

Nothing is Impossible with God

Throughout the history of redemption, it has been customary for God, when He was about to jump forward in fulfilling His promise to restore elect sinners into fellowship with Him (what we call “redemption”) that God would make an announcement of the birth of that individual through whom He was about to accomplish that particular act of redemption. For instance, God appeared to Abram and Sarai to announce the birth of Isaac, in whom God would fulfill His promise to Abram to make him a great nation through whom God will bless all the nations of the world (cf. **Gen. 12:1-3; 17:15-21**). Or think of God's announcement of the birth of Samuel who will become the forerunner and anointer of King David, the man after God's own heart (**1 Sam. 1:12-20**). And now, most recently to Zechariah, whose son will be the forerunner of King David's promised Son, who will be God Himself in human flesh and blood come to redeem Israel.

So it is hardly a surprise that when God reaches the culmination of His redemptive plan of the ages that He would now announce the birth of the ultimate individual through whom God will finally and fully redeem His elect people. The whole passage before us emphasizes the sovereign work of God to bring to pass all His holy will in fulfillment of all the promises He made long ago to redeem His people.

It always amazes me how matter-of-factly, as if these were common everyday circumstances, when the Gospels describe the events when heaven opens and connects intimately with earthlings as Luke does when he says simply, “In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee names Nazareth, to virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David.” (**Luke 1:26**). To stop and think about what has just been said is mind-boggling. Heaven has opened and the messenger of God, who stands in the immediate presence of God to behold His majesty, suddenly appears in this humble, unadorned scene with a young virgin girl who is engaged to be married. How are we to contemplate two such radically different worlds gently connecting in this one moment in history? An angel of the LORD, who dwells in the glory of God, now appears in the humble abode of a poor, Hebrew virgin girl and he is about to declare to her the great news any human ear has ever heard.

We are told that the angel who has been sent FROM God is **Gabriel**. For those who know their Scriptures the reappearance of the angel Gabriel is nothing short of breathtaking. Think of the significance of the fact that of all the myriad of angels God could have sent, He chose Gabriel to announce the greatest event in the universe. The reason this is so significant is because there are only two places where Gabriel is mentioned in the Bible: He is first mentioned in **the book of Daniel** as the one who comes to announce the prophecy of the coming 70 weeks in which God promises He will send the Prince of princes (**8:16, 25**) who will finish the transgression, put an end to sin, atone for iniquity, bring in everlasting righteousness, seal both vision and prophet, and anoint the most holy place (**9:24**) through whom God will make an everlasting, New covenant with His people which will

effectively bring a complete end to the Old Covenant and its whole temple-priesthood-sacrificial system (9:27).

Now, the only other place the angel Gabriel is mentioned in the Bible is here in Luke's Gospel, sent by God to deliver two messages: one to Zechariah (1:19), who will soon be the father of John, the forerunner of God's Messiah, and another message to Mary (1:26), who soon will be the mother of Jesus, God come in flesh and blood. Now, we need to take a moment and consider the significance of these two and only two appearances of Gabriel in the holy Scriptures. God is the author both of redemptive history and of Scripture. He chose to send Gabriel to connect these two important moments of the history of redemption. The first appearance of Gabriel was to announce the promise of the most momentous and climatic act of God's redemptive plan – when He would act definitively to put an end to man's great enemy – His sin. The second and only other appearance of Gabriel then was to announce **the fulfillment of that promise** – “this is that” – what Daniel heard in the form of promise, Zechariah and Mary now hear as fulfillment.

Such a significant moment in redemptive history and yet such an insignificant location – Nazareth (1:26). Hardly a bustling, vibrant city! In fact, it was such a small village that Luke had to identify the larger Galilean area for his Gentile readers. John will record Nathanael, Philip's brother, quipping, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” (John 1:46).

And further, Gabriel approaches a poor, young virgin Hebrew girl betrothed to be married. Hardly a member of wealth and prominence and certainly not of the stock of nobility. The majestic God of inapproachable light gives His gift of salvation in such humble and simple packaging.

