

# **To Seek and To Save the Lost**

## **The Birth of Jesus Foretold**

*Luke 1:26-38*

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# The Birth of Jesus Foretold

## Scripture

Let us continue our study in the Gospel of Luke that I am calling, “To Seek and to Save the Lost.” Today I would like to study the passage in which we see the birth of Jesus foretold.

The announcement—or, annunciation—of the angel Gabriel to Mary that she will conceive and bear a son has been painted by scores of artists throughout the centuries. Leonardo da Vinci’s *Annunciation* (c. 1472 – 1475) is housed in the Uffizi Gallery of Florence, Italy. Da Vinci depicts Mary sitting outside



Figure 1: Leonardo da Vinci’s *Annunciation* (c. 1472 – 1475), housed at the Uffizi Gallery of Florence, Italy.

her house reading the Old Testament Scriptures. The angel Gabriel is in front of her and greeting her. He is holding a Madonna lily in his left hand, which is a symbol

of her purity. Interestingly, many of the “annunciation” paintings have a lily somewhere in the scene. Mary appears calm, although we know from Luke that she was initially “greatly troubled” (1:29). Mary was about to receive the greatest announcement that had ever been given to a person.

Let’s read about it in Luke 1:26-38:

**<sup>26</sup>In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, <sup>27</sup>to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin’s name was Mary. <sup>28</sup>And he came to her and said, “Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!” <sup>29</sup>But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and**

tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. <sup>30</sup> And the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. <sup>31</sup> And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. <sup>32</sup> 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, <sup>33</sup> and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.”

<sup>34</sup> And Mary said to the angel, “How will this be, since I am a virgin?”

<sup>35</sup> 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. <sup>36</sup> 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. <sup>37</sup> For nothing will be impossible with God.” <sup>38</sup> 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. (Luke 1:26-38)

## Introduction

One British Bible commentator says that if you ask a newspaper editor what sort of stories will sell the most copies, three categories come swiftly to mind: sex, royalty, and religion. If they can be combined, so much the better. “POP STAR’S LOVE CHILD” is good; “PRINCESS HAS SECRET AFFAIR” is better; “KING’S SECRET NIGHT WITH NUN” is better still.

So when people read the story of Gabriel visiting Mary, with the child to be born being the future Lord of the world, their minds easily jump in the way the newspapers have conditioned them to do. People have read into the story all sorts of things that aren’t there, and have failed to notice some of the really important things that are there.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Tom Wright, *Luke for Everyone* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2004), 9.

Luke began his Gospel by setting side-by-side two similar stories regarding John the Baptist and Jesus the Christ. He told us about two announcements, two responses, two pregnancies, two hymns of praise, and two births that led to two great lives.

Last week we examined the announcement of the birth of John the Baptist. Today, I would like to examine the announcement of the birth of Jesus.

In the account of the announcement of the birth of Jesus, Luke tells us how we should respond to God's word.

## **Lesson**

An analysis of the account regarding the announcement of the birth of Jesus as set forth in Luke 1:26-38 will show us how to respond to God's word.

Let's conduct the analysis by looking at the following:

1. The Time of The Announcement (1:26a)
2. The Agent of The Announcement (1:26b)
3. The Place of The Announcement (1:26c)
4. The Recipient of The Announcement (1:27)
5. The Greeting Preceding The Announcement (1:28)
6. The Reaction to The Announcement (1:29)
7. The Content of The Announcement (1:30-33)
8. The Initial Response to The Announcement (1:34)
9. The Doctrine Established by The Announcement (1:35)
10. The Encouragement to Believe The Announcement (1:36-37)
11. The Final Response to The Announcement (1:38)

### **I. The Time of The Announcement (1:26a)**

First, let's begin by looking at the time of the announcement.

It is helpful to remember that God had not said a word—not a single word—to his people for four hundred years! Then, one day, God sent the angel Gabriel to tell Zechariah that his wife Elizabeth was going to bear him a son (1:13). Elizabeth, who was advanced in years and well beyond menopause did conceive and become pregnant with a child to be named John.

