

Luke 1: 26-38; “Mary’s Amazement”, A Sermon for the Christmas Season, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on December 25th, 2011, in the Afternoon Worship.

It is not the ordinary course of things when an angel preaches a sermon, but when he does we ought to listen. For this sermon was not just for Mary’s ears but for the ears of all mankind. This heavenly messenger was sent from God to the city of Nazareth to the virgin Mary who was engaged to a man named Joseph. Gabriel does not mince words. He declares to her that she is highly favored of God. He reveals to her; the great purpose and intention of God, to give her conception in her virgin womb; that she might be privileged to bring forth the Son of God, the Son of the highest. He answers her questions and quells her fears, but still there is something which remains in Mary’s heart and mind after the angel leaves. It is a holy amazement and joy at the prospect of God’s great grace to her. How great is the God of heaven to regard the lowly estate of fallen sinful man! How Mary rejoiced in God her Savior. How greatly was she amazed at the wondrous things that God would do for her, in weaving the baby Jesus in her womb. What is your reaction this afternoon to the preaching of the gospel? Are you amazed at God’s mercy? Do you believe that there can be a fulfillment of the things spoken to you in the gospel? It is faith that I would beget in you tonight through God’s own word. Mary’s amazement and joy can be yours today if you have Mary’s faith. Mary’s submissive, servant spirit can be yours if you have Mary’s faith. For nothing shall be impossible with God. Let’s look together, this afternoon, at Mary’s holy amazement. Let’s apply her thoughts of amazement, over what was happening to her, and what should be happening to ourselves as it relates to our salvation. There are 4 thoughts of amazement in Mary’s heart.

1st- Mary was amazed that she was receiving a message from heaven.
(Verses 26-30)

There is something about a heavenly messenger and a heavenly message which strikes dread and fear into the hearts of men. When angels appear it is never for a trifling purpose. It is always related to judgment or salvation or to announce some great thing which God will do. However, Gabriel was not sent to terrify Mary but to inform her of the Lord’s favor and purpose towards her. He says to her, “Hail favored one!” “Hail” here means that he greets her with peace. It is the usual form of salutation. The word *Xaire* in the Greek can also mean, “Rejoice” highly favored one. He says this to her because she is the virgin, the one virgin who has been chosen out of all the possible women in the world to be the mother of the Messiah, the promised Seed. Jerome’s Latin vulgate translation renders this, “*gratia plena*”- full of grace and Roman Catholics have twisted this phrase to mean that Mary had more of the inherent graces of the Spirit than any woman ever had. They turn this salutation into a prayer - the angel praying to Mary - because she is

supposedly the fountain of grace. They then come forth with this prayer, “Hail Mary Mother of God, full of grace. It is said by one commentator that they pray this prayer 10 times for every 1 time they pray the Lord’s Prayer. But we should ask, “Is Mary ever portrayed for us as being the mother of God or source of saving and helping grace to needy sinners anywhere in the New Testament?” Never!

Our text indicates in verse 29 that she was perplexed, she was disquieted, she was in consternation at this greeting. She did not smile upon this angel and give him a pleased look. Our text says she was greatly troubled at the statement and kept pondering what kind of salutation this might be. No, Mary was a woman of humble state and means and she had a right conception of her own position in the eyes of God and men. It says that she cast about in her mind what manner of saying this was. She knew that this being who spoke to her was angelic, but she is asking, “Why me, an ordinary girl?” “What is there about me that I should receive this distinguished heavenly guest and the message that he brings?”

The first New Testament preacher was an angel. Bishop Hall says, “The first preacher of the gospel was an angel and since then, He calls His preachers angels.” If Mary was amazed at the message from heaven, we too should stand amazed that in the preaching of the gospel, men (called of God) stand in the place of God beseeching you on behalf of God, to be reconciled to God. You and I ought to stand amazed that God would desire to reveal the way of salvation to ones such as we are; sinful and unworthy. As we hear the gospel we will no doubt be troubled by the dread which comes to us when we realize that God will punish all the wicked in hell forever. But we ought to be more taken by the thought that the Lord Jesus is full of grace to save sinners because He came to the virgin’s womb. In Luke 11: 27 there was a certain woman who had heard Jesus speaking about a person influenced by demons, trying to clean up their own heart. She raised her voice in the crowd and said, “Blessed is the womb that bore You, and the breasts which nursed You!” But He said, “On the contrary, blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it!” The Blessedness is not in Mary, but in being able to hear the Word of God and do it. Do you understand that the gospel and the preaching of God’s Word to you now, this day, is a message from heaven to your soul? Even though Mary was hearing the voice of an angel speaking to her; it is no less significant for you to receive and to think about the message of Christ and the gospel. It is just the same kind of blessing, for if the message is being believed it will mean that Christ is being formed in your soul!

