

The Savior's Birth Announced – Part 1

Luke

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Bible Text: Luke 1:26-33

Preached on: Sunday, October 9, 2011

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If you would, please turn to the gospel of Luke chapter one verse 26.

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be.

And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to 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."

And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?"

And the angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God. And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. For nothing will be impossible with God."

And Mary said, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.¹

Let's ask God's blessing on our time in his Word.

¹ Luke 1:26-38.

Lord, I am very mindful of my own weakness and my own inability and each time I stand to declare a portion of your Word to your people I am mindful and aware of my inadequacy. But, Lord, I thank you that you are sufficient to accomplish a great work in this hour. And it is to you, Lord, that we look and ask your blessing. Strengthen the servant who preaches this morning and strengthen your servants who listen this morning and do a work in our hearts for the glory of your name and for the good of your people and for the testimony of your gospel, Lord. We plead with you to work this morning and we know that we plead in agreement with what you desire to do. And so, Lord, that gives us confidence and that gives us encouragement and that gives us a sense of expectation. We pray for anyone with us this morning who doesn't know you. We ask for their salvation. We ask that your light would shine in their heart and give them the knowledge of who your Son really is and of their need for Jesus. We ask all of this today in Jesus' name. Amen.

Well, there is a great message here. The message is found not only in the straightforward reading of the narrative itself, you know, the message that is just right there on the surface and put forth before us in plain terms. There is also a message here in how the Holy Spirit through Luke has chosen to arrange the story, how the story of John the Baptist's conception and birth and how the story of Jesus' conception and birth is related to us, the way that it is arranged has meaning. So there is the straightforward message found in the narrative. There is the message that is going to be communicated to us in the way that it is arranged and then also there is a message here in terms of the historical details, the context surrounding this message.

We have looked at what Luke relates to us concerning the conception of John the Baptist this morning. Now we focus our attention on this story of the conception of Jesus and what the angel Gabriel has to say to this young woman Mary who will not only serve as the mother of the Messiah, but she will also become a disciple of the Messiah. That is an amazing thought, isn't it? She is going to be his mother and she is going to be his servant.

But before we dig into the details, I do want us to think about the arrangement for just a moment. I said there is a message in the arrangement and there is. Even a casual reading of this announcement that Gabriel gives regarding Jesus just a casual reading of it reveals that it is organized in very much the same way that the announcement came regarding John the Baptist. Events are laid out before us in the same order. The same sorts of emphasis are communicated. It is almost like reading parallel accounts and yet some of the details differ.

And so what Luke does is he says, "Here is the conception of John the Baptist. Here is the conception of Jesus. Here is the birth of John the Baptist. Here is the birth of Jesus."

So that side by side we get to examine John the Baptist and we get to examine Jesus. And there is a reason for that, because the Holy Spirit while he wants us to recognize the greatness of John the Baptist, he wants us also to recognize the greater person when we talk about the Lord Jesus Christ. John is great, but Jesus is infinitely greater.

And this is going to be true of John's entire life and ministry that he is pointing us, John is pointing us, God wants us to recognize John, because he is the messenger that is going to tell us about the Messiah, but once we recognize John's greatness, John then is used by God to help us recognize the infinite greatness of Jesus.

Here is a messenger. So don't miss his message. Here is this great individual raised up by God to tell us about the Messiah, so don't miss the Messiah, because this is why John exists and this is why he ministers, to point us to Jesus.

John chapter one and verse 19.

And this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?"

He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ."

And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?"

And he answered, "No."

So they said to him, "Who are you? We need to give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?"

He said, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as the prophet Isaiah said."

(Now they had been sent from the Pharisees.)

They asked him, "Then why are you baptizing, if you are neither the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?"

John answered them, "I baptize with water, but among you stands one you do not know, even he who comes after me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie."²

God was at work in John in such a way that even the Pharisees were recognizing this is somebody special. But once we recognize he is somebody special, what is his function, to point us to the one who comes after him, one whose strap of his sandal John is not worthy to untie. We are to recognize the greater greatness of Jesus.

So the organization of this is amazing and functions in this way.

And yet for all of the things that we are going to see which point us to the superiority of the Son of God, it is amazing that in many ways the announcement of the birth of Jesus

² John 1:19-27.

was a much more humble event. When you think about how John's conception was announced and then you think about how Jesus' conception is announced, you would almost think to reverse the circumstances.

There is a message in that, as well, and we will talk about that this morning.

We are going to organize our study this morning under two headings. We are going to talk about the messenger from God... Actually under one heading because we are not going to get to the second one. The messenger from God and then we are going to talk about the message that this messenger communicates. We will come back tonight and look at that.

But this morning the messenger from God, verses 26 and 27. Let's read it again.

