

The Annunciation To Mary

Luke 1:26-38

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In all the literature in all the world, there is no piece of literature that is more wonderful, magical and marvelous than the story of the annunciation of Gabriel, the angel of God, who came from heaven to the little town of Nazareth, to tell this little peasant girl, Mary, that she would bear the Son of God, who would be the Savior of the world. G. Campbell Morgan said, "It's magnificent, mysterious and majestic, and yet it's true. This prediction is the crown of all prophecy, and it reveals the supreme mystery of the Christian faith; that Jesus is both human and divine." I like that.

As far back as man's fall in the garden of Eden, the world had been waiting for the fulfillment of the first prophecy, in Genesis 3:15, when the seed of the woman would bruise the head of the serpent. So our text is the annunciation of that glorious event.

There are four movements in this story. The first movement is the salutation, 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." Joseph was of the lineage of King David. "The virgin's name was Mary." Joseph and Mary were both from the tribe of Judah. "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..."—we would say "freaked out"—"...at his saying, and considered what manner of greeting this was."

What is "in the sixth month" all about? It is referring to six months into Elizabeth's pregnancy. Elizabeth was the wife of Zacharias, the priest, and they would become the parents of John the Baptist. So before the announcement that Jesus would be born was an announcement that John would be born. Zacharias and Elizabeth were beyond the child-bearing years. They had been praying for a child, and God answered their prayer. In verse 24, it says that "She hid herself five months." That was the five months of her pregnancy, and now the time of this story happens during the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, as verse 36 says.

Now we see that the angel Gabriel shows up, in verse 26. This is the same angel who was sent to Zacharias, in verse 19. "I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God." So the same angel who came to Zacharias, the priest, in the temple in Jerusalem is the same angel who came to this humble, peasant girl in the city of Nazareth in the region of Galilee.

Galilee was a region in the north of Israel around Lake Galilee. This was a place that was despised by the more orthodox, elite, educated Jews who lived further south. The next region to the south was known as Samaria, the central part of the nation. Then below that is Judea.

Today we talk about Palestine and Palestinians and Jews. I guess these people haven't read the Bible. Israel's been there a long time. It was called "the land of Israel." There was a temple

there built by Zerubbabel. The first one was proposed by David and built by Solomon. This land that God promised to Abraham and David goes way back. Remember that when you watch the news.

Now up in the north of Israel in Galilee was the little, Podunk town of Nazareth. I grew up in the town of San Bernardino in San Bernardino County. We have counties in our nation, similar to Galilee, Samaria or Judea. The cool people live in Orange County. One time I was in Encinitas overlooking the ocean when a couple struck up a conversation with me. They told me they were from Dana Point. Immediately I knew they were going to ask me where I'm from, so I was getting my courage up.

"Where are you from?"

"San Bernardino," I said quietly.

"We're sorry."

But I'm encouraged when I read this story, because the angel went to Galilee to a despised town called Nazareth. "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" I think so.

A few years ago I was watching a documentary on the Hell's Angels. And I found out they came from San Bernardino. That's awesome! But I was never in the Hell's Angels. But I think about that. "God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise," 1 Corinthians 1:27. Can anything good come out of San Bernardino? I think so. How marvelous that God's grace came to this humble, peasant girl in the little town of Nazareth in the area of Galilee.

Verse 27 says that Gabriel came "to a virgin." The word virgin means what we think it means. "...to a virgin betrothed..."—or "engaged"—"...to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary" or "Myriam." The Bible is very clear that Mary was a virgin. And it is orthodox, essential Christianity to believe in the clear teaching of Scripture that Mary was a virgin when she conceived Christ in her womb by the power of the Holy Spirit. And she gave birth to a child still being a virgin at that time.

The word "betrothed" or "espoused" in the King James translation was a word that meant a legally binding period of time, one year, before the marriage was consummated. We use the word "engagement." We don't have any set time for an engagement, and it is not legally binding. An engagement can be broken at any time without any legal consequences. But in the Bible, marriage was by arrangement; parents got together and arranged a marriage between their children. In the Bible, one year before the marriage, they had the ceremony and were espoused and were then legally bound. At that point, the only way to break the marriage was by divorce.

This is why Matthew's Gospel says that when Joseph found out that Mary was pregnant, he was going "to put her away secretly," until the same angel Gabriel appeared to Joseph and

said, "Do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins," Matthew 1:19-21. So this is a divine story of the miracle of the virgin conception, which resulted in the virgin birth. This is very important for us to understand.

And notice in verse 28 that "the angel said to her, 'Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!'" The word "favored" means "graced." In the Greek, it's what's called "a passive participle." It means that Mary was the recipient of divine grace; not the dispenser of divine grace.

