

The Annunciation To Mary

Luke 1:26-38

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Where in all the world of literature can you find a story so beautiful and wonderful as the annunciation of the angel Gabriel to Mary from our passage today? Mary was chosen to be the one through whom the Messiah, the Savior of the world, would come. The great Bible teacher, G. Campbell Morgan said, "It's magnificent, it's mysterious and it's majestic." But best of all, it's true. What we are going to read today has the thumbprint of the divine. We see God's hand in everything in this passage. God is all the way through it. It's a divine story, yet it's so humble, so simple but so simply profound and amazing.

This prediction is the crown of all prophecy. It reveals the supreme mystery of the Christian faith; that Jesus is both fully human and fully divine. He is the God-man Who came from heaven. He is Emmanuel, "God with us." As far back as man's fall in the Garden of Eden, the world has been waiting for the fulfillment of the first prophecy. In Genesis 3:15, it says that the "seed" of the woman would "bruise" the head of the serpent. We are about to read its fulfillment as Mary will conceive in her womb Jesus, the seed of the woman, Who would one day go to the Cross and bruise the head of the authority of the serpent.

In this beautiful story we have four movements. The first movement is the salutation or the greeting, verses 26-29. "Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David." That means he was of the line of David. He was of the tribe of Judah. "The virgin's name was Mary. And having come in, the angel said to her, 'Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!' But when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and considered what manner of greeting this was."

Notice in verse 26 it says it was "the sixth month" when God again sent the angel Gabriel to a little town of Galilee named Nazareth. What does he mean by "the sixth month"? That refers to the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy. Elizabeth was the mother of John the Baptist. Last time we read about the annunciation to Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, that his wife, Elizabeth, would have a son, the forerunner of Messiah. The Bible says that they were both "well stricken in years" or King James for "over the hill." They were past the age when they could bear children, but God did a miracle in the womb of Elizabeth, so she had a son. This is not a virgin birth but a natural birth, but it's still a miracle in that her body was past child-bearing age. In verse 24, it says that Elizabeth "hid herself five months." Then in verse 36, it says that "this is the sixth month" of her pregnancy.

The angel Gabriel was the same angel, verse 26, that God had sent six months earlier to Jerusalem to Zacharias. The first annunciation was in the splendor of the temple in Jerusalem in the holy place. It was in the midst of the aroma of the incense and the majesty of the priesthood.

But now we have an interesting contrast; the second annunciation goes to a humble village in Galilee, a despised place, to a despised people to a young teenaged girl. It is believed that Mary was 13, 14 or maybe 15 years old. She was in her middle teens. Jewish girls would get married very early. When the angel Gabriel came to her, she was a very humble individual.

Verse 26, Gabriel was sent to a city of Galilee. Galilee was a region kind of like our counties. We have Riverside County and San Diego County and San Bernardino County. I grew up in San Bernardino, and I always thought we were awesome because we had the biggest county in the United States, even though it was all dirt and cactus. We boasted that Barstow is in our county. Isn't it awesome?

By the way, I just happened to be watching a documentary on the history channel about the Hells Angels. Why? I don't know. Sure enough, it documented that they came from San Bernardino, my home town. Can anything good come out of San Bernardino?

So Nazareth was a despised little village; not a city. It had a small population of peasant people. It was in a despised area known as Galilee. There were three regions: Galilee, Samaria and Judea. The Judeans looked at Galilee and despised them. They were considered to be hicks or hillbillies or country folk. They were uncouth and overrun with Gentiles. So it was an area that was despised by the more orthodox Jews of Judea.

The lesson for us is that God comes to the humble. God comes to the lowly. He comes to those whom the world would pass over. It's interesting that Gabriel passed over Jerusalem. He passed over Rome. He passed over Athens. And he chose "the foolish things of the world to confound the wise." The weak things to confound the things that are mighty. The things which are despised, the things which God has chosen to confound the wise. What an awesome thing.

It is clear in this text that Mary was a virgin. In verse 27, it is mentioned twice. It says that Mary is "a virgin." "...to a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph...and the virgin's name was Mary." The name "Mary" is the Greek translation of the Hebrew name "Mariam." In the Old Testament, it was Mariam. It actually means "exalted one."

The angel came to Mary and said these words: "Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!" He said, "God has chosen you. God has called you. You're going to be the mother of Messiah." But the angel hadn't divulged that yet; she doesn't know yet why he's come. Verse 29, "But when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and considered what manner of greeting this was."