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary.³

This is amazing. I mean, we... it is related to us in just a very matter of fact kind of way, but just let it sink in what is going on, that this one true and living God, the only God who exists has actually sent one of his creatures, created by God to serve him day and night and forever, an angel, God has sent an angel by the name of Gabriel, an angel that has a name and a personality. God has sent Gabriel to Galilee to a city named Nazareth to deliver a message to a young virgin named Mary.

Notice when he came, verse 26. The messenger came in the sixth month. That is, it was six months after Elizabeth conceived.

And we find out later in the text that Elizabeth is a relative. She is related to Mary. When we remember that Elizabeth comes from Aaron and we are told in chapter three that Mary comes from David, then we know they are related not through their fathers, but through their mothers. We don't know. It is really a sort of a vague term when we are told here in our text that she was a relative.

Notice verse 36.

“And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son.”⁴

“Your relative” is a generic term. They may have been first cousins. They may have been fourth cousins. We don't know, but what we do know is they definitely were related. And for six months Elizabeth has been pregnant and Mary has not known about it. She is just now being informed about it so that now maybe we have just at least a hint of the reason why Zechariah was disciplined with silence. You will remember he didn't believe the Word of the Lord and as a result he was mute. And then we are told that

³ Luke 1:26-27.

⁴ Luke 1:36.

Elizabeth sort of retreats into privacy and stays to herself. God is at work in all the details. And one of the reasons why word would not have gotten out and Mary would not have known this is because God sort of saved it up for a sign. Mary is being delivered a message that it has to be incredible to her. And the Lord through Gabriel says, “And, by the way, here is a sign for you. You know your relative Elizabeth, the one who was barren, who is past her age where she could ever possibly have a baby? Well, she is six months into a pregnancy right now.”

And we are going to read later on where Mary makes her way to Elizabeth.

So this is when he comes, six months after Elizabeth has conceived.

Second, notice where he comes, verse 26. Gabriel is sent from God to a city of Galilee.

If you looked at a map of Palestine for this time period there is Galilee. There is Samaria. Down to the south there is Judea. Mary is living in Galilee.

That would have been a shocking detail in the first century to people who were expecting the Messiah. That would have been a shocking detail. The thought that our God would select for the young woman who would be the mother of Jesus someone... or the mother of the Messiah, someone who would be living in Galilee.

Sometimes, you know, here we are in the year 2011 and sometimes we think of the land of Palestine in that day and time and we think of it, you know, being sort of just one unified group of Jewish people. And that is not true. Among the Jewish people living in the north and in the south, there were some very real distinctions and differences.

R T France in his commentary on Matthew’s gospel wrote this. He said, “The northern province of Galilee was decisively distinct in history, political status and culture from the southern province of Judea which contained the holy city of Jerusalem.”

And in his commentary he takes time to break out seven areas of distinction. There was racial distinction because in the north it was a much more mixed population. You will read in the Scriptures where Galilee is described as Galilee of the Gentiles, because of the proximity to large Gentile populations and large Gentile cities. And so the population in the north was much more mixed in terms of Jewish people and Gentile people. Geographically it was different. Politically it was different. Economically it was different, more natural resources in the north. And, as a result, they tended to be more prosperous, so there was some envy from the south regarding the material prosperity in the north. Culturally there was a distinction.

R T France describes it this way. He said, “Jews living in Judea saw them like country cousins.”

They were not as Jewish, I guess you could say, as the Jews who lived in Judea. Not in the view of those who lived in Judea.

There were some language differences. Galileans spoke a distinctive form of Aramaic and the way that they spoke as made the butt of Judean humor. And then religiously the Judean opinion was that those in Galilee were lax in their observance of proper ritual. They didn't necessarily keep a kosher kitchen. And so he sums it up this way.

He says, "Even an impeccably, Jewish Galilean in first century Jerusalem was not among his own people. He was as much a foreigner as an Irishman in London or a Texan in New York."

We can relate to that.

"His accent would immediately mark him out as not one of us and all the communal prejudice of the supposedly superior culture of the capital city would stand against his claim to be heard even as prophet, let alone as the Messiah a title, which, as every one knew, belonged to Judea."

So the region, the province where this angel is sent is surprising, to Galilee? His mother lives in Galilee?

But notice something else, verse 26. Not just Galilee, but to a city, *πολις* (pol'-is), that word is used of a city, but it can also be used of a town and, in this case, a village, named Nazareth.

How many of you know that Nazareth was not highly thought of?

In John chapter one verse 45 the Bible says:

Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."

Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?"

Philip said to him, "Come and see."⁵

By the way, the fact that Luke tells us that a city of Galilee named Nazareth, that he has to tell us where Nazareth is located, indicates he expects to have readers who will not necessarily know Palestine the way that he knew it.

