel, your servant. And gird him with strength to shatter unjust rulers, to purge Jerusalem from nations that trample her down to destruction.
- 00:17:30 "In the wisdom of righteousness, to thrust out sinners from the inheritance, to crush all their substance with an iron rod, to destroy the lawless nations with the word of his mouth." Very revelation language. "And he will gather together a holy people whom he will lead in righteousness. And he will not allow injustice to lodge anymore in their midst. And no one knowing evil will dwell with them. Blessed are the ones of those days in that they will see the good things of the Lord, which he will perform for the generation that is to come under the rod of discipline of the Lord's anointed or the Lord's Mashiach."
- 00:18:15 So there's a couple of things here. So the Messiah is going to be a king. He's going to be a son of David. Mary acknowledges those, as Gabriel talks about him. "Strength to shatter unjust rulers." I think that that's political, but it also could be in the Old Testament, the unjust spiritual rulers of Israel.
- 00:18:36 To thrust out the sinners because they're gathering together, this Messiah who's going to create a society of holy people, which is interesting to me because holy people is the word saints. A group of people who are holy, and he will lead them in righteousness.
- 00:18:53 So these are the kind of things so that there's this sense of it's not just getting rid of political enemies, but it's creating something wonderful. A holy people who dwell in righteousness. There's elements of that. It's a positive thing. And we would think about it in terms of trying to establish Zion and righteousness where Christ can come and rule over his people again.
- John Bytheway: 00:19:18 Well, Gaye, this has been wonderful. I've got notes all over the place for Luke 1 and now I'm excited to look at Matthew 1. You said that Luke was written Gentiles, rich, poor for everybody. And what unique approach, or if there is one, does Matthew take in Matthew chapter 1?
- Dr. Gaye Strathearn: 00:19:36 Yeah, that's a really good question. Matthew is different from Luke. Both of them are telling the story of Jesus, but they're doing it for different reasons because of their audience.

Matthew seems to have been written to a Jewish Christian audience who is in some tension or had recently split with the synagogue.

- 00:19:59 So in Matthew's editorial passages, the synagogue is referred to as their synagogue, or your synagogue, quite a bit in Matthew. He's the only one of the four gospels that mentions a church. So that's probably set in contrast to the synagogue. He refers to their scribes when Mark uses the scribes. And some people have argued that this represents a time during the Jamnia period, about 70 AD to 100 AD when Judaism is seeking to redefine itself after the destruction of the temple. But honestly, there are enough rifts going on in Judaism that it probably could happen any of the times, but there does seem their intention.
- 00:20:47 So one of the things that Matthew is trying to do is to, this is a really important to him, is to show that Jesus is the fulfillment of prophecy in the Old Testament. It's almost as if he's sometimes saying, "Okay, Jesus did this, hang on a minute, let me go find a scripture that works with that." And then it says, gegraptai, as it is written." And then he puts it in. But it's really important to show those connections.
- 00:21:12 Also, it shows the importance of the patriarchal line. As we'll see in chapter one, he begins his gospel with the genealogy of Jesus, and we'll want to talk about this in some time. And he's going to portray Jesus as the new Moses, and that comes out a little bit after chapter 1, so we probably won't talk too much about that.
- 00:21:34 But there are two other things that I think are really important for what we are going to discuss today. Although he is writing to a Jewish audience, I think it's clear that he's trying to also convince that audience to accept the Gentile mission.
- 00:21:55 In the time of Paul, this question of Gentiles in the church, honestly, this is ... We could read over this quickly, but this is something that threatens to split the church in two, between Jewish Christians and gentile Christians, and it's something that Paul is really struggling with. So that's going to be an important thing. He's saying to the Jewish audience, "Gentiles belong in this as well, and we should welcome them into it."
- 00:22:21 And so there's a couple of ways that this happens. Eusebius, who is a really important Christian historian, he writes in the 4th century, but when he is talking about Matthew's gospel, he says in his History of the church, "Matthew had begun by preaching to the Hebrews, and when he made up his mind to go to others

too, he committed his own gospel to writing in his native tongue."

- 00:22:47 So there's a sense of his responsibility, initially writing to Jews. But then he says, "Okay, I'm going to expand it." And we don't know, very little, if anything, about Matthew and his teaching to the Gentiles. But I think it's reflected in his gospel.
- 00:23:04 So for example, I'll just say these briefly and then maybe we can talk about them in more detail. When Matthew has his gospel, it's a very patriarchal genealogy, which we would expect, except that there are four women in it, which is totally unexpected. Ruth, Tamar, Rahab, and the wife of Uriah, who is Bathsheba.
- 00:23:25 All four of these, Gentile women. So at least at some level it's saying, "Look, Jesus comes through the lineage that we would expect through David and Abraham, but we wouldn't have Jesus, we wouldn't have the Messiah without the influence of women, gentile women." So if they're part of the beginning of Christianity, then surely they should be allowed to be a part of the church.
- 00:23:53 Matthew chapter 2 and the wise men. At least from Matthew's perspective, these are Gentiles and they play a really, really important role. And then we have places like Matthew 8 and Matthew 15, where the faith of Gentiles is just absolutely incredible. And in fact, in chapter 8, after the healing of the Centurion servant or child, we read, and this is unique to Matthew, he's the one that puts this words together with the centurion servant child.
- 00:24:22 "When Jesus heard it, of the faith, He marveled and said unto them that followed, 'Verily, I say unto you, I have not found so great faith. No, not in Israel. And I say unto you that many shall come from the East and West and shall sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, but the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness and there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'"
- 00:24:47 So again, Matthew is editing and to create this to say there are many people who expect that they should be in the kingdom of heaven, but the Gentiles are going to be there and some are going to be disappointed because of this great faith that they have.
- 00:25:03 And then the other thing that I want to just give a heads-up for now is Matthew also seems to be writing to address a question