What does the angel mean by "highly favored"? I don't believe that Mary is full of grace and can dispense that to others. The Catholic Church has done a great disfavor in mistranslating this statement, "Hail, Mary, thou art full of grace" or "Hail, Mary, full of grace." The word is used in Ephesians 1:6 for all believers. They are called "accepted in the beloved" or they've been "chosen in the beloved." So this is true of all Christians. They've been chosen by God's grace. In the Greek it is in the passive participle. It means that Mary is the recipient of divine grace,

not the dispenser of divine grace.

I don't say that to upset anyone or offend anyone, but I want to be faithful to the text and what the Bible teaches. Mary cannot hear your prayers. She is highly favored. She is blessed. She has been chosen among all these women, and we should honor and respect her, but we shouldn't worship her or venerate her. Nowhere in the Bible are we told to pray to her, that she can intercede for us or that she can dispense grace to us. She is the recipient of grace.

When we read Mary's Magnificat, she says, "My soul doth magnify the Lord...my Savior." She was a sinner just like you and me. Her own child would be her Redeemer. She would have to put her faith and trust in Him for salvation. So we have to be careful that we don't elevate Mary to a place of being the mother of God [but she was], being a co-redemptress or being an interceder for us. We also shouldn't reject her and despise her either. The statement meant that she had received grace from God.

In verse 29, she was "troubled." Why? I believe she was troubled, because she was very humble. She realized that she was unworthy. She thought, Why would an angel come to visit me? The point is that she doesn't know why the angel has come. Gabriel hasn't yet disclosed his purpose for coming. So this is the opening greeting or salutation.

The second movement of the story is in verses 30-34. It's the annunciation. "Then the angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.'" This is actually a repeat of verse 28, which says she was "highly favored" or "God's chosen you by His grace" or she was "highly graced by God." "And behold, you will conceive in your womb..."—finally Gabriel tells her what's going to happen—"...and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob..."—which is the nation of Israel—"...forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end." Then Mary said to the angel, 'How can this be, since I do not know a man?'"

I want you to note the important truths in this dialogue between Gabriel and Mary that we discover about Jesus Christ. We see His real humanity in verse 31: "You will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son." I want to use this passage to drive home some very important doctrinal truths. The Bible teaches that Jesus Christ was fully human. Sinless, but fully human. Because He was born of a virgin, He inherited a human nature. But He didn't inherit an Adamic nature or a sinful nature.

It's very important to understand that the virgin birth relates to the sinlessness of Christ. If Jesus was not born of a virgin, then He was a sinner just like you and me. There have been false teachers who have come along and cult groups that have taught that Jesus is a sinner, that He's just a normal person, that the Christ came upon the man Jesus at His baptism, and the Christ-anointing left the man Jesus when He died on the Cross. Not so. Christ came from heaven. He preexisted before Bethlehem: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." God

came from eternity past into time and space through the womb of a virgin, and He took on full humanity.

Do you know that it is just as heretical to deny the humanity of Christ just as it is to deny the deity of Christ? We're always focusing on the fact that Jesus is God—and that's true—but Jesus is also fully man. Jesus, right now, is the exalted God-man in heaven for all eternity. In heaven, He bears the scars of our salvation. He died in a body. He rose in His body, glorified and transformed. In the virgin birth, you have deity infused with humanity for all eternity. That's enough to kind of make you blow a fuse. That's what's so marvelous.

This story is so simple that we do it with dramas and kids and Sunday school, and we read it to our children. But it's so profound that our minds can't wrap around this: That the second person of the Godhead would come down and be conceived in the womb of Mary, that He would be born and live a sinless life, He would go to the Cross to die a substitutionary death for our sins, He was resurrected from the dead and ascended back into heaven and He's the Savior of the world.

The second thing we see is not only His real humanity but His mission, in verse 31: "...and shall call His name Jesus." The name Jesus in the Old Testament was the name Yeshua or Jehovah Yeshua or "Jehovah saves." It's what the name Jesus means.

In Matthew 1 when Joseph was going to put Mary away, because she became pregnant, and he was perplexed and didn't understand what was going on, he went to bed that night and again, I believe it was Gabriel, who came to him in a dream. Gabriel said, "Joseph...fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife..."—They were espoused—"...for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call His name Jesus..."—And he tells him why—"...for He shall save His people from their sins."

In Luke 2:11, the angel said, "For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord."

In Luke 2:30, Simeon said, "...for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation." What an awesome thought.

So Jesus came to save. That was His mission. When you think about Christmas, you have to think about God coming to save us, to redeem us.

Thirdly, notice His greatness. In verse 32, it says, "He shall be great." There is no one greater than Jesus Christ. He is to have preeminence. Not just prominence, but preeminence in the church, in our hearts and in our lives. Jesus is great in His words; no one ever spoke like Jesus. He also was great in His works; no one ever performed the miracles that Jesus performed.

