

The Annunciation

Advent: Hope, Peace, Love, Joy

Luke 1:26-38

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How Long, O Lord?

We began our service reading Psalm 89. This Psalm was written during the exile in Babylon. Israel sings with faith and hope. They believe God will fulfill his promise to send the Messiah (cf. 2 Sam. 7:1-16). The long-awaited Davidic king will come. And righteousness and justice will be established (v. 14). The Messiah is the mighty one (v. 19). He will crush the enemies of God and strike down those who hate him (vv. 22-23).

The Israelites believed this promise. But they were discouraged because the promise wasn't looking very promising in exile. And so as the Psalm continues, Israel's faith gives way to frustration. In verse 38 they say, "But you have cast off and rejected; you're full of wrath against your anointed." It felt like God had renounced his covenant with David and defiled his crown to the dust (v. 39). Their enemies had been exalted over them (v. 42). And so they cry out to God, "How long, O Lord" (v. 46)? "Where is your steadfast love of old, which by your faithfulness you swore to David" (v. 49)?

As we approach Christmas, we remember that God didn't forget his promise to David. Jesus is the fulfillment of that promise. But even for us, we experience a similar frustration. The promised Davidic Messiah has come. But he's not yet fully put his enemies to flight. We too are living in exile. And evil power and pride still seems to reign in our world. There's still brokenness, sin, injustice and corruption.

As we've learned this Advent, Jesus didn't come to do away with all unrighteousness and injustice at his first coming. That will happen at his second coming. At his first coming, he came to deal with our sin and bring God's people back into relationship with him.

So how should we live our lives now in our exile (1 Pt. 1:17), as we await the completion of God's promises? How should we live in the midst of pride and power?

Mary, the mother of Jesus, teaches us how to respond. She gives us an example of discipleship.¹ She teaches us how to trust the promise of God as we wait. In the face of pride and power, we learn how to live humble lives of surrender and sacrifice, trusting in God's promise.

Please turn in your Bibles to Luke 1. It's on page 855 of the pew Bibles. This passage has been called the annunciation, because here we find the angel Gabriel announcing the birth of Jesus to Mary. And her response to the annunciation teaches us how to live as we wait.

Luke 1:26-38²

²⁶In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, ²⁷to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸And he came to her and

¹ Cf. Fitzmeyer, Joseph A. "Mary in Lucan Salvation History," in *Luke the Theologian: Aspects of His Teaching*. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1989, pp. 57-79.

² Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version[®] unless otherwise noted.

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. ³⁰And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. ³²He 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, ³³and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

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

³⁵And 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. ³⁶And 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. ³⁷For nothing will be impossible with God." ³⁸And 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.

This is the Word of the Lord.

This passage is divided into three sections.

1. The angel approaches Mary and greets her (vv. 26-28).
2. The angel announces God's promise to Mary (vv. 30-34).
3. The angel answers Mary's question (vv. 35-38).

Each section teaches us about God's salvation in Jesus. And at the end of each section, Mary gives a response to the angel (vv. 28, 34, 38). Her responses give us a model of how to respond to God's promise and the announcement of the gospel.

THE ANGEL APPROACHES MARY (1:26-28)

Let's begin with the first section. It teaches us that God's grace is given to the humble; we should respond with contemplation.

Humble Place and Person

It's interesting. In a world dominated by powerful people who lived in powerful places, God sent his angel to a very humble place to announce the birth of the King of kings. The world was dominated by Caesar in Rome. And Israel was dominated by Herod in Jerusalem. But the announcement of the One whose dominion would spread from shore to shore was made in Nazareth in Galilee.

Gabriel ignored Rome.³ Gabriel ignored Judea, the heartland of God's work for centuries. He came to Galilee. Galilee was a land despised because of its bi-racial population. It wasn't pure like Judea. But Gabriel ignored Judea and came to Galilee.

He also ignored Jerusalem and came to Nazareth. Nazareth was a non-place. It wasn't even mentioned in the Old Testament or ancient histories. It was a "shoddy, corrupt, half-way stop between the port cities of Tyre and Sidon."⁴ Nathanael said of it, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth" (Jn. 1:46)? But it was out of this non-place that the Messiah would come. And so Gabriel went to this place, to Nazareth in Galilee.

³ Cf. Peterson, Eugene. "The Way of Herod," in *The Jesus Way: A Conversation on the Ways that Jesus Is the Way*. Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 2007.

⁴ Hughes, R. Kent. *Luke: That You May Know the Truth*. Preaching the Word. Wheaton, Ill: Crossway Books, 1998.