The announcement in the current account took place **in the sixth month** (1:26a) of Elizabeth's pregnancy.

## II. The Agent of The Announcement (1:26b)

Second, notice the agent of the announcement.

Luke said that **the angel Gabriel was sent from God** (1:26b) to make this announcement.

**Gabriel** is one of the two angels mentioned by name in the Bible (the other is Michael). **Gabriel** appeared twice in the Old Testament to Daniel to show what would transpire on the Day of Judgment, and to give Daniel wisdom and understanding (Daniel 8:16; 9:21–22). **Gabriel** then appeared twice in the New Testament. He appeared to Zechariah in the temple, informing him that Elizabeth would have a baby (Luke 1:11-20). And then six months later he appeared to Mary to announce that she would become the mother of Jesus. **Gabriel** is commonly called an *archangel*, but is not referred to as such in the Bible.<sup>2</sup>

## III. The Place of The Announcement (1:26c)

Third, let's look at the place of the announcement.

Gabriel went **to a city of Galilee named Nazareth** (1:26c).

**Nazareth** was an insignificant agricultural village not far

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<sup>2</sup> Walter A. Elwell and Philip Wesley Comfort, *Tyndale Bible Dictionary*, Tyndale reference library (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2001), 504-05.

from a major trade route to Egypt, the *Via Maris*. It is not mentioned in the Old Testament, Josephus, or rabbinic writings.

Although Luke called Nazareth a **city**, it really was no more than a village, with about 2,000 inhabitants at the time that God sent Gabriel to it.<sup>3</sup>

God did not send Gabriel to Jerusalem or some other well-known place. He sent Gabriel to **Nazareth**. Sometimes people get discouraged about where they are located. They feel like they are stuck in an out-of-the-way place. No one notices them, and nothing is ever going to come their way. Or, they feel like they attend a church that is small and insignificant where they will never meet a marriageable companion. Or, they attend a youth group that is small and insignificant and not nearly as exciting as others. At times like these, don't focus on your location; keep focusing on God! He knows your address, and he will come to you at just the right time.

#### **IV. The Recipient of The Announcement (1:27)**

Fourth, observe the recipient of the announcement.

Luke said that Gabriel went **to a virgin** (1:27a). A **virgin** (*parthenos*) refers to a person who has not had sexual intercourse.<sup>4</sup>

He said that this virgin was **betrothed** (1:27b). In the culture in those days, girls were usually **betrothed** at the age of twelve or thirteen years old! They were then married at the end of a one-year betrothal period. The betrothal, arranged by the parents, was a more binding legal arrangement than a modern engagement. Only death or divorce could sever the contract, and the couple could be referred to as husband and

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<sup>3</sup> Paul J. Achtemeier and Society of Biblical Literature, *Harper's Bible Dictionary*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), 689.

<sup>4</sup> *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, ed. Ronald F. Youngblood, F. F. Bruce, R. K. Harrison and Thomas Nelson Publishers (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1995).

wife. If her betrothed husband died, the girl would be considered a widow. The couple did not live together or have sexual relations during the betrothal period. During that year the girl was to prepare for marriage, and the boy was to build a home for his bride-to-be. When the year was up there was a seven-day wedding feast (cf. Matthew 25:1-13; John 2:1-11), after which the couple began their life together as husband and wife. Only then was the marriage consummated.<sup>5</sup>

Now, this virgin was betrothed **to a man whose name was Joseph** (1:27c). Though Joseph was a carpenter, he belonged to **the house of David** (1:27d). King **David** was Israel's greatest Old Testament king. There were many Old Testament Scriptures indicating that the promised Messiah would be a descendant of **David** (2 Samuel 7:12, 16; Psalm 89:35-36; Jeremiah 23:5). Although Joseph was not Jesus' natural father, his adoption of Jesus made him legally a descendant of **David**.

