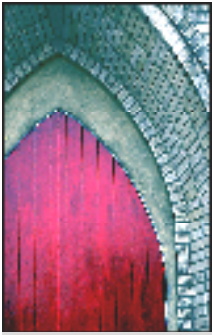


THE ANNUNCIATION OF CHRIST

TEXT: LUKE 1:26-38 (ESV)



Rev. Russ Ramsey
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Oak Hills
Presbyterian Church,
Overland Park,
Kansas

Preparing the Way:

Luke's Gospel is an orderly account of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Prior to today's text we read of how the angel Gabriel appeared to announce the miracle birth of John the Baptist to an old barren couple. John's father Zechariah would exclaim why this boy's birth was so significant. It wasn't because of who John would become that made his birth so significant that an Angel from heaven would come to announce it. It was Who he'd precede—Jesus Christ. John, his father prophesied, was born to prepare the way for the Messiah's coming.

The reason Luke unfolds the story of John is because he wants us to see that Jesus' position as Savior was **not** something He merited later in life as the result of being a dynamic leader. John was born to proclaim the Messiah has come; that this has been God's plan from the start. Upon this foundation, Luke turns now to the real subject of his gospel—Jesus Christ.

Luke 1:26-38

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 said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" ²⁹But 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.

Significance Lost:

Time stood still. Christmas always seemed to come much later than my heart could bear to wait. Ah, but when it did, it was the greatest thing ever!!! My grandparents made a point of gathering together with my family every Christmas, though they lived very far away. And my brother and I were always eager for their coming, because as we watched their little silver Subaru wagon turn up our country road, we knew that in that car were presents!!! Good ones too.

I am beginning to see that I do not always know a good gift when I see one—even when I receive one. Take for example, the gift my grandparents gave me one year—a photo album. It was full from front to back with old black and white pictures, each one carefully labeled, identifying each person in terms of their relationship to me, dating back 100 years! As a boy, I casually, but hurriedly, flipped through the pages, said the sincerest "Thank You" I could muster, and turned my thoughts quickly to the stack of unopened toys waiting.

The matter of the photo album would not come up again until my mom and I were talking about a certain family member, whom I could not place. She told me to go get the photo album and she'd show me a picture. But in the time since receiving that album, I had found a "better" use for the actual binder itself, so I had removed, in no particular order, the pictures and the labels that were next to them and put them all in a shoebox in my closet. Mom looked like I'd killed someone!

Some gifts are purchased in haste, obligatory. Others are given supreme thought—not just concerning the gift, but the one receiving it and how that person relates to the giver. My grandparents had given me something that was precious, and I didn't know it. They had given me something that told me of myself and of their relationship to me. I didn't understand. I perceived it as ordinary though it was extraordinary. I perceived it as an incomprehensible book of strange faces though it was really telling me my own story. I didn't grasp how much of my story was contained in those pages—how much of who I am now and why I am who I am was told.

Christmas is about a gift God has given that we often fail to understand. The holiday becomes a drill we think we know. Yet, like that photo album, we can hear the story of God's gift of His Son and have all the significance lost on us. We can perceive it as ordinary when it is truly the most extraordinary event of all time. We can perceive it as incomprehensible when it really is giving us the deepest, most profound understanding we can ever hope to have of our own story.

In the perceived "ordinary-ness" and incomprehensibility of Christmas, we're tempted to strip it of its contents and throw them in no particular order into a box we tuck away, while we find better uses for the "holiday season" which once contained them. We think we know all there is to know. Mary certainly did not know all there was to know when the angel of the Lord appeared to her. Nor did she pretend to. But she knew the message was at the same time ordinary and extraordinary, incomprehensible yet engaging every part of her world.

The Ordinary Interrupted:

Once upon a time there was a girl named Mary, engaged to a boy named Joseph. They lived in an out of the way town called Nazareth. Who knows where Mary came from? Joseph was descended from the great King David—though for his part, he was a carpenter. Their lives were simple and honest, and they worked hard toward a life they could live out together as husband and wife. All this was interrupted in a moment.

Mary, pledged to be married to Joseph, was visited by an angel who would tell her something that would dramatically alter the course of her life—and the whole of history. What the angel would tell her would lead these two young people to live as fugitives for a time, even running from the Roman ruler, Herod, himself. Mary and Joseph would both suffer suspicious looks from friends and relatives, questioning their virtue. And ultimately, as the prophet Simeon told them, a sword would pierce their very souls. How can we understand this story? Together with Mary, we must ask three questions: 1) **“What could this message be?”** 2) **“How could this be possible?”** and 3), **“What does this story tell us about ourselves?”**

What Could This Message Be?