She is betrothed to be married to a man named Joseph, whose lineage can be traced back to King David himself (1:27). Her betrothal was a little more formal than what we call an engagement today. She would have legally belonged to Joseph, having made a formal vow to marry her and having paid the bride price, she would have already been referred to as his wife. About a year after the formal betrothal, an elaborate ceremony would take place when Joseph would have taken Mary into their new home. A betrothal would normally take place around the age of twelve for the woman. Her name was Mary and being a relative of Elizabeth, who traced her lineage back to Aaron, meant that Mary likely had roots to the tribe of Levi (cf. 1:5, 36).

Joseph, Mary's husband, was of the house of David. This will mean that even though Jesus is not biologically Joseph's son, yet legally He is. Since Mary was legally Joseph's wife at the time of her conception and since Joseph accepts the child as his own and will provide and care for the child as his own, Jesus would be regarded as Joseph's son and therefore a true son of David, which both Matthew and Luke's genealogies in fact support (cf. Matt. 1:16; Luke 3:23).

Now, according to v. 28, when Gabriel appeared to Mary he said to her, “Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you.” Mary's response was one of great perplexity – perhaps she was dumbfounded – and tried as she might to discern what sort of greeting this might be (v. 29). Gabriel greets Mary as

one whom the LORD has chosen to set His grace upon. There is nothing in the text to suggest that Mary somehow merited or earned this favor of the Lord. It is simply because He has chosen her to be with her at her side while God is about to do this marvelous act of grace for the world. But Mary was perplexed. What was God about to do to her?

Somehow the words of Gabriel, mixed with the appearance of God's messenger sent from heaven struck fear in Mary's young, tender heart. So Gabriel had to calm her fears, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God." (v. 30). Mary should not be afraid. Gabriel has come in peace with good tidings of great joy. This is a day of great blessing and not curse. God has chosen to show her His marvelous grace as when God chose to spare Noah from the flood, or Gideon to judge Israel, or Hannah to bear of child though she was barren, or David to receive back the ark of the covenant. All of these were gifts of God – unmerited favor of great and loving God who Himself is the fountain of all goodness. It is clear that God chooses freely to show His kindness upon those He has chosen. As Paul reminds us in **Romans 9** when God says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion. So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy" (**Rom. 9:15-16**). Mary will forever become the epitome – the "poster child" in modern parlance – of the sinner who receive God's marvelous grace on the sole basis of His kind and merciful, sovereign initiation.

At first, Gabriel reveals something so ordinary, so commonplace, that Mary must have wondered why God would send an angel from heaven to tell her (v. 31). Of course she will eventually conceive a child, she is betrothed to be married to Joseph. There is little doubt that once they are married that she will have as many children as God will permit them. Perhaps God sent Gabriel merely to reveal that her first child will be a boy and that she and Joseph must name him "Jesus," which would have been pronounced, "Yeshua" and means, "Yahweh saves". Only Matthew gives us the divine reason for why He will be called Jesus, "for He will save His people from their sins" (**Matt. 1:21**), which itself is quite significant if "Yahweh" and "He" will save "His" people all refer to the individual named "Jesus".

Further, though Luke doesn't make as much of an issue of the fact that though she is a virgin, yet she will "conceive" a son in her womb as a reference to **Isaiah 7:14** the way that Matthew does (**Matt. 1:22-23**), nevertheless this connection is made in the Gospels and therefore in the mind of the reader that this child, Jesus, will be the fulfillment of the divine promise to King Ahaz: "Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel" (**Isa. 7:14**).

But then suddenly as if the flood gates of God's favor burst open upon Mary, Gabriel begins to pour out one incredible pronouncement after another on the full identity of Mary's son. First, He will be "great" (v. 32). Anyone who knows their Old Testament Scriptures, especially as well as Mary knows them, will know that the only time that the word "great" is used by itself is when it is used exclusively of God alone. Only God is "great" and the angel just said that Mary's son will be "great".