Mary’s 2nd thought was this- She was amazed that God would choose her to be the mother of someone that great. (Verses 31-33)

Verse 32 says that “Jesus 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. Truly this is greatness, because David was the greatest King that Israel ever knew. Jesus would have his throne. But the greatness of the Lord Jesus is here spoken of in relation to 2 things. It is greatness in relation to the work that His name

represents; Jesus means Savior. And it is greatness in relation to His ruling in righteousness, and ruling when all other kingdoms have passed away. In Matthew 1: 21 it says, “And she will bring forth a Son and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.” Jesus was given a kingdom from all eternity but He would have to suffer for the sins of this people, He would have to become the righteousness of this people, in order that He might reign over this people. It is not as if He were not a King already, when He first came into this world. But His kingdom is not of this world. His kingdom is an eternal kingdom and He was the Son of the Highest when He first came. But His greatness in the sense that this passage is talking about, is found in His coming to identify with fallen, sinful humanity so that they might have One to save them; so that they might have One to rule over them in a righteous way. His greatness is first found in humility; in emptying Himself of His own right to judgment and glory, and taking up our cause- the raising of fallen humanity from the corruption of sin. This is true greatness; having a right to rule, as Jesus did, and yet setting aside that right so that He might serve us by giving His life a ransom for sin. God the Father knew that He must reward such a labor of dying love in One so intrinsically and inherently great. The Lord God would give Him the throne of His father David. He would reign over the house of Jacob forever. Psalm 89: 1-4 says, “I will sing of the mercies of the Lord forever; with my mouth will I make known Your faithfulness to all generations. For I have said, ‘Mercy shall be built up forever; Your faithfulness You shall establish in the very heavens.’ I have made a covenant with My chosen, I have sworn to My servant David; Your seed I will establish forever, and build up your throne to all generations.”

Mary was amazed to think that this was the great One who would be born to her. Her child would be great because His kingdom would be the fulfillment of the promises made to Jacob, to David, and to the entire Jewish nation. Jesus would be great in His life in word and deed. He would be great in compassion and healing. He would be great in miracles that He would do, and in the hearts that He would change. He would be great in His life and great in death, because He would lay down His life for sinners. By the means of His cross He would conquer His enemies and ours. And by means of His resurrection, His power would be given to all who will believe in Him to become the children of God. He would be great in the eyes of the Father, perfect in righteousness, so that we might be made great by His grace. It says in Psalm 18: 35, “You have also given me the shield of Your salvation; Your right hand has held up. Your gentleness has made me great. You enlarged my path under me so my feet did not slip.” This was said by David and spoken by himself, in prophetic language, referring to Christ holding him up and grace and mercy being shown to him on that basis to make him great. This is how it is with every true believer.

Mary’s 3rd thought was that it was amazing to her that she being a virgin could conceive a child apart from her husband. (Verses 34, 35)

She says, "How shall this be?" She does not doubt that it can be. She does not dispute with God that it will be. She simply wants to know how it shall be since she is a virgin. Her question does not cast doubt on God's ability to bring this to pass. This is rather the beginnings of her submission. She is amazed that such a thing is possible. Her amazement and wonder are not at all lessened but rather heightened by the answer that is given to her. Her amazement is the excited anticipation of what God was going to do for her, in and through the conception of this child. God would; by His Spirit, form the body and the soul of the perfectly pure and holy Son of God in her womb! Now ask yourself, if Mary could experience God's power and grace in allowing her to conceive this child, as a virgin; cannot you experience God's power and grace to change your sinful heart to love righteousness and to put away sinfulness, and to become a godly person? Nothing shall be impossible with God. (No word of God shall be void of power.) Let us understand that it takes the power of the Holy Spirit to bring spiritual life and strength to your soul so that you will become holy, even as God is holy. You cannot simply live the Christian life on your own, apart from the Spirit's blessed working. This ought to create wonder and amazement in each believer's heart. You need to regularly stand in awe of God's work in your soul. Your faith in God and Christ Jesus His Son is a living, supernatural thing. It is simply not enough to be believing the right doctrines, as important and essential as this is. You must come to have a respect and reverence for God's actual working in your soul to bring you a greater understanding of His truth and Himself. It is the fear of the Lord which is the beginning of wisdom. This Mary had. Many times we are going to have questions about the Spirit's working, and about His leading, even as Mary did. How can this be; how can this wonderful thing of Christ being formed in our soul take place? How does the work advance? What will this mean for my reputation among men? How does our becoming holy come about? It will only come about by the Spirit's power. Christ must be formed in you.