It was an ordinary thing for 1st century Jews to study and hear the Law of God being taught. So presumably, there was a working knowledge of the Messiah being passed down throughout the generations. But when the angel comes to Mary, the hypothetical is brought into the real—the ordinary is presented in an extraordinary way. The message the Angel brings has three parts. The message the angel brings, the annunciation of Jesus, is the message of Christmas:

1. **God Knows** (vs. 28-30): Mary has found favor with God, and so she should not fear—the Gospel is coming through! Her God interacts with His people. We must put out of our minds the plastic nativity Mary, and now imagine the real girl who discovers that the Lord of All loves her, knows her and is involved in the details of her life.
2. **God Acts** (vs. 31): Mary would conceive a Son, to be named Jesus, and He will be called the “Son of God.” The poor betrothed virgin would have a Son given to her, and God has already chosen His name. Matthew’s Gospel makes the point that the name Jesus means “*Salvation*.”
3. **God Reigns** (vs. 32-33): This Son, Jesus, would reign over the people of God as their Savior and King. The knowing and acting God will deliver His people—and He will do this by keeping a covenant He made many years ago. And the passing of so much time only testifies of His rule. For one to move and act apart from the tyranny of the clock shows that He reigns even over the constraints of time.

How Could This Be Possible?

As Mary listens, she asks an honest question, “*How can this be, since I am a virgin?*” We can see from her posture toward the angel that this is not a sarcastic comment, but a real question. For her to bear this son, she must conceive, and how can a virgin conceive? To this, the angel answers in three ways:

1. **God Will Send His Spirit** (vs. 35): The Holy Spirit will come upon Mary and will overshadow her and by that Spirit she will conceive. We don’t know how God did this, but He caused her to conceive apart from her husband.
2. **God Will Give A Sign** (vs. 36): Her elderly cousin is six months pregnant, though she has long been barren. This is a significant sign for Mary because it points back to another miraculous conception that has already occurred.
3. **God Will Display His Power** (vs. 37): In doing these things, God will show that nothing is beyond Him. And we hear the overwhelming power of the Lord through Mary’s feeble response, “*May it be done to me as you have said.*” What else could be said? In no way at all could Mary prepare for this or help it along. Only God could do what He has said He would do.

What This Has To Do With Us?

Next week, we’ll examine more closely the actual fulfillment of this angel’s message, but now lets examine this message itself and ask of it, “*What does this story have to do with us?*” We hold in this story the story of our lineage, or our roots. And like with my photo album, we can look it over and see what only appears at first glance to be strange, removed people, places and events. But in this annunciation, we are told the most important thing we could ever know.

1. **God looks upon us with longing and favor because of His Grace:** Let this wash over you. The Lord of Creation is attracted to you. It is no childish or fatal attraction, but one that moves Him toward you so that you might know and love Him in return. It is not a need for you, but a holy desire. It is not an uninformed crush, but a knowing passion for you!
2. **God interacts with us in time and space so that we might receive His salvation:** Let this cut into you. God is not on the other side of the fence crossing His fingers hoping you might stumble upon some cryptic mystery that would cause you to know Him. He calls you His bride, and He runs down the isle to you to make you His. When Jesus Christ stepped out of eternity and into time to take on flesh to live and die in your place—and in fulfillment of all the prophecies of old, it was so that we might be restored to the relationship with God we were created for.
3. **God meets us in the ordinary, but remains extraordinary, and He tells us the story of our lives but remains divinely incomprehensible:** Let this humble you. Through all God’s pursuit of us, He never condescends to simply become one of us. He does not sit beside us where we are by lowering His demands of holiness, but rather sends His Son, Jesus, to meet those demands so that we might be seated with Him where He is!

This is not a generic story of people who lived long ago. It is **our** story—of impossible promises coming true, of multiple ancient prophecies being met in One man, of the death we deserved to die being placed on Him and the righteousness we could never attain being placed on us by Him. It is a call to count ourselves among the lowly, and see it is to the lowly that He came—this baby born to Joseph & Mary, the Son of God, Savior of the World—Jesus, our deliverer. May your celebration of Christmas be marked by your worship of Jesus.