Further, Jesus will be called “Son of the Most High,” which clearly parallels what Gabriel says in **v. 35** that He will be the “Son of God”. Now there is no doubt that this is ultimately another reference to Jesus' divinity. Clearly no one else has ever been declared so openly and transparently by the very mouth of God what He alone said of Jesus at His baptism, when the Holy Spirit descended upon Him: “You are my beloved Son, with you I am well pleased” (**Luke 3:21-22**) or at the transfiguration on the mountain, “This is my Son, my Chosen One, listen to Him” (**Luke 9:35**). For truly, God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (**John 3:16**).

But, there is one other important reference to “son of God” in Luke's Gospel that needs to be taken into consideration and that is the one found in the culmination of the genealogy of Jesus where Adam is called, “the son of God” (**Luke 3:38**). Why would Luke use this reference to “son of God” for only two people in his Gospel: Jesus and Adam? Because Luke wants to draw our attention to the fact that as Adam was God's son who rebelled and caused the whole human race to plummet into sin and misery, so Jesus, the true and ultimate Son of God, is now the new, greater Adam who comes to restore the human race in holiness, righteousness, and the glory of God – He has come as the promised seed of Adam's race to victoriously crush the head of the seed of the serpent (**cf. Gen. 3:15**) and forever conquer Adam's greatest enemy – death itself, so that all who are in Christ by faith can shout:

“Death is swallowed up in victory.”⁵⁵ “O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?”⁵⁶ The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.⁵⁷ But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. (**1 Cor. 15:54-57**).

Now, we are not through just yet with the reference to “son of the Most High” or “son of God” but lets move to the next proclamation that the Lord God will give Jesus “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” (**vv. 32-33**). This is obviously a reference to the Davidic Covenant from **2 Samuel 7** when God promised David:

When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom.¹³ He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. (**2 Sam. 7:12-13**).¹⁶ And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.” (**2 Sam. 7:16**).

From the moment that promise was made to King David, there grew in Israel's life a hope of the coming of the promised descendant of David who would sit on David's throne forever and establish his kingdom forever. But how could a mere mortal sit on the throne FOREVER? Before long the prophets and the psalmist began to speak of God Himself coming to deliver His people and establish the throne of God in their midst. God would come as their King forever. Before long these two visions of Israel's hope began to merge together so that the Scriptures could be read as Messiah the

King and God were the same individual who was on His way to deliver His people and call them back to Him. One place we see this union of Messiah and God is in **Psalm 2** where God says to the King of Israel:

⁶ "As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill." ⁷ I will tell of the decree: The LORD said to me, "You are my Son; today I have begotten you." ⁸ Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession. (**Ps. 2:6-8**).

Here again we return to the "son of God" reference which is applied to the king of Israel. But at the same time this king's reign is not limited to Israel but rather to the ends of the earth. It is a universal reign over all the nations and rulers of the whole world. In fact, they are all treated as giving proper allegiance and obedience to this Messiah-King who is the Son of God, who Himself is referred to as Yahweh:

¹¹ Serve the LORD [Yahweh] with fear, and rejoice with trembling. ¹² Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in him. (**Ps. 2:11-12**).

Now, Mary's perplexity has only increased through Gabriel's revelation of what is about to happen to her (**v. 34**).

Now, we haven't yet dealt with Mary's virginity. I've held back from discussing it yet so that I can focus on it with this part of the pronouncement along with the assurance that is given to Mary. First, we need to put away any silliness such as Mary or anyone else in her day did not know that that virgins could not have babies. Even in that day when medical science was not near as advanced as it is today, people knew that virgins don't have babies. Therefore, it was just as much of a shock and as unbelievable to them as it would be today.