When the Apostle Paul wrote his letter to the churches of Galatia, He was very concerned that they were abandoning the true gospel for a legalism which could never save their soul, or transform them to be servants of God and Christ. He says in Galatians Chapter 3, verse 1 – "O foolish Galatians!" "Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified?" "This only I want to learn from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?" "Are you so foolish?" "Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect in the flesh?" You see, the people were losing, or had already lost, the wonder and the awe of knowing God through Jesus Christ. They were going back to the ceremonies of the law in order to be justified. They were even thinking that somehow their becoming Christians would lead them back to that. But they needed to leave those things behind. And sometimes even those who are true Christians are tempted to believe that it is their works and their determination to

do the right things, even, that makes them a holy person. They were told that they received the Spirit when they believed in the Lord Jesus Christ crucified for them as a sinner. They, at first, saw their need for Him. They originally saw the utter impossibility of their changing their own hearts, and their own life apart from His coming to their heart. But then they left off seeing it this way. But let me beseech you to take another look at this. You need to exercise this faith in Christ not only at the beginning of the Christian life, but all the way through your life. Verse 4 says, “Have you suffered so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain?” “Therefore He who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you, does He do it by the work of the law, or by the hearing of faith?” No, you and I need more than our fleshly determination to live our lives to the glory of God. We very much need to have the life and power of Jesus Christ confirming the truth of His Word to our hearts every day, so that we truly will be transformed into righteous and holy people in the way that we live. Are you being transformed from one degree of glory to another greater, by the Spirit of God? The Christian life is not just being informed of what the Bible says, and then the preacher telling you: “Now do it”. It is also your teachers or other Christians telling you of your need of the Spirit’s power to do it and keep it. We need to have Christ born in us, and then we need to have His life changing our life supernaturally, day by day, all the way through our life.

There were people in the churches of Galatia that were going back to the weak and beggarly elements of observing the ceremonial law of Moses. This was a practical denial of Christ’s having come and fulfilled all those ceremonies and types. They were to go on to know Him, but they were not doing it. He says in verse 19 of Chapter 4 – “My little children, for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you.” When Christ is formed in you, you will not go back to thinking that ceremonies and your own determination to keep God’s commandments is the way to be justified, or sanctified, by the works of the law. Some people’s husband is the law. Even some people who claim to be Christians. A true Christian loves God’s law; he will attempt to keep God’s law. But he is not married to the law. He or she is married to Christ. At many points the true Christian will say, “How can this be, seeing I do not have a husband?” How can I become holy without thinking that it all depends upon my strength or power to conceive how to be holy? Christ Himself will open your eyes by His Spirit. And the Spirit will lead you to keep the commandments of God in the right way; not from legal motives, but out of love for what Christ has done, and what He is doing for you even now by His mighty and precious grace. Stand amazed

And then Mary’s 4th thought was that she was amazed, also, that God can bring life, even to a barren womb. (Verse 36)

The angel says to her, “Even your relative Elizabeth has also conceived a son in her old age and she who was called barren is now in her sixth month.” He says this to her to strengthen her faith and to take away her fears of what all this would

mean. It would allow her to think - "If Elizabeth can have her barrenness taken away, then certainly my virginity is no obstacle to God's handiwork."

Do you who are outside of Christ care to ponder this? If Christ has changed the barren emptiness of other's lives, can He not change yours? Is age any obstacle? Can your sinful heart really hold out against the wondrous power of God? And as for you who do know Christ; will you not allow yourself to once again be amazed that God can do such great things to overrule age and feebleness by His power and grace? Let us learn to pray the statement of willing submission and obedience which we find Mary stating. "Behold the maidservant of the Lord!" "Let it be done to me according to your word." So too, we should pray. "Behold, here I am Lord." "Let whatever needs to be done in me to have Christ formed in me, and to be seen in me more and more, be done in accordance with Your Word." It is a prayer which God will take you up on.