

An Announcement to Mary

Luke 1:26–38

Advent 2016 #3

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“THE greatest show on earth.” Those of us old enough to remember, that was the slogan of Barnum & Bailey’s Circus. “The greatest show on turf.” If you’re a football fan you’ll remember that was the St. Louis Ram’s slogan when they won the Super Bowl. If you’re a moviegoer then words like “epic,” “mesmerizing,” “an instant classic,” and other such over-the-top descriptions are familiar to you. We like things big, we like things new, we like things exciting. That’s what we have in our narrative today. The announcement that the Son of God was to be born a man is the greatest event the world has ever known! So let’s read it “with mingled wonder, love and praise,” as J.C. Ryle said.¹

This announcement is astonishing. That’s the descriptive word that kept coming into my head this week as I thought about this text. Look at Luke’s setting of the scene for us beginning in verse 26. *There’s a time marker: in the sixth month*, which takes us back to the announcement narrative of the birth of John the Baptist. This time refers to his mother

¹ Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels: Luke 1–10* (repr., Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2007), 2:1:21.

Elizabeth's sixth month of pregnancy. *There's also a location marker here:* at that time **the same angel Gabriel was sent from God north to a city of Galilee named Nazareth.** Children, how many times have you taken a long drive, you've complained, but then your parents have said, "Enjoy the drive." All the details of places and times are part of the journey to Jesus coming to earth! What's astonishing about this is how John's birth was announced at the temple in Jerusalem but the Son of God's birth was announced in the city of Nazareth, which was in the region of Galilee. Galilee was a region that was surrounded on three sides by Gentiles, was cut off from southern Judea by Samaria, and by this time had become synonymous as a place of contempt by the Jews to the south.² For example, the Jews argued among themselves about Jesus in John 7 and said, "Search and see that no prophet arises from Galilee" (John 7:52). *There's also a recipient marker here:* unlike John, whose birth was announced to his father, Zechariah the priest, Gabriel now announces the Son of God's birth **to his unassuming mother: a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David**—a detail that will come into focus in just a moment. **And the virgin's name was Mary** (v. 27). Astonishing!

² "Galilee," in *New Bible Dictionary*, ed. J.D. Douglas, et al (second edition, 1982; Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, repr. 1996), 402.

An Astonishing Announcement (vv. 26–33)

The first thing we see together is *the astonishing announcement* of the angel Gabriel: “**Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!**” (v. 28)

For those of us with Roman Catholic backgrounds or with family still in Roman Catholicism, we might stumble over this. But note well that Mary is the **favored one**; she is not the mother of grace but the daughter of grace;³ she doesn’t give out grace, she receives it! In fact, she even confesses that God is her Savior in her song in verse 47; how can he be if she is not a sinner? And Gabriel says, “**The Lord is with you.**” That’s an understatement, isn’t it? This is no polite greeting, but the Lord himself of Israel is with her, as we’re about to read, as the Spirit of the Father is about to conceive in her the Lord in human flesh! You cannot understand the birth of our Lord Jesus unless you understand that God is Triune.

As with Zechariah, this astonishing announcement leads Mary to be **greatly troubled at the saying as she tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be** (v. 29). Don’t forget what I said last Sunday: the Lord hasn’t spoken to Israel in four hundred years. Now he breaks his silence! So Gabriel reassured **her**, “**Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have**

³ J.A. Bengel cited in Geldenhuys, *The Gospel of Luke*, 79 n3.

found favor with God” (v. 30). Again, it’s not because she too was born sinless like our Lord that she found favor with God; it’s not because she earned or deserved it! Her finding favor was because of all women God himself chose her to be the human mother of the Lord incarnate: **And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son** (v. 31). What an astonishing announcement! Note why.

