

Christ the Babe Is Lord of All

Luke Series #3

Luke 1:26-38

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Please turn with me in your Bibles to Luke 1. It seems like in the last several months here at New Covenant we have had many birth announcements. It's almost as though every other week we are hearing, "Unto us a child is born." We celebrate that as a church. It doesn't have to be our child. Together we celebrate God's gift of children as a church body. That's very biblical. "*Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb a reward,*" the Psalmist says in Psalm 127:3. We've covenanted together as a church to shepherd point our children to Christ. So we celebrate the good gift of children. We love to get birth announcements and we love to hear them.

However, have you ever received a birth announcement like this?

Please join us in welcoming the newest member of our family. Our unwed teenage daughter is expecting a little boy. We don't know who the father is and we find her story a bit far-fetched. Cake and punch will be served at the shower. Please bring a dish to pass and your best parental wisdom. She is registered at Target and Babies "R" Us. RSVP by the 11th.

You've probably never received a birth announcement quite like that. Listen to how Carl Laferton puts it in his book *Christmas Uncut*:

It's the height of ambition for most five-year-old girls—and often their mothers, too. But in every school, church or kindergarten, only one girl each year can reach the dizzying height of being Mary in the nativity play.

Last year, my god-daughter was selected. She only had one line, which she forgot, and one job, holding the baby Jesus, which she did—around the neck.

But those were minor details. She was Mary. Proud girl. Proud parents. Proud god-father!

Yet in a way it's strange that parents want their daughters to be Mary. We're essentially dreaming that our child will play a teenage mom who got herself pregnant in a very suspicious way, and whose life nearly fell apart because of it—because that's what happened to the real Mary.

That's a birth announcement unlike others that we find in our Bibles, but it's really what happened. Why do we celebrate such a scandalous birth? Why do we dedicate a national holiday and a whole season of the year to it? It's because it's not only scandalous, it is glorious. In fact, the glory of this birth far outweighs its apparent scandal. The apparent scandal of the birth in reality demonstrates and points to its surpassing glory.

Let's take a closer look at this birth announcement in Luke 1:26-38 but let's pray before I read this passage. God, we pray that Your Holy Spirit would open Your Word to us right now and that You would open us to Your Word for Jesus' sake, Amen.

Luke the Gospel writer says:

²⁶ In the sixth month [that is the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy which was talked about in the previous verses] the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, ²⁷ to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸ And he came to her and 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. ³⁰ And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹ And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. ³² 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, ³³ and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

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

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

This is God's holy Word—the second birth announcement in the first chapter of Luke's Gospel. Last week we looked at the first one which came to a priest named Zechariah while he was serving in the temple. He was told that in his old age, he and his wife Elizabeth would have a child. That was the first birth announcement in Luke's Gospel. This is the second one.

We notice that there are many similarities between these two birth announcements:

- An angel makes both announcements. In fact, it's the same angel—Gabriel.

- Both announcements are made to one of the future parents of the child.
- In both, it is clear that the conception of this child will be miraculous in nature.
- In both, we are informed that the child himself will have an important role in carrying out God's plans for all of humanity.
- In both, the parent who receives the announcement is more than a little shocked and amazed.

However, that is where the similarities end. Luke's point in putting these two birth announcements right next to each other is not so much to show us the similarities as it is to show us the differences. It's in those differences that we're going to find the meaning and significance of this text for our lives and therefore find the greatest blessing from God's Word.

I want to look at this birth announcement to Mary and compare it with the one to Zechariah so we can see the differences. We'll look at four differences in these birth announcements and demonstrate what they teach us about the Child that will be born to Mary.

1. Different Circumstances

The first difference has to do with circumstances in which these announcements are made. Now as incredible as it was for Gabriel to appear to Zechariah, it makes a lot more sense for an angel to appear to a priest who is serving in the temple of God than it does for the archangel of God—Gabriel—to appear to a common teenager who was 13, 14 or 15-years-old in a town in Galilee that is so unrecognizable that Luke has to mention it by name. It's no wonder Mary is "*greatly troubled*" as it says in verse 29. She is perplexed by the angel's greeting.