Some Bibles translate this "full of grace." That's not an accurate translation. They do that because they overemphasize Mary's place and position and think that she is actually one who we can pray to and she can impart grace to us; that we can cry out to her in our time of need, and she can dispense grace. That's not at all implied in this text.

Mary was graced, was blessed among women, but she was still just a woman. We shouldn't depress her down or elevate her up. We should just give honor to her, because God chose her to be the mother of the Savior of the world. She was graced. The word "favored" has the Greek word "kairos" in it, from which we get our word "charisma" or "charismatic." And we get our word "grace" from that. So the concept of being "highly favored" means you are "graced" or God's grace is given to you unreservedly. It doesn't mean that you can dispense it, but you are a recipient of it.

Verse 29, "But when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and considered what manner of greeting this was." Anyone who would see an angel would be freaked out, because they're holy, they come from God, we're sinful, so we're convicted being in their presence. At this point, Mary doesn't yet know the message that Gabriel is going to bring to her. All she knows is that Gabriel shows up.

Picture in your mind the contrast between Zacharias and Mary. Gabriel first went to the priest, Zacharias, and now he is going to this peasant, Mary. Gabriel went to Zacharias in the temple in Jerusalem, with all the majesty and splendor of the curtain between the holy place and the holy of holies, the incense, the candles, the showbread and all its glory, and now he comes to a humble, little, peasant girl from Nazareth. At this time, Mary was probably between 14 and 16 years old. So we see the contrast between the angel coming to Zacharias and the angel coming to Mary. It's interesting too that Zacharias, the priest, didn't believe the message Gabriel brought. Mary, the peasant, believed; she just didn't know how it would be performed. One responded in unbelief and the other responded in belief.

Now we move from the salutation to the second movement, which is the annunciation, verses 30-34. Verse 30, "Then the angel said to her, 'Do not fear, Mary'..." That's kind of standard when an angel shows up. They freak you out. Then he said, "...for you have found favor with God." So Mary was "highly favored," in verse 28, and she "found favor with God," verse 30. God has chosen her by His grace. And verses 31-33 say, "And behold, you will conceive in

your womb 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 forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end.” These are marvelous words of prophecy predicting what manner of child Mary will have.

Verse 34, “Then Mary said to the angel, ‘How can this be, since I do not know a man?’” She questioned how it would happen; she didn’t question that it would happen.

Let me break down Gabriel’s words to Mary. Number one, we see Christ’s true humanity in verse 31: “You will conceive in your womb...”—which is really the first prediction—“...and bring forth a Son.” Not only would there be conception in this virgin womb, but there would be a Son in this virgin womb. This is true and real humanity.

In this Christian narrative, I want to give you some solid, Christian doctrine. The Bible teaches the virgin conception and virgin birth of Christ. Christ was born of a virgin, and He was real humanity or a real person. But His humanity was different than ours only in that He was sinless. When we are born, we inherit a sinful nature. Jesus did not; He came into Mary’s womb by the power of the Holy Spirit, the holy Son of God from eternity past. That which was conceived in Mary was already the holy Son of God. So when Jesus was born, He had humanity but He didn’t have sin.

It’s just as grievous a Biblical error to deny the humanity of Jesus Christ as it is to deny the divinity of Jesus Christ. We’re always saying that cults don’t believe in the deity of Christ—and that’s true—but to deny the humanity of Jesus Christ was an ancient heresy known as “Gnosticism.” A branch of it is known as “Docetism,” in which they believed that Jesus didn’t really have a body. They said He was like Casper, the friendly ghost; you could put your hand right through Him and He didn’t leave footprints. Not so.

Jesus actually had a body. He got tired, He was thirsty, He wept, He grieved, He had emotions, He bled when He hanged on the Cross and He physically died. He was a real man but a sinless human being.

John 1:1 says, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” Jesus was the eternal Word, the personal Word and the divine Word. John 1:14 says, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” That’s humanity. Philippians 2:7-8 says, “...taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.” So we also see the humanity of Christ.

Number two in Gabriel’s words to Mary, we see Jesus’ mission seen in His name, verse 31: “shall call His name Jesus.” This is the Greek translation of the Hebrew Yeshua or Jehovah-shua or Joshua. It means “God saves” or “God is salvation.” It’s a beautiful name.

In Matthew 1:20-21, the angel said to Joseph, “Do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bring forth a Son, and you

shall call His name Jesus...”—or Yeshua—“...for He will save His people from their sins.” So that was a given name speaking of His mission—He came to save. In Luke 2:11, an angel said to the shepherds, “For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.” Jesus came to save us. In Luke 2:30, Simeon took the baby from Mary’s arms in the temple, held him up and said, “My eyes have seen Your salvation.” Now Simeon could die in peace after seeing Jesus, the Savior. But what did he see? A baby, flesh and blood. God wrapped His love in flesh and blood and sent Him down to man.