At this point Luke tells us simply that **the virgin's name was Mary** (1:27e). Luke does not commend her at this point, as he did when he introduced Zechariah and Elizabeth in the previous account (1:6). He simply noted that she was a virgin and said nothing about her being otherwise praiseworthy. She was undoubtedly a righteous young girl, as her testimony in verses 46-55 indicates. But it seems that the Holy Spirit restrained Luke from noting anything further about her so as to prevent an unbiblical veneration of Mary.

## V. The Greeting Preceding The Announcement (1:28)

Fifth, notice the greeting preceding the announcement.

Luke said that Gabriel **came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!"** (1:28).

With these words, Gabriel pronounced God's benediction

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<sup>5</sup> John F. MacArthur, Jr., *Luke 1-5*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2009), 44-45.

on Mary. God was with Mary to bless her, not because of her merit but rather because of his grace. The expression “**O favored one**” (*kecharitomene*) comes from the Greek word for “grace.” It means “to show kindness to someone, with the implication of graciousness on the part of the one showing such kindness.”<sup>6</sup>

Gabriel’s greeting has often been misunderstood. Gabriel was not worshiping Mary. Moreover, he did not say that she was “full of grace.” These ideas come from a prayer that is commonly used by the Roman Catholic Church:

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 our death.<sup>7</sup>

It is helpful to note that this is not a biblical prayer, although it has some biblical language in it. The problem with this prayer is that it treats Mary as a *source* of grace rather than as an *object* of grace. People pray to Mary because they think that she has grace to give. But the phrase “full of grace” is based on the Latin translation (known as the *Vulgate*) of this verse, and it is actually a *mistranslation* of the original Greek text. Even Roman Catholic Bible scholars admit this, although most still think that Christians should pray to Mary.<sup>8</sup>

What the Bible actually says is that Mary was the *recipient* of God’s grace and not the *dispenser* of God’s grace. The Greek word (*kecharitomene*) that the *English Standard Version* cor-

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<sup>6</sup> Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, vol. 1, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, electronic ed. of the 2nd edition. (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 748.

<sup>7</sup> Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (New York, NY: Catholic Book Publishing Co., 1994), 643-644.

<sup>8</sup> See Raymond E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke*, rev. ed., Anchor Bible Reference Library (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1993), 325-327.



rectly translates as “**O favored one**” is a passive participle. In other words, it refers to the grace that Mary *received*, and not to the grace that she can *give* to others.

It is important that we think correctly about Mary. The Bible never says that Mary was without sin. Nor does the Bible say that she remained a virgin. In fact, after Jesus was born, Mary had at least four sons and two daughters with her husband, Joseph (Mark 6:3). Also, the Bible never says that Mary is able to give grace to sinners. Mary would be grieved to think that this is how people viewed her.

What the Bible does say is that she was saved by grace. The way Mary helps us is not by giving us grace but by showing that God’s grace is available to everyone—even those who appear to be inconspicuous and insignificant. Mary’s example showed that God’s grace is available to people like you and me.

## **VI. The Reaction to The Announcement (1:29)**

Sixth, look at the reaction to the announcement.

Gabriel’s greeting was meant to be comforting and reassuring. However, Mary **was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be (1:29)**.

One can understand how a pre-teenage girl would be alarmed by the sudden appearance of an angel in her presence. And then she would have been further alarmed at his greeting.

Fortunately, Gabriel did not leave her in suspense. He followed his greeting with the announcement.

## **VII. The Content of The Announcement (1:30-33)**

Seventh, notice the content of the announcement.

Gabriel announced that the greatest event in human history was about to happen: the arrival of the Son of God!

A. *Gabriel Announced Two Things Concerning Mary (1:30-31)*

First, Gabriel announced two things concerning Mary.

1. Mary Has Found Favor with God (1:30)

First, Mary has found favor with God.

**And the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God” (1:30).**

Aware of Mary’s fear, Gabriel assured her that she had no reason to **be afraid**. And the reason Mary had no reason to fear is because she had **found favor with God**. The Greek word for “**favor**” (*charin*) is different than the word that Gabriel used in verse 28, although it also means “grace.” God was showing his unmerited favor to Mary. She had done nothing to earn or deserve his grace; God simply chose her to be the recipient of his amazing grace.