Nazareth was just as small village. In fact, it was so small, so obscure that it is never mentioned in the Old Testament, nor was it mentioned in the writings of Josephus, nor was it mentioned in any of the rabbinical writings of the time, which for a time led some critics of the Bible to question whether it ever even existed, but there have been

⁵ John 1:45:46.

archaeological discoveries that make plain it did exist. It didn't exist on any of the major trade routes. It was way off the beaten path. I mean, this angel is sent not only to an unexpected province, the angel is sent to the smallest of small villages to an out of the way place. No one would have expected that.

Now contrast what we saw in the announcement concerning John, his conception, his birth. Gabriel came to Zechariah where? In Judea. Gabriel comes to Mary in Galilee. Gabriel came to Zechariah in Jerusalem. Gabriel comes to Mary in Nazareth. Gabriel came to Zechariah in the temple. To Mary in a humble house.

Do you see verse 27 where it says, verse 26:

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her...⁶

Literally it means he made his entrance to her. He comes in. He appears in her home in all likelihood.

Everything about this picture is the opposite of what we would expect. I mean, we would expect both the Messiah's forerunner and the Messiah to come from Judea, Jerusalem, for the announcement to have some connection to the temple. We would expect that in both cases, but if one was going to be related to more humble circumstances, you would expect it to be the fore runner, not the Messiah. And yet it is the forerunner—Judea, Jerusalem, the temple—the Messiah—Galilee, Nazareth and a humble house.

God does great things in humble places. God makes great use of humble people. And, in fact, the greatness of God's Son is being magnified by his willingness to take the lowliest place in order to rescue the lowliest people, to save sinners. He comes humbly, Philippians chapter two. He lays aside the glory of heaven voluntarily, willingly, the visible expression of his glory is laid aside and he is being given to a mother, to a woman, to a young woman who is from Galilee and Nazareth. No announcement in the temple, but the announcement in a house.

So this is when he came, six months into Elizabeth's pregnancy where this messenger came. Galilee to a city named Nazareth. Third, notice to whom he came.

Verse 27.

“...to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary.”⁷

⁶ Luke 1:26-28.

⁷ Luke 1:27.

To a virgin. We don't have to wonder about what is meant by virgin. We can't ... we cannot think that he means simply a young woman or a young maiden, a young girl, because Mary makes very plain that she has not known a man.

Look at verse 34.

“And Mary said to the angel, ‘How will this be, since I am a virgin?’”⁸

Literally in the Greek text, “Since a man not I know, since I have not known a man.”

So she is a virgin. She has never had a sexual relationship with a man. In fact, not only was she a virgin when she received this news, she would remain a virgin until Jesus was born.

Matthew chapter one gives us some insight into the difficulty that this miracle introduced into Mary's life. I want you to look for a moment to Matthew chapter one.

Look at verse 18.

Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly.⁹

Keep that in mind. We will talk about it in a moment.

But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”

All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:

“Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,
and they shall call his name Immanuel”
(which means, God with us).

When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.¹⁰

⁸ Luke 1:34.

⁹ Matthew 1:18-19.

¹⁰ Matthew 1:20-25.

Look back, if you would, at Luke chapter one.

So Gabriel is sent to a virgin living in Galilee, living in Nazareth. This virgin is betrothed, verse 27, to Joseph. According to the Jewish custom, engagement was about a year long process. A commitment was made. That commitment was as binding as marriage. In fact the only way out of it was divorce. A divorce certificate was the only way out of that engagement. And the man would go away and prepare a place for his bride and set everything in order and then a year later they would come back and the marriage would be consummated and they would move forward as husband and wife. But they were considered married at the point of engagement in terms of the binding nature of the commitment.

Mary would have been somewhere between, in all likelihood, 12 and 14 years of age. These girls married at a very young age.

This is amazing, isn't it? You have a very young woman who is being presented with this astounding news. Can you imagine 12 year olds, 13 year olds, 14 year olds in this congregation being presented with news like this?

Joseph, who would have been the adopted father of Jesus, he is descended from David so that Jesus is a legal heir to the throne of David. And not only considering Joseph's genealogy, but then later on as we will consider Mary's, both directions it heads back to David. And so Jesus is going to fulfill the biblical promises about the Messiah. He will sit on the throne of his father David forever.

This is... we will look at this tonight, but notice she is given that news, verse 32.

“He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David.”¹¹

We are told in verse 27 she is betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph of the house of David. So he is qualified.

And then we are told this betrothed virgin's name Miriam or Mary.

And notice a couple of things with me. Notice... think about the conception itself. The first miraculous birth, John's, or conception involved a pregnancy beyond the time of normal conception. They are too old. Zechariah and Elizabeth, they are too old, plus she has been barren her whole life. But in addition they are past the age. It is going to require the Lord to do something if they are going to have a baby.