Look what the angel says to her in verse 28, "*Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!*" You can almost hear Mary in her mind trying to figure this out, "What are you talking about, Angel? I'm just a kid from a no-place town. What do you mean telling me I'm favored? What do you mean 'the Lord is with me'?" She wants to make sense of it. The text says she's trying to discern what it means. She's pondering it and trying to make some logical connection here. She affirms that this greeting has meaning; she just doesn't know what it is quite yet.

We learn from the circumstances into which this announcement is made that the Child Mary will bear will be marked by humility. Of this Child, one of His own followers will say, *“Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”* (John 1:46). This Child Himself would one day say to someone who wanted to follow Him, *“Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head”* (Luke 9:58).

The prophet Isaiah said of this Child that Mary would bear, *“He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not”* (Isaiah 53:3). One day the Apostle Paul would say of this Child in Philippians 2:6-8:

...though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped [or held onto], but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

The pathway to greatness for Mary’s Child would be by becoming the humble Servant of the Lord Who would suffer and die for the sins of the world. Already, we begin to see the character of this Child in the humble circumstances of His birth based on this birth announcement.

2. Different Parents

The second difference I want us to note is that these announcements are made to different parents. The announcement of John the Baptist’s birth was made to a married couple, Zechariah and Elizabeth. Yes, they had experienced lifelong infertility and were then beyond childbearing years, but such miraculous conceptions were not unheard of in the Scriptures. Think of Abraham and Sarah, Samson’s parents and Samuel’s parents Elkanah and Hannah. They were all married couples—both a husband and a wife.

Mary is a teenage girl. She might be 13, maybe 14, probably not more than 15. No wonder she responds to the angel’s announcement with a question in verse 34, *“How will this be?”* You see, Mary took sixth grade biology and apparently she got a passing grade because she understands that in order for a woman to conceive, certain factors absolutely must be in place and they’re simply not—not yet, anyway. Mary says in the text, *“...I am a virgin.”* In the ESV, you will see the literal translation is down at the bottom of the page in a footnote. Literally it means, “I do not know a man.” She is saying, “I do not have a

husband. What are you implying, Angel? Are you telling me to take some kind of action here?”

Yes, she is engaged to be married but she isn't married yet. We read in the text that she is betrothed to a man named Joseph from the tribe of David. Though a betrothal is similar to our engagement, it is far more serious and legally binding. Betrothal would begin when the groom-to-be would come to the bride's parents and he would pay the bride price for her and it would be established that a year from then they would be married. They would not necessarily spend any time together. They certainly wouldn't live together as husband and wife during that one-year period. Clearly, Mary and Joseph are practicing God's will in terms of sexual purity before marriage and so Mary says, "This is not possible right now." Is the angel suggesting that Mary disobey God in one area in order to obey Him in another area?

Her question is a legitimate one. It's a question of, "How? How will this be?" It's very different than the question Zechariah asked. Zechariah said, "How will I know, Angel Gabriel, that what you say is going to happen is really going to happen?" That was a question of unbelief and lack of faith. Mary isn't denying that it's going to happen. She seems to be saying she understands it will but she is very curious about how exactly this is going to be.

The angel's answer reveals just how blessed of God Mary really is. Look at the angel's answer in verse 35, "*And the angel answered her, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.'*" This Child is going to be a unique work of God by the Holy Spirit. There is absolutely nothing sexual implied here. There is nothing to do with pagan gods mating with humans and producing semi-divine beings—no, there is no hint of that going on here. Rather, just as the creative power of God's Spirit was unleashed as He hovered over the formless deep like a hen caring for her brood in Genesis 1:1, so the creative power of the Holy Spirit will be unleashed in Mary's womb. This act will be an act of God's overshadowing presence.

This idea of overshadowing is throughout the Old Testament and it has to do with God's gracious presence to protect His people. The *shekinah* glory or cloud that overshadowed the tabernacle was a symbol of God's presence with His people to care for them and bless them. The angel is saying, "God is going to care for you in this, Mary. He's going to take care of you and overshadow you with His goodness." This Child will be the first since God's unique creation of Adam to come about without the agency of a human

father. This humble Servant of the Lord will be born of a virgin—something absolutely unprecedented and unique.

