

Hail the Baby, Not Mary (Luke 1:26-38)

1. The Announcement by Gabriel (v.26-27)

- Six months had transpired since Gabriel informed Zechariah, a priest serving in Jerusalem, of a child that would be born to him and his wife, Elizabeth, despite their old age. He is to be named John.
- He now visits a young woman from a desolate, unpopulated village (city) in Galilee called Nazareth. Nazareth was a shoddy, corrupt halfway village between the ports of Tyre and Sidon.
- Gabriel was sent by God (passive voice), indicating that he is “following orders.” Gabriel ignored the holiest physical location (Jerusalem) for a run-down village in the middle of nowhere.
- Extra-biblical historical data (Apocryphal Gospel of Mary and the History of Joseph the Carpenter) places Mary’s age between 12-14.
- She is too young to have accomplished anything, as she was poor and illiterate. She would only have Old Testament understanding from her regular visits to the local synagogue and teachings from her parents.
- She is engaged to a man named Joseph. Roman law set the minimum age of marriage for girls to be 12, and for boys, 14. The Jewish practice was similar: it was 12 1/2 for girls. This would be advantageous for her father because of purity practices, for it would benefit the father, husband, and daughter if she were married before puberty.
- She is mentioned twice in this pericope as a virgin (v.27) which alludes to Isaiah 7:14.

2. The Anathematic Doctrine of the Immaculate Conception (v.28)

- Gabriel calls her “most favored one.” The Greek root word for “most favored” is “grace.” The Latin Vulgate translates this “most favored” as “full of grace.”
- In the Catholic tradition, the most well-known prayer is: “Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee, blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of death.”
- Mary is supposedly a fountain of grace (full of grace). How did this happen?
 - A. The Munificentissimus Deus (11/1/1950): issued by Pope Pius XII, which defined the bodily assumption of Mary (she ascended to heaven with a glorified body at her death).
 - B. Ad Caeli Reginam (10/11/1954): issued by Pope Pius XII, which defined the coronation of Mary as the queen of heaven: God chose her to be the mother of Christ as the second Eve, thus associated with the second Adam (Christ).
 - C. The First Ineffabilis Deus (12/8/1954): issued by Pope Pius IX, which declared the doctrine of immaculate conception.

The “Immaculate Conception”: “the Blessed Virgin Mary was, by the singular grace and privilege of Almighty God, and because of the merits of Jesus Christ, Savior of mankind, kept free from the stain of original sin.” Under this Catholic doctrine, Mary was preserved from any taint of sin from her conception until her death through the future retroactive merits of Christ on the cross.

Scripture does not allude in any way to Mary as sinless. Outside of the gospels, she is mentioned only once in Acts 1:14. No biblical writer makes any mention of her sinlessness.

Gabriel’s announcement of her favored status does not describe her intrinsic grace but her endowed grace. It refers to the favor and grace she has received, not the grace she can provide.

3. The Anticipatory Arrival of the Son of God (v.29-38)

There are five characteristics:

- A. Mary will conceive and give birth to a son, and his name will be called Jesus (v.31).
- B. He will be great (v.32). Unlike John, who will be great before the Lord (v.15), there are no qualifications to His greatness. In the LXX, greatness is an attribute of God alone (Ps. 48:2; 86:10; 135:5; 145:3).
- C. He will be called “Son of Highest.” This sonship goes beyond the Davidic kingship and refers to the unique relationship that this Holy One has with God (v.32).
- D. As a royal Messiah, he will be given the throne of his father David, recalling the Davidic Covenant (2 Sam. 7:13-16; Ps. 2:7; 89:27-29). The last king of Judah through the line of David was King Zedekiah, who reigned 600 years ago.
- E. He will reign over Jacob’s descendants forever. This is a circumlocution, as eternity is an attribute of God, and only God’s kingdom is eternal (Isa. 9:7; Dan. 7:14; Ps. 145:13; Heb. 7:24).

Gabriel’s announcement does not address the preexistence of the Son before the incarnation but instead informs her of the child’s name. Jesus will be called the Son of God, not that he will become the Son of God (v.35). Each firstborn male was dedicated and consecrated to God (Ex. 13:1-2; 11-16).

Mary’s question, unlike Zechariah’s, was not one of doubt but of technicality, as she is a virgin. This has never happened before! Abram and Sarai, Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob and Rachel, Samson’s mother, Elkanah and Hannah, and Zechariah and Elizabeth all had husband and wife relations, thus bringing about the promised child through natural, conjugal rights. Mary is informed that she is to become pregnant as a virgin. There is a qualitative difference between natural and unnatural conception. Additionally, she is pregnant before the consummation of the wedding, and the child is not biologically Joseph’s. This would have brought a tremendous amount of shame from the community to her, her parents, and Joseph.

The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you (v.35):

This language recalls God’s “brooding” over the waters during creation (Gen. 1:2). It can also allude to the glory of God that shadowed/filled the tent of meeting (Ex. 40:33-35). It can be synonymous with God’s “Shekinah.” This “glory” is the materialization and localization of the presence of God in time and space. God is intervening uniquely with this child. The divine shekinah present in the tabernacle will be in this son (John 1:14).

While the Annunciation of Mary is the culmination of Isaiah 7:14, there is an ascension from the least to the greatest (Luke 1). While both accounts have Zechariah and Mary as troubled (v.12, 28), afraid (v.13, 30), informed that they would have a son (v.13, 31), naming their son (v.13, 31), their son being great (v.15, 32), speaking and replying to Gabriel (v.18, 34), Gabriel speaking to them and being sent by God (v.13, 19, 20, 26), there are significant differences:

- Zechariah and Elizabeth are described as upright priests, yet there is no depiction of Mary.
- The first announcement is in a temple, while the second is at an obscure town in the middle of nowhere (Nazareth).
- Zechariah and Elizabeth are like Abram and Sarai, while Mary is like Hagar (vulnerable and socially ostracized).
- The announcement for the birth of John was to a married couple. On the other hand, Mary was a single 12 to 14-year-old virgin.
- The Holy Spirit will fill John from the womb (v.15), while Jesus will be conceived through the operation of the Holy Spirit (v.31, 35).
- Mary submitted without reservation (v.38) while Zechariah doubted (v.18).