But the second miraculous conception defies the whole process of normal conception. It is not just an age issue. It is a sexual issue. She has not known a man. She is not going to know a man until after the birth of Jesus. Therefore, what is going to be conceived in her womb has to be the product of God's power and working.

¹¹ Luke 1:32.

I just want you to see from great, a great work of God to a greater work of God.

And think about the people involved. The first miraculous conception involves a man and a woman who had tried to have a child and were now very old. The second miraculous conception involves a man and a woman who have yet to live together as husband and wife. And she is very young. Husband and wife, very old; not yet lived together as husband and wife, very young. Notice the contrast.

What are we to learn from this? Well, be amazed at how God does what he does. He never works, it seems, in the way that we would expect. And yet he is always teaching us something in the way that he works.

As I said earlier, we would have expected that the town and the province and the place of the announcement, we would have planned this in such a way that those would have been reversed. But not with God. Yet he is teaching us something.

Be amazed at what God actually does, that he would work in ways that have no human explanation and that God himself and the person of our savior would humble himself in order to save us from our sins so that when we look at this whole picture I have got a question for us. And it is a very important question for every person sitting here right now.

Where will you find the Lord? Or we could say it this way and you will understand what I mean. Where will he find you? Where does he find the parents for John the Baptist? Just a priest, just one of 18 to 20,000 priests. But, in addition, one, a husband and wife who have borne a reproach because they haven't been able to have children. And when we talk about the mother of the Messiah, just a humble young girl, living in an out of the way nondescript place, where does he find these people? He finds them in humble places.

Where is he going to find us? Will he find us in a proud place? Will we know the sweetness of God's presence as we walk in a proud state, a state in which we exalt ourselves and think highly of ourselves and celebrate ourselves? Is that where we will meet with God and walk with God? Or will we find him and will he find us when we assume the place of humility? Will he find us in a defiant place wanting to do our own will, wanting to go our own way? Or will we find the Lord and will he find us when we can follow in the footsteps of this young girl Mary.

We are going to deal with this tonight, but notice what she says in verse 38.

“And Mary said, ‘Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.’”¹²

Lord, just your will be done.

¹² Luke 1:38.

Isaiah 57 verse 15 says this.

“For thus says the One who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: ‘I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly, and to revive the heart of the contrite.’”¹³

Do you need revival today? Do you need a fresh touch from the Lord? He revives lowly people. He revives... end of the verse.

“...and to revive the heart of the contrite.”¹⁴

He revives sorrowful people, people who are sorrowful, broken hearted over their own sinfulness when they think of themselves in comparison with God’s holiness. God doesn’t dwell with proud people. He doesn’t dwell with indifferent people. He doesn’t dwell with defiant people. He dwells with lowly broken people.

Do you ever say to yourself, “Well, there are some people who ought to be broken, you know, some of those really bad sinners, they ought to be broken before the Lord”?

Can I ask this morning? Who in this place shouldn’t be broken before the Lord? If we are not, it is not a commentary on our righteousness. It is a commentary on our blindness.

Isaiah 66:1.

Thus says the LORD:

“Heaven is my throne,
and the earth is my footstool;
what is the house that you would build for me,
and what is the place of my rest?

All these things my hand has made,
and so all these things came to be,
declares the LORD.

But this is the one to whom I will look:
he who is humble and contrite in spirit
and trembles at my word.¹⁵

We will know that we are seeing ourselves accurately when his Word causes us to tremble, when we wait before the Lord’s Word to hear it, receive it, submit to it and obey it.

So the first lesson in this text has to do with the messenger, when he came, where he came, to whom he came and it all communicates, really, one clear message. God does

¹³ Isaiah 57:15.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Isaiah 66:1-2.

great thing in humble places. And he does great things with humble people. And so let us humble ourselves this day before God and tremble at his Word.

And the beginning of all wisdom is humility and the beginning of wisdom is to know God's Son, to see yourself as you really are, a sinner deserving of God's wrath, but to recognize that this awesome God has done what is necessary to save sinners like us by giving his only Son, his only Son who lived a sinless life and died on a cross, a cruel death, crushed by the Lord for iniquities. And upon him was laid all the sins of all those who will trust in him so that if you will turn from your sins and trust in God's sin, not just as a Savior, but as your Lord and King and God, if you will turn to him with an honest, broken heart, even you, even me, he will save.

Let's bow together for prayer.

Our Father in heaven, we thank you for your Word, for the gospel, for the good news, for the message of reconciliation that in your Son sinful men can be brought to you, the God who is infinitely holy who dwells in the heavens to whom we cannot give one thing because everything that is you made it. It exists because of you. Lord, where we are proud, reduce us. Grant to us, we pray, a humble contrite spirit because we want to walk with you. And we ask you for this in Jesus' name. Amen.