Let me pause to ask you a question: Do you believe in the virgin birth of Jesus Christ? This is one of the indispensable truths of the Christian faith. Do you believe it? About 100 years ago, this particular doctrine and biblical truth was under great attack within the church as people looked at it and said, “It seems kind of pre-modern, nonscientific and superstitious. We should just ditch that in order to teach the other truths of the Bible to people and not be so embarrassed by this one.” The net result was the churches that took this approach eventually lost all the other truths of the gospel as well.

I think today this history may be repeating itself. It’s not so much a frontal attack on this truth but something much more subtle that typically goes along these lines, “Would we really lose anything if we dropped the virgin birth from our understanding of Scripture? I mean, does it really make a difference? Is it really all that important?”

I appreciate Pastor Mark Driscoll’s response to that question, “What would we lose if we just dropped the whole virgin birth thing?” His answer was, “We’d lose Jesus!”

It’s true. We would lose the uniqueness of Jesus Christ if we lost the truth of the virgin birth in the Scripture.

I want to take a moment to encourage you in your faith and in this truth of Scripture. I’m going to give you four reasons why the doctrine of the virgin birth of Jesus Christ is important. I found Wayne Grudem’s *Systematic Theology* very helpful with these points:

- 1) **The virgin birth of Jesus teaches us that salvation ultimately must come from God and not any human being.** No human being can take credit. Humanly speaking, no set of parents together can take credit for the production of the Lord Jesus Christ. God did it. It was a special act of creativity through the Holy Spirit.
- 2) **The virgin birth made possible the uniting of full humanity and full deity in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ.** He is fully human and fully divine. If Jesus had been born as the result of two human parents and then God had somehow infused the Second Person of the Holy Spirit into Him, we would probably wonder about His full divinity. On the other hand, if God had created a completely new human being out of nothing and that was Jesus Christ—which He is certainly able to do—then we would wonder about the full humanity of Jesus, which is important as well so that in our Savior we have full divinity and full humanity in one Person.
- 3) **The virgin birth of Jesus makes Jesus’ full humanity possible without Him inheriting human sin from His parents.** The Bible calls that original sin—the sin that we inherit as being the descendents of Adam who sinned first. Jesus is going to be called holy because He hasn’t inherited human sinfulness. And because of

this, He can be a sacrifice for human sin that is infinitely worthy and fully sufficient to pay for all the sins of every person who has ever lived.

- 4) **The virgin birth is important because it fulfills Scripture.** Isaiah 7:14 says, *“Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel”* [which means God with us].

This doctrine of the Christian faith is crucial. It is absolutely necessary in order for Jesus to accomplish His mission to seek and save the lost. Wayne Grudem says that “...anyone who affirms that a virgin birth is ‘impossible’ is just confessing his or her own unbelief in the God of the Bible.” This is a clear teaching of Scripture. If you can believe in the God of the Bible—Who is infinite, holy, glorious and all-capable—then you can believe in the virgin birth of Jesus Christ. Not only will Mary’s child be a humble Servant, He will also be absolutely unique, unlike any human being since Adam.

3. Different Roles

We have different circumstances for these birth announcements, different parents and also different roles for the two who will be born. Zechariah was told that his son would be *“great before the Lord”* (Luke 1:15). In Luke 1:32, Mary is told that her Son will be great—period. This Child will have absolute greatness. In the Old Testament, whenever someone is called “great” or *gadol*, it is typically only used of God. Philip Ryken puts it this way, “His greatness is the greatness of God.”

Zechariah was told in verse 15 that his son would be filled with the Holy Spirit in his mother’s womb. In verse 35, Mary is told that her Son will be created by the Holy Spirit in His mother’s womb and therefore He will be holy.

Zechariah was told that his son would turn many children of Israel to the Lord their God. Mary is told that her Son will be the King of Israel, reigning over the house of Jacob forever.

Look at verse 32. It says, *“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.”* That is Jesus’ identity. He is the Messiah. He is the branch of David. Mary’s Child will be the promised Messiah, the descendant God promised to King David Who will always reign on his throne. Remember in 2 Samuel 7 we read that David wanted to build God a literal house—a temple? God said, “That’s wonderful, but you’re not going to do it. I’m going to have your son Solomon do that. For you, I’m going to build you a house—that is a dynasty and lineage of

kings. One day, there will come from you—physically—a King Who will be the King of Kings Who will always reign. He will be the Anointed One. He will reign on your throne forever and ever as the perfect King.”