or a concern that some in Judaism seem to be asking. And that is, where is this God who made a covenant with us? He promised that if we made a covenant that we would be His people, that we would be a treasured nation to Him. He promised that He would go before us with our enemies and fight our battles and be our divine warrior.

- 00:25:41 So what happened? How did we get overtaken by the Greeks and now the Romans, where is God? Why isn't he fighting our battles for us now? Has he abandoned us? Is he really there?
- 00:25:56 Part of Matthew's answer to this is, you better believe it. So let me just show you a couple of verses, one's from chapter 1 and then one's from the end of the book. This is a part that we're all familiar with and we'll put it in more context later. But when the angel is speaking to Joseph, he's going to quote a passage from Isaiah chapter 7:14, and we're all familiar with this.
- 00:26:22 Now this is done that might be fulfilled, which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet Isaiah saying, "Behold a virgin shall be with child and shall bring forth a son and they shall call his name Emmanuel." Which is being interpreted, "God is with us."
- 00:26:42 Now jump over to the end of Matthew, Matthew chapter 28, and we're probably, I think more familiar with verse 19, but we often stop quoting it in the middle of verse 20. But it's the part after that that I'm interested in, but I'll put it in context. So this is the resurrected Jesus on the Mount of Olives, and he's talking to his 12 and this is the last thing that we have him saying to them, at least in Matthews Gospel,
- 00:27:10 "Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." And now notice this language, "And lo I am with you always."
- 00:27:29 This is a literary device known as an inclusio. So if a passage starts with an idea or words that are the same and where it ends with those words that are the idea or the words themselves are the same, that's a device. An enthusiasm means it is kind of bringing together everything in between. Everything in between is then meant to illustrate or to prove these inclusio, that God is with his people.
- 00:28:06 So that suggests to me that when Matthew is writing this, he is also responding to those who are saying, "God's abandoned us. Where is he? Why isn't he with us?" Matthew is writing his

gospel, at least in part to say, "God has not abandoned His people and the evidence that He has not abandoned his people is that He sent His son, Jesus Christ."

- 00:28:35 Everything in Matthew's gospel is to reinforce the coming of Jesus and to show that God continues to be with His people. Even, as He says at the end, even though He's resurrected and He's leaving them in mortality, He's still not going to abandon them. He will continue to be with them even when He's left mortality. I think that's beautiful.
- Hank Smith: 00:28:58 That is those two bookend verses. That's Matthew 1:23, and Matthew 28:20.
- John Bytheway: 00:29:05 That's really cool.
- Hank Smith: 00:29:06 God with us, I am with you always.
- John Bytheway: 00:29:10 I think just about every high council room in the church has that painting with the great commission in it. That's the caption, I guess.
- Dr. Gaye Strathearn: 00:29:17 And so for me, the question also is, if we're thinking about what does this mean for me, do people today have the same questions? Where is God? Has he abandoned me? I thought I joined the church, I made covenants. Where are those provenance for me?
- 00:29:36 I think Matthew is teaching us that the answer will be the same. As individuals, if we take Matthew seriously, what's the evidence for me that God has not abandoned me, but that He continues to be with me? And as a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, one of my answers to that is the evidence that God has not abandoned me or this generation is the restoration of the gospel. That He continues to talk to us through prophets, seers and revelators. He continues to give us guidance for the things that are affecting us in this life.
- 00:30:15 God has not abandoned us because God and His son returned to the prophet Joseph. Rather than walking away from the restoration, I want to hang onto it with everything that I've got because that's what connects me with this promise.
- 00:30:33 And I think the other answer I would say, what's the evidence in my life that God has ... For an individual, not just a community, is that He hears my prayers and He answers me in very personal ways. And I cannot, I cannot reject or forget or push those

things away and think that they're just kind of happenstance. This is the evidence of a loving God who's heavily invested in me personally. And I'm sure there are other ways to think about it as well.