But not only did Gabriel go to a humble place, he also came to a humble person. He didn't go to a person of prominence and repute to announce the promised Messiah. He went to a young Jewish teenager, no older than 14. She was certainly a peasant girl, and probably illiterate.⁵

She's a nobody living in the middle of nowhere. The greatest news ever proclaimed in Israel came to the humblest of people in the humblest of places. Why? Because the Lord's grace is for the humble.⁶ It's for the poor in spirit. The Lord comes to needy people. To those who realize they can't make it without God. To those who acknowledge their weakness and spiritual need. Christ came to save us from the power of sin and Satan and to overthrow the injustice of powerful people. But Christmas is not for the powerful and self-sufficient. It's for the humble.⁷

Response

So how should we respond to the announcement of God's grace? Mary gives us a picture of the needed response. When the angel says to Mary, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you" (v. 28)! Mary is troubled. And we're told that she tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be (v. 29).

Literally, this reads, "she kept pondering the meaning of the greeting."⁸ This is similar to how she responds to the shepherds in chapter 2—another group of nobodies to whom the angels announced Messiah's birth. After the shepherds left her, we're told "She treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart" (2:19).

Mary contemplated the grace of God. Maybe she wondered, "Why me? Why am I the recipient of God's grace? Why am I the favored one?" When you hear of God's grace, how do you respond? Have you taken time to reflect on these glorious truths? Have you contemplated the fact that God's grace is given to the humble?

Kent Hughes tells the story of the poet Robert Southey who was once talking to an old Quaker woman. Telling her how he learned Portuguese while taking a bath. How he learned something else while he got dressed. How he ate breakfast as he gleaned in a field. And other things about how he filled his day completely, not wasting a minute. After he finished, the Quaker woman responded to him quietly. "And when, does thee think?"

In a world that fills our schedules to the brim, when do we ponder the things that really matter? When do we think about the grace of God that has been given *to us* in Christ? Unto *us* a child is born. Unto *us* a Son is given. Have you spent time this season reflecting on the wonder of this grace? The hymn writer teaches us to.

Let all mortal flesh keep silent,
and with fear and trembling stand;
ponder nothing earthly minded,
for with blessing in His hand
Christ our God to earth descendeth,
Our full homage to demand.⁹

⁵ Hughes

⁶ Bock, Darrell L. *Luke*. The NIV application commentary. Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 1996.

⁷ Hughes

⁸ Hughes

⁹ Quoted in Hughes

God's grace demands our full attention. That's what Mary gave in the first section of this passage.

THE ANGEL ANNOUNCES GOD'S PROMISE (1:30-34)

Let's look now at the second section, where the angel announces God's promise to Mary. It teaches us that God's promise is fulfilled in Jesus; we should respond with investigation.

Son of God and Son of Man

In verses 31-33, the angel tells Mary why she has favor with God. She will conceive and bear a son. His name will be Jesus, which means Savior. "He will be given the throne of his father David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever. And of his kingdom there will be no end." In other words, her son will be the Messiah. The fulfillment of the promises made to David. But that's not all. Jesus was more than anyone ever expected. He was not only the offspring of David. He was also the Son of the Most High. As David's offspring, he would be a man. But he was also the Son of God.

Finally! God's Messiah would bring down the powerful and the proud. And exalt the humble. He would also save God's people from their sins, as we learned last week. God's promises were fulfilled in Mary's son Jesus, the Son of God.

This has to be the most remarkable birth announcement ever given. Even if it was given in the most humble of places to the most humble of people.

Response

How did Mary respond to this promise? In verse 34, Mary says, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?" Or literally, how can I have a son, the Son of God, since I've never even been with a man.

It's important to note that her response is not a sign of doubt. When Gabriel announced the birth of John the Baptist, Zechariah responded with doubt. But there's a contrast here between Zechariah and Mary. She's not doubting. She simply wants to know how it will all take place. She doesn't say "how *can* this be?" She says "how *will* this be?"

She's showing inquisitiveness. Holy curiosity. That's why I say we should respond to the promise of God with investigation. We shouldn't just take the gospel on blind faith. We should look into it and see how it works. That's what Mary's doing in this second section. And that's what we should do as well.

THE ANGEL'S ANSWER TO MARY (1:35-38)

Let's look now at the third section of the passage where the angel answers Mary's question. It teaches us that God's power makes all things possible; we should respond with submission.

Conceived of the Holy Spirit

Mary's question was a legitimate question. How would a woman who had never been with a man give birth to a son, much less the Son of God?! And the angel doesn't hesitate to answer her question. He says, "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."

Joseph would not sire the Son of God. The Holy Spirit would come upon Mary like it did in the Holy of holies. As the Apostle's Creed says, Jesus was conceived of the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary.