Gabriel continued sharing his incredible announcement.

2. Mary Is to Conceive and Bear a Son and Call him Jesus (1:31)

And second, Mary is to conceive and bear a son and call him Jesus.

Gabriel continued, saying, “**And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus**” (1:31).

Surely, this must have been the most astonishing announcement that a young girl could receive! Not only would Mary conceive and bear a son, but his name was also given to her: **Jesus!** His name means “savior” or “Jehovah is salvation.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 1141.

This was the first hint that Jesus would be the Savior of sinners. He would bring eternal life to those who believe in him by dying on the cross and rising back to life three days later. Right from the beginning, his name testified to his saving work.

*B. Gabriel Announced Two Things Concerning Jesus (1:32-33)*

And second, Gabriel announced two things concerning Jesus.

1. Jesus Will Be Great in His Person (1:32a)

First, Jesus will be great in his person.

Gabriel said, **“He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High”** (1:32a).

Gabriel told Zechariah that his son, John, would be “great before the Lord” (1:15). But no such qualifying statement is given to Mary about her baby. Jesus simply **will be great**. Period. No additional qualifying statement. Jesus **will be great** because he will come to accomplish salvation for his elect.

Therefore, Gabriel said that Jesus **will be called the Son of the Most High**. **“The Most High”** was a favorite expression of Jesus’ ancestor, King David, who used it to praise God (e.g. Psalm 7:17). Now, Gabriel was saying that Jesus would be **the Son of the Most High**. In one sense, every Christian is a son or daughter of the Most High. However, this title belongs to Jesus in a unique way. In just a few moments Luke is going to reveal to Mary that Jesus is not only **the Son of the Most High** but that he is in fact “the Son of God” (1:35). That is, Jesus is the Second Person of the Trinity.

2. Jesus Will Be Great in His Office (1:32b-33)

And second, Jesus will be great in his office.

And then Gabriel continued, **“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”** (1:32b-33).

Gabriel clarified that Jesus would sit on **the throne of his ancestor David**. Moreover, he would **reign over the house of his even more distant ancestor Jacob forever**. The **house of Jacob** is a traditional way of speaking of the nation of Israel. Finally, Jesus’ **kingdom** will never end.

A little over 2,000 years after Gabriel gave this announcement to Mary we can be encouraged at the growth of Jesus’ kingdom. According to the US Center for World Missions, in 100 AD there were an estimated 360 non-Christians for every Christian. Today there are only 7 non-Christians for every Christian.<sup>10</sup> And although there is still an enormous amount of work to do, we know that Jesus’ **kingdom** is growing and will never end.

## **VIII. The Initial Response To The Announcement (1:34)**

Eighth, look at the initial response to the announcement.

**And Mary said to the angel, “How will this be, since I am a virgin?”** (1:34).

**Mary** was understandably puzzled. She was betrothed to Joseph, but not yet married to him. She understood Gabriel to mean that she would conceive a child before she got married. So, she had to ask, **“How will this be, since I am a virgin?”**

Now, you may recall that Zechariah asked Gabriel a similar (but not identical) question as well. Luke wants us to see the difference between Zechariah’s doubt and Mary’s faith in their two questions. Zechariah asked Gabriel, “How shall I *know* this?” (1:18a). He was not sure whether to believe the

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<sup>10</sup> See <http://thepjournal.wordpress.com/2010/03/10/the-gospel-is-winning-christian-growth-in-history/>.

angel, and so he asked for some kind of sign. He wanted Gabriel to give him some assurance that it would happen. Ironically, Gabriel did give him a sign—by causing him to become mute until John was born! We know that Zechariah doubted Gabriel’s announcement because Gabriel said so in verse 20: “. . . because you did not believe my words.”