Jesus is that King. Mary’s Child will be that King, the promised Messiah. The angel is telling her that her Son will be the Messiah. But more than that he is telling Mary that her Son will be God in the flesh, “*the Son of the Most High*” (Luke 1:32). If there’s any doubt, then Luke says in verse 35, “*the Son of God.*” Zechariah’s son would prepare the way for the Lord; Mary’s son would be the Lord.

4. Different Names

We have different circumstances, different parents, different roles and then finally, different names. The angel had told Zechariah to name his son John. John means “God has been gracious.” That’s a wonderful name. If your name is John, you have a great name. The angel told Mary to name her Son Jesus, which is the Greek rendering of the Hebrew name Joshua which means “God saves; God delivers; salvation is from the Lord.” John’s name tells us that God is gracious; Jesus’ name tells us how God is gracious. God is gracious by delivering men and women from their bondage to sin by sending Jesus to seek and save the lost.

This is why at the name of Jesus every knee will bow and every tongue will confess (Philippians 2:10). They will confess the things the angel has been telling us which have been building all the way through this passage. They will confess that He is Lord, He is King, He is Messiah, He is Holy, He is the Son of God and He is God in flesh come to save His people. He is the fulfillment of all the Old Testament promises:

- He is the humble Servant of the Lord, the suffering Servant of Whom the prophets prophesied.
- He is the New Adam—the seed of the woman who would crush the serpent’s head—promised in Genesis 3:15.
- He is Messiah, the Christ, the Anointed One reigning forever and ever over His people.
- He is the Savior of the world.

This passage teaches us that Jesus is the fulfillment of all God’s promises to deliver His people, by seeking and saving the lost.

As you add up all that is in this wonderful birth announcement that initially looks so scandalous, you realize how glorious it is because it predicts the birth of the King of Kings, the One Who fulfills all God's promises to deliver His people.

Our RSVP to the Birth Announcement

How do we respond to a birth announcement like this? When you receive a birth announcement, you probably RSVP. What should our RSVP be to this birth announcement of the Lord Jesus?

I think Mary provides us with a wonderful example of how to respond in this passage. Her example in this text is to be commended and emulated. However, she herself is not to be worshiped. Make sure you understand that—many don't.

Mary is not "full of grace." That's actually a mistranslation and a misunderstanding of verse 28 which is rightly translated in the ESV and all modern English translations. It's rightly translated "*favored one*" rather than "full of grace." Unlike her Son Jesus—but like you and me—Mary was a descendent of Adam. She—like us—shared in Adam's sin and guilt. Mary recognizes this when she sings her great hymn of praise, "The Magnificat," which we'll be looking at next week. Look at this in Luke 1:46-47, "*And Mary said, 'My soul magnifies [not herself] the Lord [why?], and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.'*"

Mary is acknowledging that God is her Savior, too. She will be giving birth to her Savior. She will need to exercise saving faith and trust in Him. In fact, that is what makes this text so wonderful! She is favored by God. She receives grace from God. She is someone like you and me who needs grace from God and she receives it as God freely offers it. God takes the initiative in committing Himself to her. He said, "I will be with you." The angel said, "*The Lord is with you*" (Luke 1:28). He tells her through the angel that she has found favor with God. This is the very same thing we learn about Noah in Genesis 6:8. In both cases, it's a matter of God freely showing His favor, dispensing His favor on a person apart from them deserving it at all.

We don't commend Mary for being "full of grace" but we do commend her for responding to God's grace. We want to follow her example of faith. Hebrews 11:1 defines faith as "*the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.*" That is what Mary has in this passage. We should recognize this as God's grace in her life. She has this kind of faith, the assurance of what she hopes for and the conviction of something she has not yet seen. She responds to God with submission and obedience.

Look what she says in verse 38, *“Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.”* She offers herself as God’s servant that His will be done and not hers. This is the type of response God is always looking for when He graciously discloses Himself to a person. The road ahead of her will not be easy. Her heart as well will be pierced with many sorrows as she watches her Son suffer and die. She confesses before God that she is willing. Philip Ryken puts it this way: Mary is “willing to trust God for the impossible and then obey Him without hesitation or qualification.”

