

Luke 1:26-38

NIV Harmony 33; Compassionate 21-24

Introduction

1. Birth announcements are a time of great joy.
 - a. Sometimes finding out you are pregnant comes as a surprise. Hopefully it is a good surprise!
 - b. We love to share the good news of an impending birth with others.
 - c. In our last study, God sent news of an important, unexpected birth to Zechariah and Elizabeth.
 - d. In today's passage God sent news of an even more important and unexpected birth to the virgin Mary.
2. **Read Luke 1:26-38.**

A. The Angel's Greeting (26-29)

1. The angel came "in the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy" (26).
 - a. Remember that Elizabeth had kept her pregnancy a secret (cf., Lk 1:23).
 - b. The revelation of her pregnancy to Mary will be an important sign given to Mary about the truth of what the angel said to her (cf., Lk 1:36).
2. The angel's name was Gabriel, the same angel who had announced the birth of John the Baptist to Zechariah (cf., Lk 1:19).
3. Gabriel came to "Nazareth, a town in Galilee" (26).
 - a. Warren Wiersbe notes, ". . . Gabriel brought a second birth announcement, this time to a young virgin in Nazareth named Mary. At least there was variety in his assignment: an old man, a young woman; a priest, a descendent of David the king; the temple, a common home; Jerusalem, Nazareth; unbelief, faith" (Warren Wiersbe, *Be Compassionate*, 21).
 - b. Notice that the announcement came to an outlying area of Judea that was not highly regarded by the pious Jews in Jerusalem.
 - 1) Nazareth was a town of about 15,000 people that lay at the halfway point of the trade route between Jerusalem in the south and Tyre/Sidon in the north.
 - 2) It was a cosmopolitan city populated both by Jews and many, unclean Gentiles.
 - 3) Remember Nathaniel's words when Philip told him that Jesus came from Nazareth. "'Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?'" (Jn 1:46).
 - c. Notice the irony. God sent this important announcement not to Jerusalem but to Nazareth; not to a Davidic heir in Jerusalem but to a virgin pledged to marry a man from the line of David. God went outside the corrupt system and did something that no one would have expected.
4. The announcement came "to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary" (27)
 - a. The recipient of this important message was Mary, and she was most likely about 13 to 15 years old, which was the normal age for a girl to be pledged to be married.
 - b. She was a virgin (Gk., *parthenos*). What a young, humble recipient for such an important word.
 - c. She was pledged (Gk., *emnesteuennen*) to be married.
 - 1) Most marriages in that day were arranged through a bargain made between the bride's father and the groom or the groom's father.
 - 2) A bride price was paid to the bride's father since he would lose her as a helper in his household and the groom would gain a helper.
 - 3) Once pledged, the bride and groom normally lived separately for about a year before consummating the marriage and living in the same house.
 - 4) They were to remain celibate during this time, and the only way the pledge could be dissolved was by a formal divorce.
 - d. Her pledged husband was named Joseph, who was a descendant of David. Remember our previous discussion of the lineage of Jesus. This line of descent was important as we will see.
 - 1) An angel will also speak with Joseph (cf., Mt 1:20-21) as we will see in a later study.
 - 2) Joseph accepted Mary as his wife instead of divorcing her and cared for Jesus as his own son.

5. “The angel went to Mary and said, “Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you” (28).
 - a. “Greetings” (Gk., *Chaire*) – “Grace” – This was a standard greeting given upon meeting and is often found at the beginning of NT epistles (cf., Gal 1:3, Eph 1:2, Phil 1:2, Col 1:2, Phil 1:2, 1 Th 1:1, 2 Th 1:2, 1 Ti 1:2, 2 Tim 1:2, Ti 1:4, Ph 1:3, Jm 1:1, 1 Pe 1:2, 2 Pe 1:2, 2 Jn 1:3, Rev 1:4).
 - b. The term “highly favored” (Gk., *kecharitomene*) means “one who has been graced.”
 - c. So, a possible alternate translation of Gabriel’s words are: “Grace, one who has been graced.”
 - d. God’s grace shown to Mary was a confirmation that the Lord was with her and had chosen her by His sovereign will for a special purpose.
 - e. Mary was not chosen specifically based upon her character but primarily as an act of God’s grace to her and ultimately to all humankind.