Have you ever held a baby and thought of the miracle of life? Wow! Can you imagine looking at the baby Jesus?! God in flesh! Charles Wesley said, “God contracted to a span, incomprehensibly made man.” This is beyond my comprehension. So Jesus’ name meant that He would save; that was His mission.

Number three in Gabriel’s words to Mary about Jesus was His greatness, verse 32. “He will be great.” I like that. He had greatness in His words and in His works. He caused the blind to see, the deaf to hear, the lame to walk, He raised people from the dead, He walked on water, He calmed the storms. He took a few pieces of bread and some fish, prayed and broke the bread and fed thousands. He would say, “Peace, be still!” and the winds would stop. No wonder He’s so great! There is no one greater than Jesus.

Colossians 1:18 says that Christ should have “preeminence.” Not prominence but “preeminence.” “Prominence” means “important”; “preeminence” means “the most important.” A lot of people give Jesus prominence, but they don’t give him preeminence. The Bible declares that there is no one higher than Jesus: His is “the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow...and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord...”—or “Kurios, Jehovah, Yahweh”—“...to the glory of God the Father,” Philippians 2:9-11. So there is no one greater than Jesus.

Number four, we see His deity, verse 32. He “will be called the Son of the Highest.” That is a phrase which means that He is God, actually the Son of God. And verse 35 says, “will be called the Son of God.” Many times Christmas cards will have Isaiah 9:6, which says, “For unto us a child is born...”—that’s His humanity—“...unto us a Son is given...”—that’s His deity, and it goes on to describe the Messiah. So Jesus is God, “the Son of the Highest.” He is divine. That is very, very important.

Number five, we notice Jesus’ Messiahship and His eternal kingdom, verses 32-33. “The Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob...”—which is another name for Israel—“...forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end.” This is the future aspect of Christ’s kingdom.

Now I want to point out seven prophecies of Gabriel to Mary, in verses 31-33. The first five have been fulfilled, but the last two are yet future to us. Number one, Mary “will conceive in [her] womb.” Number two, Mary “will bring forth a Son.” Number three, His name shall be “Jesus.” Number four, “He will be great.” We know that is true. Number five, He “will be called

the Son of the Highest.” Now the last two, which haven’t been fulfilled yet, are number six, Jesus will reign on “the throne of His father David”; and number seven, “He will reign over the house of Jacob...”—or Israel—“...forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end.”

These last two prophecies from Gabriel will happen at the Second Coming. Jesus will sit on David’s throne and will reign forever. In 2 Samuel 7, we find the Davidic Covenant. David was King of Israel, the land people call Palestine today, and he told Nathan he wanted to build God a temple. At that point they had a tabernacle, a tent, where they worshipped. Nathan said, “Go, do all that is in your heart.” But that night God said to Nathan that he should return to David and tell him that he won’t build the temple, because he was a warrior and had blood on his hands. His son, Solomon, would build the temple, because he would be a man of peace. So Nathan went back to David and prophesied these things to him.

David was disappointed but God gave him good news in that God would build David a house. God said that from the tribe of Judah, from the family of David, would come the Messiah, the Savior of the world. Jesus will come again to sit on David’s throne and reign forever, and “of His kingdom there will be no end.” Then these last two prophecies will be fulfilled.

You say, “I thought Jesus will just reign for 1,000 years.” The 1,000-year reign is how this prophecy gets started. This millennial reign will flow into the eternal state; “And of His kingdom there will be no end.” I emphasize that because I look at all the kingdoms of man that will tumble and fall. But Jesus will be king forever.

So at Christmas, you don’t just look at the cradle, you don’t just look at the Cross, you don’t just look at the empty tomb; you look for Jesus at His Second Coming. We are between the two Advents: Christ at His first coming to Bethlehem to die on the Cross for our sins, and His Second Coming as “King of kings and Lord of lords” to reign in righteousness. That is what Gabriel is prophesying in this passage.

Now notice Mary’s response to all this in verse 34. “Then Mary said to the angel, ‘How can this be, since I do not know a man?’” Sometimes people ask, “How is it that Zacharias didn’t believe and was judged with silence for his unbelief, but Mary doesn’t seem to believe and she has no repercussion or judgment on her?” Actually, Zacharias’ response was unbelief; he didn’t believe it would happen. “How is that going to happen? I’m an old man and my wife’s well-stricken in years! We’re over the hill!” He didn’t believe. But Mary believed; she just didn’t know how it would happen. Someone pointed out, “Mary expressed astonishment, not unbelief. She believed the promise, but she didn’t understand the performance.” I like that. She was asking how this would happen.

