
Two Announcements

Luke 1:5-38¹

There had been 400 long years of silence. No prophet had spoken God's Word to God's people. They were in the land. They had a large and expanding Temple. They quietly nursed the hope of the Messiah while toiling under the iron heel of oppressor after oppressor. Now the hand of Rome was at the reins of their politics. And still God did not speak. Into that silence, God sends an angel, Gabriel. God sends Gabriel to two women who are about to bear special sons whose impossible births will point backward to Isaac and forward to each of God's sons and daughters.

The Announcement to Zechariah (v.5-25)

The first announcement is to the parents of the one who would be the forerunner of the Messiah.

Its Recipients (v.5-7)

Who is the recipient of this great announcement?

⁵In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, of the division of Abijah. And he had a wife from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. ⁶And they were both righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord. ⁷But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were advanced in years.

Luke makes a point that both are of the priestly line (v.5). Elizabeth is directly from Aaron. Zechariah is serving as a priest in the Temple. The Levites were divided into different divisions, or groups with duties assigned respectively.

They are affirmed as being a righteous couple (v.6). They are righteous in their character. They are spoken of as "righteous before God." This is the Old Testament way of saying a person is justified. They are also righteous in their conduct. They have walked in obedience to God's Word.

Their heartbreaking situation reminds us of Abraham and Sarah (v.7). Elizabeth is barren. In her culture, this would be a sign of God's disapproval. It would be a stigma. People would think that they had displeased God somehow. And they are both aged. They are beyond the years of childbearing. There is no human resolution to their situation.

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Its Delivery (v.8-17)

⁸ Now while he was serving as priest before God when his division was on duty, ⁹ according to the custom of the priesthood, he was chosen by lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense. ¹⁰ And the whole multitude of the people were praying outside at the hour of incense. ¹¹ And there appeared to him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. ¹² And Zechariah was troubled when he saw him, and fear fell upon him. ¹³ But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. ¹⁴ And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, ¹⁵ for he will be great before the Lord. And he must not drink wine or strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. ¹⁶ And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, ¹⁷ and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared."

The message comes at the time that Zechariah is ministering in the Temple (v.8-10). He is serving in the Temple on his regular rotation. From the description, he is serving at the altar of incense in the inner room of the Temple. That altar stood in front of the veil that divided the outer space (the Holy Place) from the inner space (Holy of Holies). The reason he is tending the incense altar is because it was the time set aside for people to come and pray at the Temple, call the daily prayers.

While he is serving, suddenly a heavenly messenger appears beside the altar (v.11-12). Angelic appearances almost always cause an understandable fear. Angels are magnificent, powerful, bright beings. Suddenly appearing within a relatively dark room would be frightening.

The angel come with a startling message (v.13-15). It is a word of comfort. Do not be afraid. This is the message from all the angels at the birth of Christ. Do not be afraid. The fulfillment of all the Scriptures is about to begin to unfold. It is also a message of conception. In spite of both of them being too old Elizabeth will conceive and will give birth to a boy.

God, through the angel tells Zechariah to name this boy, John. Not only will their son's birth be miraculous, but he will be the cause of great joy to his parents and to many, many people.

Why? Because he is going to have a great mission in life (v.16-17). He is going to be great. He will be the forerunner of the Messiah. I do not know if Zechariah understood it when the angel said it; but, his words here clearly are indicating that this boy, this son named John, will be important because of his ministry. To highlight this, John was going to be filled with the Spirit even before he is born, while he is still in his mother's womb.

Its Confirmation (v.18-23)

¹⁸ And Zechariah said to the angel, "How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years." ¹⁹ And the angel answered him, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I was sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news. ²⁰ And behold, you will be silent and unable to speak until the day that these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time." ²¹ And the people were waiting for Zechariah, and they were wondering at his delay in the temple. ²² And when he came out, he was unable to speak to them, and they realized that he had seen a vision in the temple. And he kept making signs to them and remained mute. ²³ And when his time of service was ended, he went to his home.

Zechariah responds with a doubting question (v.18). At some level this is easy to understand. He is being informed of a supernatural birth, a supernatural indwelling of the Spirit and his child will be a fulfillment of many scriptures. His question is one of doubt unlike Mary's question which was one of process. He is questioning that this can be so. He does this even though he would be familiar with the history of Abraham and Sarah.

He is met by a stern rebuke (v.19-20). Look at it again:

The angel is Gabriel. He stands by the throne of God. He goes at the command of God. He speaks the words God gives him. It is almost as though Gabriel has taken offense. How dare Zechariah question the message. This is good news. Do not reject the good news just because it is spectacularly hard to believe.

The angel then gives a confirming sign of muteness. Zechariah is not going to be able to speak until the baby is born. If the message is false, he will be mute the rest of his life. If the message is true, he will be mute for around nine months.

Well, this conversation made Zechariah's stay in the holy place longer than it should have been and longer than people expected it to be. When he emerged, he could not talk. He tried to explain with hand motions what had happened. What they understood is that he had seen a vision. Interestingly, he continues and completes his time of serving even though he is now mute.