- John Bytheway: 00:31:10 So the definition of Emmanuel, which is interpreted, "God with us," and then, "Lo I am with you," and the weekly reminder we get that they may always have His spirit to be with them. There's no aloneness in the gospel. There is a promise of being with you. And I remember Elder Hafen pointing that out in one of his books. I just love that promise at the sacrament table of being with you. There's not an aloneness. I'm glad you said that about Matthew now and now I can think of, as you said, the restoration promising the same thing.
- Dr. Gaye Strathearn: 00:31:48 It's beautiful. And when I saw that, that has really changed the way I've thought about Matthew's gospel. I mean, I've always loved Matthew's gospel. Even though it's not everyone's favorites, it's one of mine. So that just deepened it even more for me.
- 00:32:01 The book starts with that part that as we're reading the Old Testament is probably the part we skip the most. All of those blinking genealogies that come along.
- Hank Smith: 00:32:12 All the begating.
- John Bytheway: 00:32:13 How many begats do I have to go through here?
- Dr. Gaye Strathearn: 00:32:15 Yeah, there's a few actually. But one of the things that I learned from the Old Testament, that those genealogies are really important because they help to connect us with the original story, with the divine. They help to connect us with God.
- 00:32:34 Matthew, writing to a Hebrew audience, is going to pick on it. So it shouldn't surprise us that there's a genealogy front and center. And in fact, the first two words in Matthew chapter 1 is, "The Book of Genesis." We've got it translated as the Book of Generation, but the word is Genesis. And I'm not sure that that's happenstance.
- 00:32:58 I think that Matthew, like John, is wanting to connect this Christian story as an extension of the creation. Back in Genesis where God created the world and now He's creating a community, a kingdom of God on earth-type of thing. And I think that this is one way that Matthew does it. That for his original readers, they would pick up probably a little bit more

quickly than what we do because we don't live in that same sphere and time.

- 00:33:32 So this is the book of Genesis of Jesus Christ, the son of David and the son of Abraham. Again, for his audience, it's really, really important for Matthew to connect the story of Jesus with two of the most prominent important people in Jewish history. King David, Jesus comes as a Messiah. He's a descendant of David, as prophesied that David's house
- Dr. Gaye Strathearn: 00:34:00 would last forever, and Jesus renews that. But also the son of Abraham. Remember that Luke had gone back to Adam because it was important to his audience, but for Matthew and his audience, it's the connection with Abraham, the covenant of Abraham, that is an important connector for understanding who this Jesus is as Matthew tries to explain him to his audience.
- Hank Smith: 00:34:30 These are the biggest names in their history. David, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob. It doesn't get any bigger.
- Dr. Gaye Strathearn: 00:34:36 You'd kind of expect a little bit of Moses in there too, but he doesn't make it in this way, but Moses is prominent in other ways in Matthew's gospel. Jesus is the new Moses as well.
- 00:34:47 It's clearly that Matthew has not just crafted this chapter, but he's crafted this genealogy, and he's crafted it around the number 14. So he's broken Israelite history down into three major places, from Abraham to David. He's put in 14 generations there. He's in verse 17 here, and then he's got from David until the Exile Babylon, and he's included 14 generations there as well. Even though the time from Abraham to David was a lot longer than from David to the Exile, he's still staying with 14. And then from the carrying away the Exile of Babylon to Christ, another 14 generations, even though he's had to miss out lots of kings to make it 14.
- 00:35:38 Why is he doing this? And I don't think that there's only one answer, but some things to maybe consider is that for a Hebrew audience, the number 14 is particularly important on a number of levels. Jews have this thing called gematria, where in Hebrew, unlike English, numbers don't have separate symbols to letters. In Hebrew, it's the letters that are the numbers. So their first letter, Aleph is number one, Beta is number two. This means that for them, words have numerical significance. Somebody has noticed that the name David adds up to 14, the dalet four, vav six, and then the dalet four is then 14.

- 00:36:27 So is Matthew intentional here in crafting this genealogy in this symmetry of 14 generations, 14 generations, 14 generations? Is that a way of reinforcing the importance of Jesus' connection to David and the extension of the Davidic covenant? That may be the case. It's not explicit, but it may be one way. The number seven is also very, very important. That creation and dispensations and everything is this, six periods of seven, which would indicate that there is an anticipation of a seventh that is being ushered in by Christ and the kingdom of God. That has been brought up by people as well. We don't know exactly what Matthew was thinking, but there's some possibilities looking at it.
- Hank Smith: 00:37:18 It is crafted on purpose. The numbers are important to him.
- Dr. Gaye Strathearn: 00:37:21 Yeah, for whatever reason.
- John Bytheway: 00:37:24 I have a comment here from our friends and colleagues, Kelly Ogden and Andy Skinner in their book, Verse by Verse: The Four Gospels. This is what they said, "By using the number 14, Matthew emphasized Jesus's perfection and messiahship as well as his direct descent from King David. Sometimes, as here, genealogies might be telescoped or condensed to match a desired number of which an author is particularly fond." So like you said, well we really want to make this fit 14. One of the things that I'd love to share with my class is that photo in the Bethlehem Grotto underneath the Church of the Nativity. If you go down the spot where the traditional spot of the birth of Christ is marked by a 14 pointed star, to go back to this Matthew 1:17.
- Dr. Gaye Strathearn: 00:38:13 So whatever he is doing, and he does like balance, Matthew likes balance, that this is kind of balance the doubt.
- 00:38:19 Can I just say one other thing about the women in here in this genealogy? People have said, "Well, there are four women because fill in the blank." But here's the reason why I emphasize their gentile nature. Tamar was a Canaanite. We never talk about her in seminary. Verse five talks about Rahab, then Boaz, of Obed of Ruth. They're familiar with the stories of Rahab and Ruth, both of whom were Gentiles. Rahab was a Canaanite. Ruth was a Moabite. Tamar was also a Canaanite.
- 00:38:54 But then notice verse six, "And Jesse begat David the king, and David the King begat Solomon of her that had been the wife of Uriah." This again is where I stop and ask a question. I'm going, "Why on earth did he say it that way?"