There's so much that could be said about the virgin birth at this point. But that's not my focus this morning. I simply want to say that it was *necessary* for Jesus to be conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. His miraculous conception is necessary for him to be fully God and fully man. And it's necessary for our salvation that he *is* fully God and fully man. If he's not God, he's not *able* to save us from our sins. And if he's not man, he's not *qualified* to pay for the sins of man. But because Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary, he's both fully God and fully man, and fully able and qualified to save us from our sins.

The thing I want to highlight this morning is the miraculous nature of Jesus' birth. What's impossible with man is possible by the power of God. In fact, nothing is impossible for God (v. 37).

The virgin birth is a miracle of the first order. But it's not unbelievable. Because all things are possible by God's power. And that's good news. Because so much of our salvation is dependent on God's miraculous power. Think about regeneration...

If we're going to be saved, we must be born again. And this is not of the flesh, nor of the will of man. We must be born of God (Jn. 1:13). So, not only is *Jesus'* birth a miracle. *Our rebirth* is also a miracle. Jesus was conceived of the Holy Spirit. And all of us must be born of the Holy Spirit if we are to be saved. It's impossible with man to be saved. But nothing is impossible with God (cf. Lk. 18:22).

The announcement of Jesus' birth is not only an announcement that he's the promised savior. It's also an announcement that our salvation is completely dependent on God. The angel didn't come to Mary because of anything in her; she was a nobody, living in the middle of nowhere. God the Father took the initiative in salvation. And God the Son secured our salvation on the cross. Jesus came because we needed a Savior and there was nothing we could do to save ourselves. And God the Spirit is the one who applies salvation to our hearts, who washes away our sins and makes us new.

The salvation that's being announced in Luke 1 is miraculous. It's of God, not of man. That's why it's by grace. And that's why God gets the glory.

Response

How did Mary respond to the announcement of this miraculous birth? And what does her response teach us about our response? In verse 38, she says, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word."

Mary's the first model of a faithful disciple. Later in the Gospel of Luke, people come to Jesus and say, "Your mother and your brothers are standing outside, desiring to see you." But Jesus answered them, "My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it" (Lk. 8:16-17; cf. 11:27-28). His point is that being a part of the family of God is not a matter of flesh and blood; it's not a matter of ethnicity or family. It's all bound up in believing in Jesus and following him. Those in the family of God are those who hear the Word of God and do it.

But that doesn't mean that Mary wasn't in the family of God. Because what do we see her doing in this passage? Hearing the Word of God and doing it. Hearing the promise of God and surrendering

to it. She submits to God and his Word. “I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.”

Do you see how radical her response is? Mary was “a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph” (v. 27). But now she was going to be pregnant. What will people say? And what would she say when they asked her how she got pregnant? “Oh, great question. Let me tell you about it. My baby was conceived by the Holy Spirit.” Like anyone would believe her. They would laugh at her. And when they finished laughing, they would condemn her. They would think she’d committed adultery. And everybody knew the penalty for adultery—it was death.¹⁰

But in the face of these realities, which she would have surely thought about, she says, “I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.” She doesn’t say, “Find somebody else, count me out, I can’t do it, it’s too much for me.” She says, “let it be to me according to your word.”

What courageous faith to consent to God’s Word? She’s our first model of a faithful disciple. Jesus calls all of his disciples to take up their cross and follow him (Lk. 9:23). In faith, Mary began to carry a cross before Jesus was even born. She began to suffer for the Messiah before the Messiah suffered.¹¹

That’s why she’s a model of how to live our lives now as we await the return of Christ. Christ didn’t come the first time to do away with all injustice, and suffering, and persecution. He’ll do that at his second coming. As we wait for that day, we need to be people who have humble and courageous faith. We need to believe that God *will* fulfill his promises. And we need to be faithful until he does.

Another reason Mary is a perfect example of being a disciple of Jesus is because Jesus says almost exactly what Mary says, when he’s in the Garden of Gethsemane. When facing suffering and ridicule, when facing the cross, Jesus, like Mary, said, “Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done” (Lk. 22:42).¹² He’s basically saying, “Let it be to me according to your word.”

At Jesus’ first advent, he came humbly to offer his life in place of ours. He came to suffer and die for our sins. If we want to have forgiveness of sins and eternal life, we need receive his gift of salvation this Christmas. And then we need to humbly surrender our lives to him as we wait for his return.

¹⁰ Hughes

¹¹ McKnight, Scot. *The Real Mary: Why Evangelical Christians Can Embrace the Mother of Jesus*. Brewster, Mass: Paraclete Press, 2007, p. 13.

¹² Peterson, 216-217