Afterward, he goes home. Imagine trying to explain that to Elizabeth. Believe it!

Its Realization (v.24-25)

²⁴ After these days his wife Elizabeth conceived, and for five months she kept herself hidden, saying, ²⁵ "Thus the Lord has done for me in the days when he looked on me, to take away my reproach among people."

Just as was promised, Elizabeth conceived. This was supernatural because of age, but seems to have come about through natural intimacy. Knowing that people will not believe her until she starts showing, she does not go out in public for five

months. But then, she witnesses to the gracious power of God in her and Zechariah's life. She is so grateful that God has taken away the reproach of barrenness.

The Announcement to Mary (v.26-38)

At the center of the announcement to Mary are: **the honor of Christ and the humility of Mary.**

The Authority of God's Messenger (v.26-27)

This is not a message to be ignored.

²⁶ In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, ²⁷ to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary.

This is more likely referring to the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy. Note Verse 36. The providences and purposes of God are so evident. When Mary went to visit Elizabeth, John the Baptist was old enough to "leap in her womb."

God sent him. Gabriel is heard and heeded, not just because he is an angel, but because it is the Sovereign God sent him. Gabriel has that special function, to bring special messages to people of God's choosing.

His greeting to her is expressive of all that God's revelation is to us. When God sends His Word it is always a matter of grace. It is God bestowing His favor and giving the enablement to hear and to heed.

The Humility of God's Maiden (v.26-29)

Notice how the text points to the humble condition of Mary.

Its Outward Evidence (v.26-27)

We see it in the outward evidence of her sweet humility.

²⁶ In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, ²⁷ to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary

She lives in Galilee in the town of Nazareth. People from this area and this town were generally looked down on. It was what we would have called "being from the wrong side of the tracks." It was a poor area and had way too much contact and influence from the Gentiles to suit a proper Jew.

Here she is, born into the royal tribe, a direct descendent of King David yet seems to not have all the advantages that go with such a family heritage.

Three times this text points out that she is a virgin. There is the objective statement of the Scripture in verse 27 and her own expression of her pure state in verse 34. Her virginity is a humble honor. She has kept herself pure for her husband; now she learns that purity has been kept for God.

She was "pledged to be married" or betrothed. Our modern word for engagement might be used. The difference is that in their culture, a covenant bond

was already established and breaking an engagement required a divorce. The marriage supper and consummation afterward were yet to come. How amazing this is. Jesus is born into a family after the covenant bond has been made and yet before physical union. Do you realize that this is true of each of us who are born into the family of God and become part of the bride of Christ? We are Jesus' bride after the marriage covenant yet before the marriage supper. Today, this day, is the time of the betrothal.

So, we ought to honor Mary. God bestowed on this humble maiden an amazing honor. Let us honor her as we would any humble sinner, graced by God to be indwelt and enabled by God for His purposes and glory.

Its Inward Expression (v.28-29)

²⁸ And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" ²⁹ But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be.

Gabriel greets her with two amazing sentences. "Greetings, graced one. The Lord is with you." Here is a greeting from heaven by heaven's messenger saying God has favored her. God is with her. Now listen to me for a moment. Mary does not hear these words like we do. The abiding presence of God in our lives is a present reality. It was not so for them. The abiding presence of God was a thing in their past. The Presence of God's glory had dwelt in the Temple over the Ark of the Covenant. But it had departed in the days of Ezekiel. It had not returned. And now the very Presence is coming to and upon Mary.

It is not surprising that she wonders at the words and the greeting. It is an astonishing thing. It is wholly unexpected. Luke tells us that she "kept on pondering" (v.29 NASB). Mary exhibits the godly habit of quiet humility linked with constant reflection and meditation. We find her over and over again treasuring up words and events and thinking about their significance.

Her humility is evident in her surprise and consternation. This is wholly unexpected. There is no sense of inner satisfaction that she has finally been given her due. True humility is constantly surprised at the grace and favor of God: not because of a wrong view of God, but because of an accurate assessment of self.

The Clarity of God's Message (v.29-37)

Luke records this in his writing "an orderly account...so that we might know the certainty of the things we have been taught. (1:1-4). The message for Mary comes to us like a great vessel laden with rich treasures of truth. There is much to understand and admire.

The heart of this message is Jesus. The central theme of the angel's announcement is the amazing wonder that God became man-Jesus is God incarnate. The second person of the Godhead took upon Himself human form, *forever*.

Its Calming Perspective (v.29-30)

²⁸ And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" ²⁹ But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰ And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.

The message opens with a sense of calming perspective. Do not fear. You are graced of God. It is not that she fears the presence of the angel; she wonders at the meaning of the greeting. So, the angel reassures her that God has not come with a message of judgment, but one of surprise and blessing. If the content of the message is going to be clear, it must arrive at home in a heart unshadowed by fear.