Mary, on the other hand, asked a completely different question, “**How will this be?**” Unlike Zechariah, who wanted confirmation *that* it would happen, Mary wanted to know *how* it would happen. She believed Gabriel’s words. She simply wanted to know *how* she would conceive.

## **IX. The Doctrine Established by The Announcement (1:35)**

Ninth, observe the doctrine established by the announcement.

**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” (1:35).**

Mary would conceive by the power of **the Holy Spirit**. No further explanation is given about how Mary would conceive and bear a son who would be fully man and fully God.

Some call this the doctrine of the virgin birth. Technically, Jesus’ birth was a natural birth, like any other child’s birth. It is better to call this the virgin conception. Mary conceived a child simply by the power of **the Holy Spirit**.

Mary’s question, “How will this be?” is still a question people ask today. How can a person become pregnant without having sexual relations? Or, how can a person become pregnant without artificial insemination? The answer is simple: Only by the power of God. Only God can bring this about.

The virgin conception is an important Christian doctrine.

Deny this, and you deny the faith. Jesus was fully man and he was also fully God. His conception by the power of the Holy Spirit points to his deity. And his birth from a woman points to his humanity. Only the virgin conception preserves both deity and humanity of Jesus Christ. He was one person with two natures—a divine nature and a human nature.

Because Jesus was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus was not corrupted by the guilt of Adam. That is why Jesus was able to be the Second Adam, and the perfect Son of God.

## **X. The Encouragement to Believe The Announcement (1:36-37)**

Tenth, notice the encouragement to believe the announcement.

In case Mary had trouble believing the announcement, Gabriel gave her a sign. Unlike Zechariah, who asked for a sign, Mary did not ask for a sign. Nevertheless, Gabriel gave her one anyway. He said to Mary, **“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”** (1:36).

Apparently, Mary did not yet know that Elizabeth was pregnant. So, Gabriel told her. And then he added a memorable statement, **“For nothing will be impossible with God”** (1:37).

Is there anything in your life that seems impossible? Do you have a broken relationship in your life? A heartache? A burden? An obstacle? A dream? A sin? You may think that it is impossible to solve. But, the Bible says, **“For nothing will be impossible with God.”** He is the God of the barren womb! He is the God of the virgin conception! He is the God who is all-powerful! He is the God of the impossible! So, look to God and ask him for help.

## **XI. The Final Response to The Announcement (1:38)**

And lastly, notice the final response to the announcement.

**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 (1:38).**

**Mary** must have known that obedience would cause her great difficulty. People would always accuse her of infidelity. They would shun her. She nearly lost the love of her life, Joseph—until an angel told him what had happened to **Mary**, and then he took her as his wife. Nevertheless, **Mary** simply trusted God. She took him at his word.

### **Conclusion**

Therefore, having analyzed the account regarding the announcement of the birth of Jesus as set forth in Luke 1:26-38, we should trust God’s word.

This is what it means to be a Christian. Mary’s response should be the response of every Christian: “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.”

Trust God with your relationships, romantic or otherwise. Let him lead you in purity and righteousness.

Trust God with your daily work. Let him grant you success, even though your superiors may not.

Trust God with your ministry. Let him give you blessing, as you are faithful in your service to him.

Trust God with your troubles. Let him support you with his peace.

Finally, trust God with your eternal salvation. Let him give you give you new life as you put your trust in Jesus. Amen.





# Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ  
and membership in his church family,  
develop them to Christlike maturity,  
equip them for their ministry in the church  
and life mission in the world,  
in order to magnify God's name.*

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This sermon, and other sermons, by the Rev. Freddy Fritz can be found at:

1. [www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/sermons](http://www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/sermons)
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**PRAYER:**

Almighty God, thank you for the example of Mary. As a recipient of your grace, she shows us that anyone can receive your grace. Enable us to respond to you and your word in faith. Help us to trust you, especially when we are going through difficult times.

And for all of this we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

**BENEDICTION:**

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.

**CHARGE:**

Now, brothers and sisters, go into the world trusting God and his word!