Don’t misinterpret that. It’s very clear here that Mary was a virgin; she had not been intimate with a man. But some Bibles translate this, incorrectly, as “I have not a husband.” That’s a bad translation. Mary knew how babies were produced. She was not intimate with a man, so how could this happen? So Mary was a virgin, and she obeyed God’s plan and purpose for her life. That’s so important.

Let me tell you about the doctrinal importance of the virgin birth. If you take the virgin birth out of the Bible, you don't have Christianity. It is essential, orthodox, Christian doctrine to believe in the virgin birth. If you don't believe in the virgin birth, then you're rejecting orthodox, Biblical Christianity. In Jude 3, it says that we must "contend earnestly..."—or "fight"—"...for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints." And in that faith is the virgin birth, the Trinity, the deity of Christ, His bodily Resurrection, the atoning sacrifice of Christ—these are essential, Christian doctrines. If you take any of them out of your belief system, it no longer is orthodox Christianity. We must stand on the true teaching of the Word of God.

The third movement of our story is the explanation, verses 35-37. Mary asked, "How can this be, since I do not know a man?" Verse 35, "And the angel answered and said to her, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you...'—or "rest upon you"—"...and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God."

Whenever you have the statement "the Son of God," that is an affirmation of the deity of Christ. Not "a son of God," not "a child of God," but "the Son of God." When Jesus called Himself "the Son of God," people picked up stones to stone Him, because He claimed to be equal to the Father; He claimed to be God. It's a claim of deity.

Then the angel said to Mary, "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," verses 36-37. There is no sin too black, no heart too hard, no promise God can't keep.

So the answer to Mary's question was, "The Holy Spirit...will overshadow you." The word "overshadow" is the same word used for the shekinah glory of God in the temple, and the same word used for Christ being transfigured in the glory of God.

How do you explain the virgin birth? How do you explain the Incarnation? In three words: It's a miracle. If you believe in God, then all things are possible. Is anything too hard for God? No. God is all-powerful, all-knowing, omnipresent. So how will this happen? God will perform a miracle. It's a mystery, the mystery of Christmas.

Now this story has a divine messenger, verse 26; it has a divine choice, verse 27; it has a divine, supernatural blessing, verses 28-30; it has a divine child, verses 31-32; it has a divine kingdom, verse 33; and it has a divine miracle, verse 35. Christianity is supernatural, and it rests distinctly upon the supernaturalism of its founder, Jesus Christ. The Christian religion is God coming down from heaven to earth into the womb of the Virgin Mary, taking on humanity, dying a substitutionary death on the Cross for our sins, being buried and rising from the dead, ascending back into heaven as "King of kings and Lord of lords." And "Whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved," Romans 10:13. That's Christianity. It's a supernatural religion. Christianity is not a philosophy, it's not a theory, it's not a fable; it's supernatural. How marvelous.

We also see, in verse 38, Mary's submission. "Then Mary said, 'Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word.' And the angel departed from her." The word "maidservant" or "handmaid," in the King James translation, means "female slave." It's the lowest slave in the house.

To me, this is one of the most beautiful pictures and statements in all the Word of God. This humble, teenage, peasant girl from despised Galilee and Nazareth said, "Have it your way." She said, "Let it be to me according to your word." It's so marvelous, because she knew the shame and the stigma and the pain it would bring to her life. Her whole life she would carry the stigma of having had a baby born out of wedlock. And she would watch her Son hang on a cross.

You mothers and fathers—especially mothers—think of watching your child crucified on a cross! Simeon said to Mary that God would use this child, but "A sword will pierce through your own soul," Luke 2:35. Yet Mary was willing: "This is a scary thought, but have Your way, Lord." What a beautiful picture that is. Mary believed the Word of God, and she submitted to the will of God.

Charles Erdman said, "Those who believe most firmly in the promises of God submit most patiently to the providence of God." Mary would take the shame, the suspicion, the suffering and the sorrow that it would bring. "Let it be to me according to your word." No one has ever been mightily used of God but that they have to be broken. Someone said, "If you want to bless, you have to bleed." If you want to bless, you have to be broken. This is no easy task for Mary. This is difficult.

But Mary, like us, had these five blessings: Mary was chosen by the grace of God, Mary believed the Word of God, Mary was touched by the Spirit of God, Mary surrendered to the will of God and Mary was indwelt by the Son of God. How marvelous! But the same is true of us. We are chosen by God's grace, we have the ability to believe God's Word, to be touched by God's Spirit, to be surrendered to God's will and to be indwelt by God's Son. "Christ in you, the hope of glory," Colossians 1:27.

You won't find Christ in Christmas unless He's first in your heart. So if you haven't repented of your sin and believed in Christ, do it today. Jesus Christ is the only one who can save. He is the only divine, sinless God-man who died on the Cross in your place. And the Bible says, "Whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved," Romans 10:13. The same blessings are yours, but you have to believe. You have to receive. You have to trust Christ.