B. The Angel’s Annunciation (30-34)

1. Mary was “greatly troubled” (Gk., *dietarachthe*) and “wondered” (Gk., *dielogizeto*) what this meant.
 - a. Certainly an angelic encounter would be a surprising and wonderous event for anyone.
 - b. She must have wondered what news the angel had for her.
 - c. Mary did not speak her question, but the angel discerned the trouble and question in her heart.
2. The angel responded to her troubled and wondering state with a word commonly given by God to those in distress: “Do not be afraid . . .” (30a)
3. The angel confirmed again, “...you have found favor (Gk., *charin* – “grace”) with (Gk., *para*) God.” (30b)
 - a. God’s grace surrounded Mary.
 - b. G. Campbell Morgan clarifies that the pronoun with (Gk., *para*) “. . . does not mean merely that God was conferring grace, but she had found grace *by the side of* God, in the fellowship of God” (G. Campbell Morgan, *The Gospel According to Luke*, 22).
 - c. Charles Erdman writes, “It does not mean that Mary was to be a source but rather a recipient of grace; upon her God was bestowing peculiar favor. She may rightly be regarded as the most blessed among women; but only a woman still” (Charles Erdman, *Gospel of Luke*, 23).
4. The angel answered the unspoken question that was in Mary’s wondering, troubled mind: “You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus” (31)
 - a. Erdman writes, “This prediction is the crown of all prophecy and it reveals the supreme mystery of the Christian faith, namely, the nature of our Lord, at once human and divine” (Erdman, 23).
 - b. His name will be Jesus (Gk., *Iesous*; Hb. *Yeshua*) which means “Yahweh is salvation.”
5. Robert Stein highlights the fivefold description of who this child would be as declared by Gabriel and the implication in those words that His ministry will be superior to that of John the Baptist, His forerunner.
 - a. “He will be great (Gk., *megas*)” (32a) – “Thus Jesus and John were both alike (‘great’) and different (Jesus’ greatness is an unqualified greatness). This adjective functions not as a name but rather indicates his being and nature” (Robert Stein, *Luke* in NAC, 83).
 - b. “. . . will be called the Son of the Most High (Gk., *upsistou*) – “Once again Jesus is shown to be greater than John the Baptist, for John is described as a ‘prophet’ of the Most High (Luke 1:76) whereas Jesus is described as ‘Son’ of the Most High” (Stein, 83-84). John’s conception was miraculous but Jesus’ conception would be even more miraculous as we will see shortly.
 - c. “The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David” – “Clearly 2 Sam 7:12-13,16 and Jesus’ role as Israel’s Messiah are in view here. . . Jesus’ Davidic descent already has been alluded to in Luke 1:27, where Joseph is described as ‘a descendant of David’” (Stein, 84). John the Baptist would be the forerunner of Messiah, but Jesus is the Messiah.
 - d. “forever” (Gk., *aionas*) – “The eternal rule of the Davidic kingship is taught in 2 Sam 7:13,16; Pss 89:2,29; 132:12; Isa 9:7, but in this verse it is the final Davidic King, the Messiah, who will reign forever” (Stein, 84). John the Baptist had a limited role in time as part of God’s plan of salvation, but Jesus has an eternal role.
 - e. “His kingdom (Gk., *basileias*) will never end (Gk., *telos*)” – “This may be an allusion to Isa 9:6 (LXX) or to Dan 7:14. The kingdom of God that is realized in the coming of Jesus and is to be consummated at the parousia will continue forever” (Stein, 84).

6. The next question from Mary's troubled and wondering mind is vocalized, "How will this be . . . since I am a virgin?" (34)
 - a. This statement does not come from a lack of faith as did the earlier question of Zechariah, "How can I be sure of this?" (Lk 1:18).
 - b. Gabriel's announcement troubled Mary since being pregnant once pledged in marriage was a serious matter and could result in divorce and even her death by stoning.
 - c. Remember the questionable sexual circumstances of the four women mentioned by Matthew in his genealogy of Jesus (i.e., Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba, the mother of David). Mary would also face questions about the birth of Jesus. God has a miraculous plan that pushes human understanding and expectations to the edge.
 - d. Mary's question is not about the truth of what has been but about how it will occur.
 - e. Her statement literally in the original Greek is: "How is this, since a man I have not known?"
 - 1) In biblical terms to know a man means to have sexual intercourse with him. To "know" is a euphemism for the sexual act of intercourse.
 - 2) Mary had not had sexual intercourse with her pledged husband Joseph nor any other man.
 - 3) This is a question that many have had about the conception of Jesus: How can a virgin give birth?
 - 4) There is no rebuke from the angel for asking this important question which he answers in the following verses.
 - 5) Wiersbe states, "Mary knew *what* would happen, but she did not know *how* it would happen. . . . She believed the promise, but she did not understand the performance" (Wiersbe, 22-23).