00:39:09 We all know that the wife of Uriah is Bathsheba.

John Bytheway: 00:39:12 Bathsheba.

Dr. Gaye Strathearn: 00:39:13 So why not just say blinken Bathsheba? Well, I wonder whether, because we don't know the lineage of Bathsheba, but she was married to Uriah. And in the Old Testament, Uriah is called Uriah the Hittite. Even though this might not work perfectly, Matthew is wanting to emphasize the gentile-ness of this woman, who we all know as Bathsheba. But because he says it this way, I think it again emphasized the gentile nature of the four women here. So that's why I go that way.

Hank Smith: 00:39:46 A reader during Matthew's day who is saying, "I don't want Gentiles to be part of this," should start off the book going, "Gentiles are already part of our story and have been for a long time."

Dr. Gaye Strathearn: 00:39:59 And we wouldn't be at this place without these women and the impact they had or the part they played in the lineage. There's an idea that even sinners have a part to play in this coming forth. Even sinners can do things to help move along the kingdom of God because God is omnipotent and he uses imperfect people like me to help this work. And here's an example of that as well.

John Bytheway: 00:40:25 That's what I like about it. It's like, you don't have to have a perfect lineage. Your pedigree charts and everything can have all sorts of interesting characters in it, and we need them all. But it doesn't determine what you're going to do and be.

Dr. Gaye Strathearn: 00:40:39 That's right. Now, the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise, when his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph. Before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost. Now, one of the things that I like about seeing the story in Luke and seeing it separately in Matthew is we are reminded, in Luke, of Mary and the importance of the story for her. But Matthew has a different audience again. His emphasis here it is on Joseph. He also has a part to play. It's not the same as Mary's. So I'm trying to think about Joseph here.

00:41:22 So verse 19, "Then Joseph, her husband, being a just man." Now I want to stop there and think about that. So the word here is for just is *dikaiosune*. Joseph, her husband, being a righteous man. I think that that's really important. We talked a little bit about Mary and her foreordination and those kinds of things, but Joseph shouldn't be just in the background here. I think if

we look at both of these and their emphasis on their righteousness suggest to me that even though this was undoubtedly an arranged marriage, that they were equally yoked together spiritually. They were both righteous beings, and/or people. And that also makes sense to me, that God would want to send his son to a home and to a family that is based in righteousness, like we saw with Zacharias and Elisabeth.

00:42:26 And I think then we see some evidence of his righteousness. He's not willing to make a public example of Mary. He was kind to her and wasn't going to divorce her, even privately, because that would cause real heartache for her. And the fact that he also, in Matthew's gospel, he's the one receiving dreams and revelations. While he thought on these things, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream saying, "Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife for that which is conceived of her is of the Holy Ghost." I wonder what he was thinking on that. He's heard the story that is conceived in her of the Holy Ghost, and he is told that she shall bring forth a son and now shall call his name Jesus. Specifically here for he shall save his people from their sins.

00:43:24 I'd love to think about that idea of Joseph and Mary being equally yoked together in this great enterprise embarked in. And this is the only time we're going to hear of Joseph. He kind of falls off the edge of the earth and we don't hear from him again. So I think it's important that we remember that aspect while we have the opportunity to do so.

John Bytheway: 00:43:47 Elder Holland talked about Joseph once in a... The talk I think was 1995, and I think it was called Always Remember Him. And he talked about certain things that we could think about during the sacrament. And Elder Holland said, I'll get as close as I can, that we could think of Jesus's unpretentious father and we could be reminded that quiet unpretentious people have moved this work forward from the beginning. And then Elder Holland said, "If you feel like you are serving almost anonymously, so did one of the best men who ever lived," about Joseph.

Dr. Gaye Strathearn: 00:44:24 Yeah, I think it's good to hear from him and to think about him as it is to think about Mary.

00:44:28 Now, I also want to kind of go to what the angel tells Joseph in a little bit more detail, specifically quotes Isaiah 7:14. Now a couple of things here. Number one, I love it when scripture interprets scripture.

John Bytheway: 00:44:45 Yeah, it's really helpful.