You know you think that if God became a man and came to earth that He would do some miraculous things; and He did. Jesus turned water into wine. Jesus cleansed leprosy

immediately. Jesus gave sight to the blind. Jesus opened deaf ears and healed people who couldn't speak. Jesus raised the dead, and Jesus walked on the water. Jesus calmed the stormy sea. Jesus multiplied the bread and fish and fed a multitude. Jesus raised people from the dead by His own power. Jesus said, "Lazarus, come forth," and he came out of the grave. On and on the stories go.

Notice fourthly, His deity, verse 32. It says, "...and shall be called the Son of the Highest." Verse 35 says He "shall be called the Son of God." These are direct statements of the deity and the divine nature of Jesus Christ.

When it says "the Son of God," note that it doesn't say "a Son of God." I could stand up in front of you and say that I'm a child of God or I'm a son of God. But I'm not the Son of God. If I ever say I'm the Son of God, run for your lives. Get out of here as fast as you can, because lightning's going to strike.

But when Jesus says He's the Son of God or the Bible refers to Him as the Son of God, that doesn't mean He's lesser than the Father. The Bible teaches there is one God in three persons: God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. They are all equally divine; in essence they are all God.

On Christmas cards we often see Isaiah 9:6, which says, "For unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given." There you see both His humanity and His deity. "For unto us a child is born" shows His humanity. "Unto us a Son is given" shows His deity.

But fifthly, notice His Messiahship in verses 32-33. Notice His Messiahship and His eternal kingdom. In verse 32 it says, "He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest, and the Lord God shall give unto Him..."—that is, Jesus—"...the throne of His father David" or His great-great-grandfather, David. "And He shall reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there shall be no end."

Back in the Old Testament book of 2 Samuel 7, David wanted to build God a temple. God said "No" to David, but He told David, "I will build you a house, and through your lineage..."—or "family"—"...Messiah will come." That's why the Messiah was called "the Son of David." Sometimes the people would cry out to Jesus, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" It became a title for the Messiah, because Jesus was the fulfillment of the Davidic covenant or promise. God made a promise to David, and God kept His promise to David.

Notice what the Old Testament, as well as the New Testament, says about the Messiah, Jesus Christ. It says that "He will reign over the house of Jacob..."—or "Israel"—"...forever, and of His kingdom there shall be no end." This is yet future in its fulfillment. It will not happen until Jesus comes back in His Second Coming. There are two Advents: the first was when Jesus came to die as a Lamb for the sins of the world. Then there will be the second Advent when Jesus comes back as the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the King of kings and the Lord of lords. He will sit upon the throne of David. And just as His first coming fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies,

so His second coming will be literally fulfilled.

There are a lot of people who deny that Jesus is coming back or deny that there will be a kingdom of David in Israel for a thousand years. I believe God's promises. I believe that God fulfills what He has spoken. There's no reason to believe that He won't come back literally, physically, gloriously, powerfully to establish His kingdom. When Christians pray, "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven," we're praying for that coming of Jesus Christ.

When I celebrate Christmas, I don't only look at the cradle and the Cross, but I look forward to the crown. I realize that little baby grew up, He suffered and died and rose from the dead, He ascended into heaven and is exalted at the right hand of the Father. He's coming back as King of kings and Lord of lords. That's a day we are looking for. So Christmas isn't just looking back at His first Advent; it's anticipating and looking forward to His Second Coming. We thrill with excitement to realize that Christ will come in power and glory, He will set up His kingdom and it will be "an eternal kingdom of which there will be no end."

I want you to notice Mary's response in verse 34. "Then Mary said to the angel, 'How can this be, since I do not know a man?'" Again, this is a clear statement of her virginity. She says, "I have not been intimate with a man." If your Bible translates that "I don't have a husband," you need to get a new Bible, because that's not a good translation.

Again, I mention that Mary and Joseph were "espoused." That means that one year before they consummate their marriage, they enter into a legally-binding relationship that could not be broken unless there was a formal divorce. They were legally bound together in espousal. We call it engagement. They called it espousal. It was one year before they got married, and during their espousal, they would be legally bound to each other.

Marriage, in Bible days, was by arrangement of the parents, which I think is a great idea. At least I do now that I am already married and I have my own daughters. I don't know if I would have liked that when I was looking for a wife, but now that I have daughters and granddaughters, I think even grandfathers should pick who would marry their granddaughters. I think about my granddaughters and think, Man, someday I'll go to their weddings if I live long enough. You know you're old when you go to your grandkid's wedding. And you have great-grandkids.