Further, the purpose of the virginity of Mary is not because of some "medieval" reprehension or disgust for the physical relationship between a husband and wife. Mary was not a virgin because otherwise she would have been "dirty" or contaminated had she already been with Joseph. The reason she is a virgin is for the same reason that the stone of the altar at God's temple could not be cut with human hands or instruments (**Ex. 20:25**) or why the stone which destroys Nebuchadnezzar's statue was "cut out by no human hand" (**Dan. 2:34**) because it was to be clear to all who heard the story of Jesus' birth that this was none other than the work of God alone. It is the same reason Paul tells us in **2 Cor. 5:1**:

For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. (**2 Cor. 5:1**).

God alone performs this act so that you will know:

⁷ But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. (2 Cor. 4:7). ¹⁶ So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. ¹⁷ For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, ¹⁸ as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal. (2 Cor. 4:16-18).

In the same way, God wants you the reader to know that the only way this was possible is that God would have had to intervene and do the impossible (cf. v. 37). Gabriel describes the creative moment in a way that brings together several glorious images when he says, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you" (v. 35).

The very immediate image that comes to mind is when God formed the dust of the ground into a man and breathed – the word for "spirit" – into the nostrils of the man and he immediately became a "living being," created into the image of God and what Luke calls, Adam, the son of God (cf. Luke 3:38).

We also think of the larger picture of creation when the Spirit is hovering over or overshadowing the face of the ocean deep who will then bring creative form and fullness to creation that is currently without form and is void (cf. Gen. 1:1-2). From the very beginning we see it is the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit to complete and glorify the work that the Father has ordained through the Word, who is His eternal Son. When the Father speaks, the One through whom He speaks is His eternal Son, with the eternal breath that is the Holy Spirit of God.

But the ultimate place where the language of God's Spirit overshadowing something is in regards to the tabernacle/temple where the Spirit-glory cloud of God overshadows and fills the temple with God's glorious presence as God takes up His residence in the very midst of the people He loves.

Now, to bring all of this into focus you will remember that David was unable to build a house for God. Instead, God promised to build a house for David and that it would be David's Son who would build a house for God so that through that Son of David, God would establish David's house forever. So now, think about what Gabriel has just promised Mary. God is about to send the Holy Spirit upon Mary to overshadow her, in the same way He did when He overshadowed the temple to fill it with His presence. So, God will now take up Mary's human body and fill it with His holy presence – the Son of God – that what is about to be conceived in Mary's very human womb is literally the new, full, and final temple of God – the house of God, the house of David – the everlasting throne of King David.

Therefore, the child to be born of Mary will be "holy," set apart from all sin – original and actual – and set apart as God Himself – the Son of God, yet born of Mary's womb.

Now, you can just imagine what Mary must be thinking and feeling at this moment. This would be

simply overwhelming for any human being to hear but this young, little Hebrew girl would have been especially stunned – speechless – awestruck. So to assure her that all was well, Gabriel went on to encourage Mary that she was not alone in God's plan – there were going to be two mothers, two births, that would be intertwined to bring about this purpose of God (v. 36). Some in the church, especially after the Enlightenment have struggled with the idea of a virgin birth. After all, we all know that it is humanly impossible. The only way that the virgin birth is possible is if God brought it to pass. But in regards to the virgin birth, you rarely ever hear any objections to the other miraculous birth in the story and that is Elizabeth's conception at such an advanced age (cf. 1:18). Even Zechariah wondered how it would be possible for her to be pregnant since he was so old and Elizabeth was so far advanced in years. Yet, Gabriel informs Mary that her relative Elizabeth in her old age, who was called barren, is yet in her sixth month of pregnancy. How is any of this possible? Well, if this universe filled with human beings is all there is to life then it is simply impossible. But if God exists . . . and He does, and if God is who He says He is . . . and He is then their simply is no problem – for NOTHING is impossible for God!

With that word Mary was content. She says simply, “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word” (v. 38) and with that humble response Mary has forever set the bar of how all the disciples of Jesus are to properly respond to God's will. With a mother like Mary, it is perhaps no wonder that when Mary's own Son is being prepared for what God is about to do in Him that His response was similar: “Nevertheless, not my will, but yours be done” (Luke 22:42).

Amen

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