Dr. Gaye Strathearn: 00:44:46 This is one of those places. That Gabriel is interpreting Isaiah 7:14 to be a reference for Mary and the birth of Jesus. Now, the reason I want to point this out is because that's not probably what Isaiah is doing when he uses this verse back in Isaiah 7. And I think this is a really good place to help us think about original context and our interpretation of it.

00:45:18 So one of the reasons why I think, at least for Isaiah's audience, that this could not be a reference just to this future event of Mary and Jesus is how it's used in Isaiah 7:14. So if you want to kind of follow me here to that verse, because if we look at the rest of chapter seven, and you learnt this last year, but just kind of putting it in this context, what we have here is that Ahaziah is the king of Judah, and the king of Syria and Israel are trying to force him to enter into an alliance, a political alliance, so that they can fight against this Assyrian war machine that is coming down. Ahaziah wants to make peace with the king of Assyria himself. But he's feeling the pressure here of what these two are doing.

00:46:12 And Isaiah comes to him and says, "Look, don't be afraid of them." And in verse four he says, "For these two," he uses a symbolism. "They're smoking firebrands." They're on the way out. That's what smoke is. After the flame is out, they're smoking. And then Isaiah says to Ahaziah, "Ask for a sign that I am speaking of the Lord." And Ahaziah says, "Well, I can't ask for a sign. I'm not going to ask for a sign." we know that. We're told that. Don't ask for a sign for a wicked and adulterous generation ask for a sign. And I don't know whether Ahaziah knew that or not, but when the prophet of the Lord is saying, "Ask for a sign."

John Bytheway: 00:46:50 Ask for it, yeah.

Dr. Gaye Strathearn: 00:46:53 Ahaziah is going, "I don't," and maybe he's thinking, well, if I ask for a sign, then I'm going to have to listen to him. And I don't know.

John Bytheway: 00:46:57 I don't want to listen. Yeah.

Dr. Gaye Strathearn: 00:46:59 That's right. But Isaiah keeps pushing and pushing. "Ask for a sign, ask for a sign." "No, no." "Okay, well I'm going to give you one anyway."

John Bytheway: 00:47:06 I'll give you the sign.

Dr. Gaye Strathearn: 00:47:07 And the sign he gives to Ahaziah is this, "Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a son and call his name Emmanuel." If we were to only read this from the perspective of, this is talking about Mary and Jesus, then that sign makes no sense whatsoever because the Assyrians are coming. And if they've got to wait 700 years until the sign is given, then Ahaziah is not going to trust Isaiah. So this is one of these places where the immediate context is something to do with a young woman having a child. Perhaps, according to chapter eight, it's Isaiah's own wife. And that's going to be evidence to Ahaziah to trust Isaiah as a prophet. But that doesn't work if we only see it in terms of... There's only one way to interpret scripture.

00:47:58 So two quotes, one's from Elder Holland and one's from then Elder Oaks and talking about this passage here, and seeing it in terms of dual fulfillment. So Elder Holland says, "The dual or parallel fulfillment of this prophecy comes in the realization that Isaiah's wife, a pure and good young woman, symbolically representing another pure woman, did bring forth a son. This boy's birth was a type and shadow of the greater and later fulfillment of that prophecy, the virgin birth of the Lord Jesus Christ. The dual fulfillment here is particularly interesting in light of the fact that Isaiah's wife apparently was of the royal line of David. Isaiah's son is thus the type the prefiguring of the greater Emmanuel, Jesus Christ, the ultimate king who would be born of a literal virgin."

00:48:50 And then Elder Oaks. "The book of Isaiah contains numerous prophecies that seems to have multiple fulfillments. One seems to involve the people of Isaiah's day or circumstances of the next generation. Another meaning, often symbolic, seems to refer to events in the meridian of time when Jerusalem was destroyed and her people scattered after the crucifixion of the Son of God. Still another meaning or fulfillment of the same prophecy seems to relate to events attending the second coming of the Savior."

00:49:19 So this is just a reminder to me to always dig deeper. Don't think just because I've heard, "Oh, this verse means this," that I'm satisfied with that. It's the breadth and depth and nuance of scripture that makes studying the scripture a lifetime pursuit of excitement for me. This is just one example of that.

Hank Smith: 00:49:42 And Matthew had no problem, it sounds like. He probably knows its original context, but he's saying, "Hey, I'm going to use it to talk about Jesus as well because it fits."

Dr. Gaye Strathearn: 00:49:52 Yeah. And he's going to use the Septuagint, the Greek version, not the Hebrew version, because the Greek version has Parthenos, a virgin. The Hebrew version has Alma, which just means a young girl.

Hank Smith: 00:50:04 Oh, okay.

Dr. Gaye Strathearn: 00:50:05 So that's going to be important for him.

John Bytheway: 00:50:07 When I teach Isaiah, I like to say Isaiah 7 is the prophecy. Isaiah 8 is the first fulfillment. "I went in to the prophetess she conceived and bared a son," Isaiah 8:3. And then Isaiah 9 is the next fulfillment. Unto us, a child is born. Unto us, a son is given. The government shall be upon his shoulder." Speaking of Christmas. So it sounds like... I call them current events and coming events. Sometimes a current event will foreshadow a coming event. Yeah, that one is fun to teach because when you really figure out which nations and everything, it makes no sense, as you said. Yeah, just wait 700 years and we'll all be okay.