So the parents make the arrangements. "You have a cute little girl? You have a cute little boy? Let's get them hooked up. Let's get them together, and some day they'll get married." They would set that all up. Then the last year, they would enter into espousal. But Mary and Joseph had not consummated the marriage. They were legally bound together. That's why some places in the New Testament Joseph might be referred to as "the husband" of Mary.

So Mary said, "How can this be, since I do not know a man?" Her words expressed astonishment at Gabriel's message, but not unbelief. Zacharias' response was, "I don't believe it." Mary said, "I believe it; I just don't know how you're going to pull it off!" It's one thing for

Elizabeth, who is old, to have a baby, but it's another thing for Mary, "...since I do not know a man." Mary believed the promise; she just didn't understand the performance process or "How can this be, since I do not know a man?"

Let me come back to the important doctrine of the virgin birth of Jesus Christ. If you deny the virgin birth—more strictly speaking, it's a virgin conception. The birth was natural, but the conception was supernatural. If you deny the virgin birth of Jesus Christ, you don't have Christianity. You would have a sinful Christ, who could not die for the sins of the world. It's like a drowning swimmer can save no one else. A sinner can't save other sinners. Only a sinless Messiah could save us. Some say, "He was not sinless and divine; he was just a man. He didn't die for our sins. He didn't rise from the dead, and he's not the savior of the world." Not so.

If you pull the virgin birth out of Christian theology and doctrine, you do not have Christianity. Now it's possible for you to be a true Christian and not understand the virgin birth or comprehend it, but doctrinally you don't have Christian doctrine; it's not orthodox to reject the virgin birth of Jesus Christ. It's so very important.

Now we go to the third movement of our story in verses 35-37. It's the explanation. The angel Gabriel told Mary that she would have "a Son, and shall call His name Jesus. He will be great," He will be the Son of David and sit on the throne of David and will reign forever. Mary asked, "How?" The answer is found in verse 35: "And the angel answered and said to her, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will...'—catch this phrase—"...overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God.'" Then Gabriel gives Mary an assurance and encouragement: "Now indeed, Elizabeth your relative has also conceived a son in her old age; and this is now the sixth month for her who was called barren. For with God nothing will be impossible." Mary said, "I don't know how you're going to pull this off. I believe, but seeing I don't know a man, that's going to be quite a feat." So the answer to Mary's question is "the Holy Spirit."

The word "overshadow" is the same as the shekinah glory of God in the Old Testament. It was used in the New Testament for the glory manifested on the mount of transfiguration. How do you explain the virgin conception or the virgin birth? Basically you just say, "It's a miracle." Some people reject this idea by saying, "How can a virgin have a child? It can't happen." It's a miracle, and it's a mystery.

This whole story is permeated with the supernatural. In verse 26, you have a divine messenger. In verse 27, you have a divine choice. In verses 28 and 30, you have a divine blessing. In verses 31-32, you have a divine child. In verse 33, you have a divine kingdom. In verse 35, you have a divine miracle. This means that Christianity is a divine religion; it's supernatural and comes from God. It rests distinctly on the supernaturalism of its founder, Jesus Christ. In verse 35, Jesus is called "the Son of God." He's not just an ascended master. He's not just a guru. He's not just a great religious teacher. He's actually God manifested in the flesh. "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us."

Some of the reasons for the incarnation, God becoming man, was so that we could see God, so that we could know God, so that we could understand God. “For no man has ever seen God at any time, but the only begotten Son of God, Who came from the bosom of the Father, has declared Him” or “He has made Him known.” Jesus also became a man so He could die for us. He also became a man so He could sit on the throne of David and keep the Davidic covenant, the promise that God made so long ago to David.

Then notice that Gabriel gives Mary an assurance. I love it. God condescends to us. Gabriel could have said, “Just believe it; okay? I’m Gabriel.” Mary’s statement is different than Zacharias’. His was unbelief; hers was faith. Every week leading up to Christmas we’re going to see a different response to the coming of Christ. Week one we saw unbelief. This week we see faith or believing. So to encourage Mary, in verse 36, he said, “Check out your cousin, Elizabeth.” That meant that John the Baptist and Jesus were second cousins. So the angel was saying that Mary’s older cousin, Elizabeth, “has also conceived a son in her old age...”—that son is John the Baptist—“...and this is now the sixth month for her who was called barren.” Now Mary didn’t ask for a sign, but God gave her a sign. Mary is going to run up to see Elizabeth in the hill country of Judea. Mary will spend a couple of months with her there.