C. The Angel's Explanation (35-38)

1. "The angel answered, 'The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.'" (35a)
 - a. "Most High" (Gk., *upsistou*) – This circumlocution for God (cf., Ro 9:7, Hb 11:18, Ge 21:12) was used to describe Jesus Himself in v. 32.
 - b. "overshadow" (Gk., *episkiasei*)
 - 1) G Campbell Morgan comments, "That is a tremendous word, 'overshadow,' *episkiazo*, that is, envelope thee in darkness, and it became an enveloping in darkness, which is excess of light. That was the answer of the angel to the question of Mary. I am not attempting any argument as to this answer. I content myself with saying that my philosophy of God, and His relation to the universe makes that answer one which carries the consent of my reason, as the only adequate way of accounting for the Person of Jesus. That is the solution of the biological problem" (Morgan, 23).
 - 2) Wiersbe adds, "That word is applied to the presence of God in the Holy of Holies in the Jewish tabernacle and temple (Ex. 40:35). Mary's womb became a Holy of Holies for the Son of God!" (Wiersbe, 23).
 - c. The child will be miraculously conceived in her virginal womb by the power and will of God, the one who created her womb.
2. The child will be the "holy one . . . the Son of God." (35b)
 - a. The term "holy one" (Gk., *agion*) implies the child will be unique, separate, set apart.
 - b. Morgan addresses the moral question of how a child born of a woman can ". . . escape the consistent, continuous sinfulness of humanity" (Morgan, 23). He concludes, ". . . by that same force, the Holy Spirit overshadowing, that which is begotten shall be held from contamination with sin of [Mary's] nature, and in human nature. It shall be holy. . . . and it shall be held from contamination with the sinfulness of [Mary's] nature, by the same act of God. The possibility of the Virgin Birth, and the way of the Immaculate Conception were declared by the angel" (Morgan, 23).
 - c. He is holy because He is God and one set apart for the special purpose of God.
3. Gabriel revealed the identity of Mary's special child.
 - a. His Physical Identity - "your child" (31) – The Holy Spirit would be Jesus' divine father, but Jesus would also be a son of man; a human being; one who would experience birth, growth, hunger, thirst, love, laughter; and one who would also face temptation to sin, pain, and ultimately death.
 - b. His Historical Identity - "son of David" (32) – He will be the last in the line of David's descent and will rule forever.

- c. His Spiritual Identity – “the son of God” (35) – This child will not be just any human being nor will He be an ordinary king. He will be the Son of God in flesh. As the Apostle John said, “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only who came from the Father, full of grace and truth” (Jn 1:14).
4. The angel gave Mary a sign of confirmation even though she did not ask for one.
- “Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month.” (36)
 - God is in the miracle baby business. Remember Hannah, Sarah, and other women in the OT who conceived when it seemed impossible.
5. Finally, the angel declared, “For no word from God will ever fail.” (37)
- The KJV says, “For with God nothing shall be impossible.”
 - While that statement is true, the NIV gives a better translation of the original Greek.
 - hoti ouk adunatesei para tou theou pan rama* – “For no powerful word from God is powerless.”
 - Gabriel began his announcement with assurance to Mary: “The Lord is with you” (28), and he ends his message with the reality that: “Nothing is impossible with God” (37).
 - This final statement fits perfectly with the declaration of God's presence with Mary.
 - These two statements are the bookends of all true encounters with God.
 - God comes to us and does what we cannot do.
6. Mary gave her response to this powerful word of God to her: “I am the Lord’s servant. . . . May your word to me be fulfilled”
- “servant” (Gk., *doule*) – This is the word used to describe the lowest household slave.
 - She accepted the powerful word (Gk., *rama*) of God spoken to her.
 - This would also be the response of the son she bore when God spoke a powerful word to Him about the sacrifice He must make. Jesus would pray the night before His crucifixion, “Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done” (Lk 22:42).
 - What was Mary's response to the angelic message? It was the same as that of Joseph after his encounter which we will examine in a later study.
 - She listened and believed: “I am the Lord’s servant . . .” (38).
 - She obeyed: “. . . May it be to me as you have said” (38).
 - She rejoiced in God's miraculous plan with a song of praise (cf., Lk 1:46b-55) that we will examine in our next lesson.
7. At this word of humble acceptance, the angel left Mary to ponder what was to be.

D. Questions/Thoughts for Reflection

- Truly, when the Lord is with us, nothing seems impossible. In the midst of a life filled with imperfections and disappointments, God still speaks this word to us. When the way through or ahead seems impossible to us, God says, “Fear not. I am with you and nothing is impossible with me.”
- Wiersbe concludes, “Mary’s believing response was to surrender herself to God as His willing servant. She experienced the grace of God (Luke :30) and believed the Word of God, and therefore she could be used by the Spirit to accomplish the will of God. . . .She belonged totally to the Lord, body (Luke 1:38), soul (Luke 1:46), and spirit (Luke 1:47). What an example for us to follow (Rom. 12:1-2)!” (Wiersbe, 23-24).
- What is your response to God’s presence with you today?
 - Will you have faith to listen and respond to God today in the midst of your life story?
 - He may not speak to you by an angel today, but He still speaks His love and truth to your heart by His Word and through his Spirit.
 - Will you listen, believe, and follow Him in obedient, joyful faith just as Mary did?
 - May our response to God’s powerful word to us be the same as Mary’s—“I am the Lord’s servant. . . . May your word to me be fulfilled.”