Dr. Gaye Strathearn: 00:50:46 And then you can trust, but it wouldn't work for him. Yeah. Can I just shift gears just a little bit here? Scholars are going to argue that the story of Jesus' birth in Matthew

Dr. Gaye Strathearn: 00:51:00 And in Luke are not historical, but they're just kind of mythological, to set up a story and they say there's no historical value in them because if you were reading these stories for the first time, would you think that they were telling the same story? They're very, very different. We didn't get into chapters two of Matthew or Luke, but there's shepherds and tomb in Luke, there's wise men here. The emphasis is on Joseph here. It's on Mary in there, is this really talking about the historical birth narrative? I've been interested in something that I learned from a very fine Catholic scholar, Joseph Fitzmyer, who soon passed away and he was very aware of this discussion in scholarship about the stories and the not historical nature of them.

00:51:59 He went through and he said, "Sometimes in effect, you can be looking at the minutia that you can miss the panorama before you." He went through the stories and he said, "Well, they're very, very different stories, but what do they have in common?" And he made a list, if I can share that list with you, I think it's important. He's going to argue that in both Matthew and Luke, both of them agree that Jesus' birth is related to the reign of Herod the Great, so that puts it in a historical context. They both agree that Mary, his mother to be, is a virgin, engaged to

Joseph but they have not yet come to live together. They both agree that Joseph is the house of David. They both agree that an angel from heaven came announcing the birth of Jesus.

00:52:51 They agree that Jesus is recognized himself to be a son of David. They both agree that his conception is to take place through the Holy Spirit. They both agree that Joseph is not the father, I want to come back to that one. They both agree that Jesus is ... the name Jesus is imposed by heaven prior to his birth. They both agree that the angel identifies Jesus as Savior. They both agree that Jesus is born after Mary and Joseph come to live together. They both agree that he's born in Bethlehem and they both agree that Jesus settles with Mary and Joseph in Nazareth and Galilee later on. So as I kind of sift through this list, which I really appreciate, the one thing that comes to my mind is, is there anything that is fundamentally important to the story of Jesus as the son of God, that they don't agree on?

00:53:52 The answer to me is no. They agree it's a virgin birth. They agree that he's the son of God. They agree that he's here of salvation. They agree that he's the Savior. All of those really, really important things, they're on the same page with. And whether there's wise men or shepherds is not nearly as important, is that Jesus is the son of David. He's the son of God and that he's come to be a Savior and bring salvation to his people. I think that that's really important to think through.

John Bytheway: 00:54:24 That's a good way to put those two stories together. I like that

Hank Smith: 00:54:28 They probably didn't know they would be put together in the same book, but they complement each other so well.

Dr. Gaye Strathearn: 00:54:34 Right.

Hank Smith: 00:54:35 Like two pieces of a puzzle.

John Bytheway: 00:54:36 In the most important areas as you said.

Hank Smith: 00:54:39 Yeah.

John Bytheway: 00:54:40 Most fundamental areas.

Dr. Gaye Strathearn: 00:54:42 One other thing, this idea that they agree that Joseph is not involved in the conception, so he is not the dad. So I want to share a story if that's okay. When I was, first came to BYU as a student, it was Christmastime and I love Christmastime like most of us do. I was watching a program on TV about Christmas

and as part of that program they were interviewing a leader from another Christian tradition and he said something that has just stuck with me ever since, right? He said, as best as I can recall, "Why don't we just stop kidding ourselves and admit that Joseph was Jesus' father?" Now, when I heard that, I almost fell off the couch. I'm going, "What?" This is a religious leader. I mean, I knew that scholars would say things like that, but this was a religious leader and I don't want to criticize him, but I guess I have done that and I apologize for that.

00:55:48 I share this story because it caused me to start thinking, so it was a catalyst for my thoughts on this matter. We do this often in the church. Why is it important that Jesus had Mary as a mother, a mortal and God as a father? If we were to take out the fact that God was Jesus' father and just admit that Joseph was it, then my first thought, well, what would that mean to Christ's atoning sacrifice? If God isn't his father, the atonement doesn't work. Then, I went next step further and then thought, well, what happens if we took Mary out of the equation? The atonement of Jesus Christ also wouldn't work. I don't think we often think about it that way, but there's part of Jesus being mortal.

00:56:38 A part of him having the experiences of a mortal experience, suffering, pain, death, hungry, sleep, tired, all of those kinds of things is also part of that atoning sacrifice. If we are thinking about Christ's atonement, the author of Hebrews in chapter four, we have not a high priest that cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but was in all points tempted like as we are, even though he was without sin, but then verse 16 is what jumps out for me. "Let us therefore, having a high priest or a Messiah who has Mary as a mother. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of his grace." The Greek word here for boldly means, let us come with confidence to the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

00:57:37 I love that imagery. It is because Jesus' mother is Mary, that in a very real way, we have a connection with him, that he knows us. He doesn't just know us intellectually, but he knows our experiences because he has experienced us, all of the trials and the difficulties of what a mortal life is all about. Sometimes in Christian dialogue, we have this tension and this struggle. Where do we put our emphasis? Is Jesus God or is he human? We want him to be God because all of the things that he can do as a God to enable the atonement to work, but we also want him to be human because it's his humanness that allows us to connect with him in a powerful and important way.