The explanation in verse 37 is, “For with God nothing will be impossible.” So Mary asked, “How’s this going to happen?” Answer: the Holy Spirit. “God is going to overshadow you. That which is conceived in you is the work of the Holy Spirit. Check out Elizabeth; it happened to her and it’s going to happen to you. God is a God of miracles.” Then he makes this statement: “For with God nothing will be impossible.” If you don’t underline anything else in your Bible, underline this verse. Isn’t it awesome? It is one of the great verses of the Bible.

In Jeremiah 32:17, Jeremiah said, “Ah, Lord God! Behold, Thou hast made the heaven and the earth by Thy great power and stretched out arm, and there is nothing too hard for Thee.” Remember that.

Jesus said in Matthew 19:26, “With God, all things are possible.” The context of this statement Jesus made was that it is hard for rich people to get into heaven because of their riches. So the disciples responded to Him and asked, “Well, who can go to heaven then? Who can be saved?” Jesus said, “With men it is impossible, but with God, all things are possible.” God has the power to keep His promises.

One translation has verse 36 as, “For God’s promises can never fail.” I love that. Have you ever made a promise and not kept it? “I’ll call you this week,” but you didn’t call. “We’ll go to Disneyland Saturday, kids,” but you don’t take them. They’ll never forget that one. They’ll be in their 60s and they’ll say, “Remember when you said we were going to Disneyland, and you didn’t take us?” We parents make promises. “But I didn’t know it was going to rain!”

“Yeah, but you promised!” Don’t you love that? “You promised!”

“Yeah, I know I promised, but I didn’t know the car would blow up.” “Catch fire.” “I didn’t know

there would be a tornado that would hit the house.”

You know God's in control of everything? So whatever He promises cannot be thwarted or be hindered. His promises will be fulfilled.

Now my favorite of this whole story is the end verse, verse 38. It's the fourth and last movement of the story. It's her submission. So the movements are the salutation, the annunciation, the explanation and now the submission. Mary said in verse 38, “Behold the maidservant...”—or “the handmaiden”—“...of the Lord!” A handmaiden was the lowest, female slave of the household. She was humble. “Let it be to me according to your word.” So Mary was humble and submissive and obedient. “And the angel departed from her.”

Mary's submission is seen in that statement in verse 38: “Let it be to me according to your word.” If I were working on my own translation of the Bible, that's how I would phrase that, or I would say, “Lord, have Your way.”

This is one of the most beautiful pictures of submission to the will of God, even in spite of the suffering, the sorrow, the shame and the suspicion that it would bring. Mary would be looked at as getting pregnant out of wedlock. They would say of Jesus, “We be not born of fornication.” She would have that stigma and that reproach. They would look down upon her. At first even Joseph was going to “put her away privately,” because he didn't want anything to happen to her. God had to convince him in a dream that it was all the work of the Spirit. Then one day Mary would have to stand at the foot of the Cross and look at her own Son suffer and die.

Are you a parent? Can you imagine standing and watching your child be crucified? Being spit upon? Hanging on a cross and dying? Breathing their last breath? Can you imagine, as Simeon said, how “the sword would pierce through your own heart”? I think a mother's love for her child is one of the greatest loves in the world, as Mary's love for Jesus was when she watched Him suffer and die and hang upon that cross and she bore the reproach. Yet Mary said, “Let it be to me according to your word.” “Have your way.”

Whenever we do the will of God or we're used by God, there is suffering involved. There is no one who has been used by God who has not paid a price or suffering, but what a blessing it brings. Mary believed the Word of God, and she submitted to the will of God. She trusted and she obeyed and she was blessed. When we trust God, when we obey God, we will be blessed by God.

In conclusion, some of the same blessings that Mary possessed, we possess. She was chosen by the grace of God. Do you know that God has chosen you by His grace? Nothing in us, but by God's grace. Secondly, she believed the Word of God. We, too, can believe God's Word. God's Word is true; we can trust it and believe it. We can “take it to the bank.” We can claim His promises. Thirdly, Mary was touched by the Spirit of God. We, too, can be touched by the Spirit of God. Fourthly, she surrendered to the will of God. We ought to surrender to God's will for our lives, no matter what price we pay. Fifthly and lastly, Mary was indwelt by the Son of

God. How glorious and how wonderful that the Son of God was tabernacling in her womb. But you, by faith in Jesus Christ, can have the Son of God dwelling in your heart. Christ can live in you if you trust in Him and you believe in Him and you put your faith in Him.

What a great summary of the Christmas story. "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life." That's the gift of Christmas. But you must open your heart and invite Christ to come in. You do that by faith; trusting Jesus as your only Savior.

Let's pray.