First, his name: **you shall call his name Jesus** (v. 31). We’ll see tonight in Matthew 1 that this was the Hebrew name for “the Lord saves.” Many faithful Jewish parents who were looking for a Messiah named their sons Joshua, Jehoshua, or Jeshua, which were variations of this name. So the objection you’ll hear on the seasonal shows that try to discredit Christianity is that Jesus was a common name. That’s why what comes next is important.

Second, his nature: **He will be great**. How? The next line is Hebrew parallelism, adding a little more: **He...will be called the Son of the Most High** (v. 32), literally, “Son of Most High,” which is one way to emphasize his uniqueness.⁴ Let me ask you a theological question. Does Gabriel say here that this son Jesus would “become” the Son of God? No, he is declared to be the Son. This is so important. You might see people all around the beach or

⁴ Geldenhuys, 76.

at parks these days sitting on chairs with a little literature rack nearby with the letters: “JW.org.” Those are the Jehovah’s Witnesses. They believe that God created his Son. The Son, in other words, became to be. He is not co-eternal with the Father but a lesser being. Why is that so important? Because the Lord says in the prophet Isaiah that he alone is Lord and he cannot share his glory with another. But Gabriel says Jesus would be **called** what he actually was by nature **the Son of the Most High**. This means that the Son is equal to the Father. As we’ve confessed this morning, the Son is “God of the substance of the Father, begotten before the worlds” (Athanasian Creed). He is the same as the Father in divinity. The analogy is a father begetting his son, but before we go too far with that like the JW’s, the Creed says, “begotten before the worlds,” in other words, this begetting was eternal; there was no point in time when the Son came to be.

Third, his nation: **And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David** (v. 32). This was a promise the prophets made over and over (Jer. 30:9; Ezek. 34:24; 37:24; Hos. 3:5; Amos 9:11). **And he will reign over the house of Jacob forever** (v. 33). That’s the promise of Genesis 49. **And of his kingdom there will be no end** (v. 33). That’s another promise of the prophets (Dan. 7:14; Isa. 52:10; 40:5; 49:6). Astonishing!

An Astonished Response (vv. 34–37)

Ladies, if that was who you were going to give birth to, how would you respond? Imagine that. You're a very young woman, engaged to be married, living at home with your parents out in the sticks of insignificance. That's who Mary was; that's where she was. Wouldn't you be a little astonished? Listen to Mary's *astonished response*: "**How will this be, since I am a virgin?**" (v. 34) Gabriel is announcing a son whose names means Savior, who **will be great**, who **will be called the Son of the Most High** (v. 32), who will sit on **the throne of his father David** (v. 32), who **will reign over the house of Jacob forever**, and whose **kingdom...will have no end** (v. 33). But Mary is concerned more with how this will be! She's going to give birth to the Son of God in human flesh but her thought is that she is a virgin!

She's astonished, but she's not in disbelief. Note the similarity and difference with her response and Zechariah's response back in verse 18. They were both troubled and fearful (vv. 12, 29). But Zechariah's disbelief was evidenced in his request for a sign. So God gave him a sign: he couldn't speak until John would be born. Why doesn't God also place a temporary sign of rebuke on Mary? Because he doesn't doubt; she doesn't ask for a sign. She only asks how this would be, not that it would be!

Gabriel's answer is that **“the Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you”** (v. 35)—but I will come back to that tonight as we look at Matthew 1 and the announcement to Joseph. For now, the key thing is verses 36–37: **“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.”** That's the emphasis here! It's that God is Almighty!

Let me bring this home to you today and say that no heart is too hard, no lifestyle is too far gone, no doubts are too deep for the Almighty to save you! No thing is impossible for God to do and no person is impossible for God to save! God knew when he gave his beloved Son to the world that the world was full of rebellious sons and daughters. It still is; you and I are among them.

An Appropriate Response (v. 38)

What is your response to God's gift of Jesus? Will you ask for more signs, more evidence, more time to think, more time to live how you please? Or will you offer the *appropriate response* of Mary: **“Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word”** (v. 38). Give yourself to Jesus Christ today; serve him, not yourself. Amen.