00:58:27 I hope that as we go through and spend this new year, looking for and studying the New Testament, that we are going to absolutely look for, Jesus is the Son of God, Jesus is God. That's fundamentally important, but I hope in the process that we don't lose the Mary side of this son of God that we have and see him. So can I just share two examples? These are my favorites and again, you can talk about them in more detail much later.

Hank Smith: 00:59:01 Please do.

Dr. Gaye Strathearn: 00:59:01 Okay, so the first one is in Matthew eight. So I'll just start in Matthew. These are really interesting verses, the way Matthew has crafted them, but we've got somebody coming to Jesus in verse 19 who says, "Master I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest." So in other words, he's saying, "I want to be a disciple." And Jesus stops and says ... and he doesn't say, "Oh yes, that's great," but as the great master teacher, he says unto him, "The foxes have holes and the bird of the air have nests, but the son of man hath not where to lay his head." Now, we could read over that very quickly, but just thinking through what this might mean about Jesus and the mortal side of Jesus.

Hank Smith: 00:59:47 His human side. Yeah.

Dr. Gaye Strathearn: 00:59:49 Do you understand the cost of what it means to follow me? This is not just a free ride and following me means that you're going to be an itinerant teacher. Foxes have holes, birds have homes, but I don't have a house to live. I don't have one of those basic comforts. Are you willing to give up that as well, if you're going to follow me, to give all things, to sacrifice all things, to come and follow me or are you a disciple with a but clause? "I will follow you but," and then fill in the blank. I see that as a verse that helps to see a little bit of a window into Jesus. Then, the other one that I'd like to share is John chapter six and we're all familiar with this. This is the bread of life sermon that Jesus gives, magnificent.

01:00:45 In fact, in John's gospel, there is no sacrament in John's gospel at the end, but this is the sacramental chapter where he talks about the importance of the sacrament. Go to verse 66, one of the greatest sermons Jesus gives. From that time, many of his disciples went back and walked no more with him. Notice the poignancy. "Then Jesus said unto the 12, will you also go away? Are you also going to abandon me?" Can you feel the pathos of that question, that Jesus feels the rejection at some level? "Are you also going to do for this?" And this is when I love Peter, bless Peter. Steps up to the plate and says, " Lord, to whom shall we go for thou hast the words of eternal life and we

believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the son of the living God." Boom, boom, boom.

01:01:39 I love that about Peter, but it also reiterates to me that Jesus, even as God, has experienced the difficulties of mortal life, and if I take the time to read, trying to appreciate that aspect of him as well, there's a connection there that I think is really important for me as an individual, as I struggle the things of mortality as well.

Hank Smith: 01:02:09 Gaye, we have a wonderful opportunity this year to study the New Testament.

Dr. Gaye Strathearn: 01:02:13 Amen.

Hank Smith: 01:02:14 What would you say to our audience who are excited to study the New Testament, but they've spent most of their time in the Book of Mormon maybe and they gave the Old Testament a try last year and it was maybe difficult for them. Now, I know you're a student of the Bible. What would you say to those who really want to give the New Testament a try this year?

Dr. Gaye Strathearn: 01:02:32 I am very pleased that we get to study the New Testament, and I think blessings be upon the heads of everybody who worked through the Old Testament last year as well.

Hank Smith: 01:02:45 Yeah.

Dr. Gaye Strathearn: 01:02:45 The Old Testament is wonderful and I love it as well. So why study the New Testament? First thing, the prophet Joseph said, speaking of the Bible, "He who reads it oftenest will like it best." I'm going to say that again because I want that to sink in. "He who reads it oftenest will like it best." There's a part of me that would say, "Why do we love the Book of Mormon?" And part of that answer is because we read it, we pay a price to get to know it. My encouragement is, and my experience would be, that the same thing happens as we take the time to really study the New Testament. So my mom used to have us as children memorize quotes, and I didn't like doing it very much as a kid, but I've lived long enough to see and appreciate the value of it.

01:03:43 One of the quotes that she had us memorize was by Leonardo da Vinci, and it goes something like this, "Knowledge of a thing engenders love of it. The more perfect the knowledge, the more fervent the love." I love that quote now because that has been my experience. I've had the blessing to be able to study the Bible for many years, professionally, as well as individually. The

more I have learnt about it, the more my love of it and its message has deepened. It's much more nuanced now than it has been, and I'm not there yet. I anticipate for the however much longer I have in this life that I'm going to continue to learn new things and see principles and applications that I didn't see because I've paid the price to study it.