Have you considered the final words of the angel in this birth announcement? This is really the content of Mary’s faith. This is the thing she is putting her faith in. Luke 1:37 says, *“For nothing will be impossible with God.”* These are the last words from the archangel Gabriel who serves before the presence of the Lord. If anybody knows what is or isn’t possible with God, it has to be Gabriel. He’s been there for millennia serving before the Lord. It seems like there should be an exclamation point after these words. *“For nothing will be impossible with God!”* They are Gabriel’s exclamation of joy and worship. He has waited hundreds—if not thousands—of years to make this announcement of the coming Savior. It is essentially a quote from Genesis 18:14 where the Lord announced to Abraham and Sarah that Sarah would miraculously conceive the son of promise. Now Gabriel has witnessed God doing the impossible again, as he has throughout the Scriptures—God making and keeping His promises and fulfilling His Word.

Now I’m sure this statement, *“For nothing will be impossible with God,”* could be misunderstood. One could take it as a Pollyanna sort of wishful optimism but it is not that. I suppose someone could take it as a sort of prosperity gospel truth that God will do whatever you want for you, if you just manufacture enough faith; but it is clearly not that either. Rather, it is God’s own absolute commitment to accomplishing His own purposes for His glory. Nothing will be impossible with God—God will accomplish His redemptive purposes for His glory. God can do whatever is necessary to accomplish His plans, even if things look impossible. It is His promise to be faithful to His people, to be for them and to bless them richly in the Person of Jesus Christ.

Friends, these are words that each of us need to hear this morning, *“For nothing will be impossible with God.”* There are things in our lives that look impossible right now. There is something in your life that looks and appears impossible and God’s Word is coming to you and saying, *“For nothing will be impossible with God.”* Maybe you find it impossible to believe that God could ever forgive you. Maybe you feel like you have sinned

and rebelled against God to the point where you don't believe He could seek you and save you. God's Word says, "Nothing is impossible with Me. I have sent My Son to die for your sins. If you turn from and repent of your sins and trust Him by faith, I will completely forgive your sin, cleanse you from all unrighteousness and give you a hope and a future." (1 John 1:9, 2:12; Jeremiah 29:11).

Maybe you are a believer but you're struggling with a sin pattern that seems impossible to resist. God's Word says to you, "*For sin will have no dominion over you,*" because you are united with Christ (Romans 6:14).

Maybe there is a strained relationship in your life that seems impossible to reconcile. God's Word says, "*Outdo one another in showing honor*" (Romans 12:10).

Maybe there's a job situation or an unemployment situation you're dealing with that seems impossible to endure. God's Word comes and says, "*Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness,*" and God is working out His good plans and purposes in your life (James 1:2-3).

Maybe you're a young person who thinks it seems impossible to keep yourself pure in a culture of sensuality. God's Word comes to you and says, "*Flee from sexual immorality,*" (1 Corinthians 6:18) and pursue "*holiness without which no one will see the Lord*" (Hebrews 12:14).

Perhaps God is calling you to a new area of service or ministry that seems impossible. You say, "God, I just can't do this," and God says, "*My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness*" (2 Corinthians 12:9).

Friends, wherever you are read the birth announcement of the Savior, the One Who came to seek and save the lost. Be reminded today that nothing will be impossible with God. We serve a God Who is absolutely committed to His redeeming purposes for our good and for His glory. He has fulfilled His promise by sending a Savior born of the virgin Mary. He is fully human, identifying with our sin and our suffering. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit and is fully God, fully able to pay for every one of our sins with His precious blood.

May we say with Mary, "*I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word*" (Luke 1:38). Amen.

Our heavenly Father, we confess to You that we have viewed circumstances in our lives and pronounced them impossible. It is Your kindness that tells us through Your Word that nothing will be impossible with You and that You will accomplish everything You have

set out to accomplish for Your glory. Lord, we praise You first of all that this has happened through the Lord Jesus Christ, that You were able to send a Savior Who was fully human—able to identify with us, taking on our sin as a human being—and fully divine, able to receive Your wrath for our sin.

Lord, we pray that we would remember these truths again during this Christmas season and that our faith would be renewed and strengthened. We pray that we would come to the situations in our lives that look impossible and remember that God, You have always accomplished Your purposes and You are absolutely committed to accomplishing them in the Person of Jesus. It's in His name that we pray, Amen.

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