Its Great Personage (v.31-33)

³¹ And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. 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, ³³ and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

Here is the announcement. You are going to have a child. Here are the jewels of truth about this child. Here are mysteries that baffle the brightest minds and thrill truth loving hearts.

He will have a human conception and birth. He will be a human son. He will have a human name, Jesus (Joshua, in Hebrew). This is not some angelic or spirit being coming into the world via the channel of human birth. This will a truly human baby.

His name will connect Him with the great leader, Joshua. When Moses, the Law-giver could not enter the land because of failure, Joshua crossed the river and brought the people into their promised heritage. It reminds me so much that what the Law could not do because it was weak and powerless, Jesus, our Joshua has done. He has crossed the river for us and lead us over it and is bringing us into the fullness of all that God's Covenant promised.

But He will be more than just another human baby with a spectacular birth. He will be more than just Mary's son, He will the Most High's Son. He will be God. He will be great because inside the living dust of a true man will dwell the infinite Presence of the God's Son. Notice the distinction made: she will give birth to a human son, but He will be declared the Son of God. Imagine what this would have meant for Mary! I am going to have a son and He will be God's Son *in a way no one ever was or ever will be again.*

Her son would be human. He would be God. And He will forever be God's High King ruling in sovereign majesty on David's throne. If she thought the words of the greeting and wonder of the grace were worth pondering, what

about these words? There is almost a subtle irony in Luke's writing. "You thought that angels and greetings were amazing, listen to this!"

In these words God summarizes almost all that the New Testament is going to unfold about Jesus Christ. He is human, born a baby from a mother's womb. He is God, Divine, eternal and great. He is the King, majestic, covenant fulfilling and eternal.

Now I must ask a question of this text. Why is Jesus portrayed as ruling over the house of Jacob? Why *Jacob*? Simply this. Jacob always stands for the unmerited mercies and electing love of God for sneaking, slithering sinners. "You worm, Jacob" in one text. "Jacob have I loved" in another. All of this has happened in order that men and women and boys and girls—we who are truly worms yet loved and chosen—might be happy citizens of this holy and never-ending kingdom.

Its Amazing Process (v. 34-37)

³⁴ And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?"

³⁵ 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. ³⁶ 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. ³⁷ For nothing will be impossible with God."

Mary now asks a question. This is not a question of unbelief, but one of belief. This is not as though she were saying, "This not possible. This cannot happen." Rather, her question is one about method. Since she is a virgin, how will God bring this about? It is correctly translated, "How will", not "How can." She is expressing her belief while asking about how this is going to come about. Remember, whatever process God is going to use, she will have to experience. "I believe it will take place: please tell me how."

The answer comes most mysterious. It gathers up the hovering Presence of the Spirit at creation and Pillar in the Wilderness and the Cloud on Mount Sinai and the Glory in the Temple in Isaiah at brings them into the womb of young virgin and implants there the very life of God. It is a mystery beyond our ken. We cannot understand how it is possible. But it is what God did.

The end result is "so the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God." Notice, what will be born is Holy and is God. There is no sin in Him. He will not receive the sinful nature; He will receive the divine nature. All of the Satanic efforts to corrupt and contaminate the human race and thus thwart the manifest purpose and plan of God, come to naught in the heartbeat moments when the Holy Spirit brings into Mary's womb the second Person of the Godhead, Jesus.

Its Encouraging Pattern

Ah the wonderful mercies of God. Here is encouragement and motivation for a young heart. He tells of Elizabeth's pregnancy. Mary does not know of it for Elizabeth stayed in seclusion until the 5th month when no one could laugh and doubt, for she would be obvious. It is a heartening spring from which Mary may drink encouragement. If the barren in her old age can have a child, then this is not as difficult as it sounds.

Its Divine Power

Lest Mary have to wonder, here comes the Word of God actually imparting grace to her humble heart. Listen to these words, "Nothing is impossible with God." Literally, it says, "Not one of these words is impossible with God." I know this seems like the obvious. And I reckon that I should not be so sharply critical of Christian slogans and bumper sticker theology. But at least (or at most) this is true and this is Truth. No one word of what God says He will do is impossible for Him to do.

Reflect and Respond

The response of Zechariah ought to encourage us to hear and heed God's Word. No, we will not have angelic visitations in our day. We have the Word of God. Even if we had them, we still are bound to believe and obey what God has said in His Word.

God will fulfill what He has promised and prophesied. Zechariah's son fulfilled Scripture. Mary's Son fulfilled Scripture. On these great truths we rest our heart to trust God to complete His glorious plan.

The response of Mary ought to ring in our hearts and lives as well. What she says here is faith, believing God in an obeying way (v.45).

Servanthood -She here declares that she is utterly at God's disposal. She is a servant. She is willing to give up her rights to bow to the will of God.

Submission - Servants submit. This is the common expression today, "Make it so." May God's will be done on earth, in her life, as it is done in heaven and declared by God's messenger from heaven.

May God give us grace to be humble servants who submit with delighted joy to this son of Mary, this Son of God, this High King and eternal Sovereign.