01:04:34 So that's the first thing. It's a great book. We believe the Bible to be the word of God as far as it is translated correctly. So where am I going to put my emphasis, on the we believe the Bible to be the word of God or on as far as it is translated correctly? I choose to put it on the first part of it, because then it means it's important to me. In my busy life, I should make time for the biblical record. The other thing I think is important, it's from the Bible that we get the historical experience of Jesus' mortal life. We don't get that so much in the Book of Mormon, although we get plenty of other wonderful things, but his mortal ministry, that's from the New Testament. For no other reason, I think that that should be a motivation for us to read.

01:05:22 Then, even though Acts and Paul ... well, Paul in particular can be a little bit more difficult because it's not narrative. One of the things that I love about the epistles is seeing people, imperfect people like me who still have a place in the kingdom of God. Peter, how many times was Jesus pulling his hair out at Peter? Look what Peter became because Jesus saw in Peter not who he was, in my opinion, but who he could become. I take real hope from that, and whether it's Peter or Thomas or Judas, or whether it's Paul, don't matter. These are people like me, people that I can relate to and seeing them work through their struggles to come to know and to understand and to apply their knowledge of Jesus Christ and his atoning sacrifice. For no other reason, for those two, I think it's well worth the time and the effort to do it.

Hank Smith: 01:06:27 What a fantastic first day in the New Testament, John, this has been just wonderful. I'm excited. It'll be over all too quick. I have a feeling we'll be in the Book of Revelation, in the blink of an eye. So well, I'm going to take advantage of this time to be in this wonderful book this year. We want to thank Dr. Gaye Strathearn for being with us today. She's just been phenomenal. We want to thank her for time and her expertise. We want to thank our executive producer Shannon Sorensen. We want to thank our sponsors, David and Verla Sorensen and of course, we want to remember our founder, the late Steve Sorensen. We hope all of you will join us next week. We have another episode coming up, New Testament, followHIM.

01:07:11

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WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM THE
PEOPLE IN MATTHEW 1 AND LUKE 1?



- Hank Smith: 00:04 Hello, my friends. Welcome to another followHim Favorites. John and I are taking a part of this week's lesson, which is Matthew 1 and Luke 1, and just talking about a tiny portion of it. John, we've got all sorts of people listed in Matthew 1 and Luke 1, from Abraham to David, to Joseph and Mary, and Elisabeth and Zacharias. Then you go into the rest of the Christmas story and you've got shepherds, and angels, and Herod and wise men. What do you take from all these characters? Is there any of them that stand out to you?
- John Bytheway: 00:38 One fun way to look at it, whenever you see a name in the scriptures is to ask yourself, is this person an example, like I want to be like that, or is this person a warning, I don't want to be like that. Boy, do we have some contrasts here. We've got Joseph, who the Angel of the Lord visits him in a dream. We've got Herod, who is so wicked. Sometimes when there's not a whole lot of doctrine being taught, we can look at the examples of the people and say, "Which one of those do I admire? Which ones do I want to avoid?" I mean, I've heard you talk about Herod before, and Joseph, and what a contrast those two are in their personal character.
- Hank Smith: 01:15 Matthew put them side by side, and here you've got Joseph, who is very responsive to dreams, very responsive to promptings. The one thing that I've noticed about Joseph is that he's slow to act in emotion. He finds out that his fiancé is pregnant. It says he's a just man. He doesn't want to make her a public example. He wants to maybe end this privately, to divorce her privately. Then while he thought on these things, behold the Angel of the Lord appeared unto him. There's something to be said about not being governed, not having kind of a knee-jerk reaction to something, but to be slow, and calm and deliberate, where Herod just seems to be governed by his emotions in every aspect of his life. He's governed by jealousy. He's governed by his insecurities. We don't get to talk much about Joseph. We talk about Jesus and we talk about his mother, but it's nice for us to say, "What's the example of Joseph for us in this chapter?"

John Bytheway:	02:16	Yeah, I remember Elder Holland giving a talk about things we could think about during the sacrament. My mom used to say, "think about Jesus," when I was a kid during the sacrament.
Hank Smith:	02:24	Yeah.
John Bytheway:	02:25	He gave this talk about always remembering, and he just made a little comment about Joseph that I've never forgotten. He said, "Joseph is a reminder that plain unpretentious people have pushed this work forward from the beginning, and that if you feel you're serving almost anonymously, so did one of the best men who ever lived," and that was Joseph. That's a good way we can think of... We don't know much about Joseph, but just like you said, he was slow to respond. He was trying to protect Mary by not embarrassing her in public with something he didn't understand, and the Lord gave him understanding about.
Hank Smith:	03:02	He was open to the Holy Ghost. He was open to these promptings of the Spirit. So I'd like to... Let's say Joseph is a great example of someone in the scriptures this week. You can say, "You know what? How can I be more Joseph-like? How can I walk away from this chapter being more Joseph-like?"
	03:20	We hope you'll join us on our full podcast. It's called followHIM. You can get it wherever you get your podcasts, and then come back next week and join us for another followHIM Favorites.