

Sermon 5, The Annunciation, Pt. 2, Luke 1:26-38

Proposition: Gabriel announced to Mary that God was sending the ultimate Son of Promise through her.

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Introduction

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, last Sunday evening we left Mary so confused, pondering and trying to figure out what the angel's greeting meant. As we will see next Sunday, the Magnificat confirms that she did figure it out. Last week's Sunday evening message highlighted the reality that the coming of Jesus inaugurates the great reversal that the Kingdom of God brings. Status and power and wealth do not count in the accounting of the Kingdom. Zachariah is greater than Mary in Judean society, but not in the economy of God. Nonetheless, the reversal of worldly values was so rapid and dizzying that it left Mary saying "How can this be? I'm so confused." Well, this morning we will look more at the King — the one whose very birth and existence brings about the great reversal that so dizzied His mother. What we'll see is that though in Christ all things will become new, they will do so through the fulfillment of an ancient promise and an ancient kingdom — for nothing will be impossible with God.

I. Setting, v. 26

To review quickly from last week, the annunciation takes place in the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy. On the literary level, this ties together the births of Jesus and John. On the theological level, it reminds us once again that nothing will be impossible with God. Elizabeth, the barren woman, has received a son of promise. Is anything too hard for the LORD? I should say not. And that, of course, prepares us for the astounding announcement that Gabriel is about to deliver to Mary.

II. Recipient, vv. 27-29

As we discussed at length last week, Mary is a virgin. Her sexual purity is incredibly important to the story that follows. It is the power of God that opens the womb, even for women who have husbands and are actively trying to conceive. How much greater, though, is the obstacle of virginity! It is well known that abstinence is the only 100% effective contraception. And yet, when God is at work, even abstinence is not 100% effective. Nothing is too hard for the Lord. That is the hinge which Gabriel's announcement will pivot. As we will see in the coming weeks, the Virgin Birth is the easy part. It is the one to be born who will do the impossible and save the world.

III. Announcement, vv. 30-33

Let's look then, at the substance of Gabriel's highly unexpected announcement.

A. God's Favor Will Make Mary God's Mother, v. 30-31

The announcement is that God has graciously chosen Mary to be the one who would conceive in her womb and bear a Son who is to be named Jesus. This is the favor of God; unmerited, unlooked-for, and yet real and true. The purpose of God according to election is vividly illustrated in the life of Mary, who is blessed by God with this — to be the Mother of God's Son, who is Himself God. Unlike the gross perversions of this event in the Greek myths, where horny Jove goes around raping women and producing half-divine offspring, the child to be born here will be fully divine, and also fully human. He will be fully Mary's son, and fully God's.

The title "Mother of God" is not used in Scripture, but as the early church hashed out over the centuries, the substance of the title is true and is contained in Scripture. Mary's Son is God. His name, as Matthew tells us, means "Yahweh saves."

B. Who Jesus Will Be

Who will this child be? Gabriel names five things about him.

1. Great

The first of them is that he will be great, full stop. There is no limit on the greatness of Jesus Christ. He is not called "Jesus the Great," as if to distinguish him from other, not-so-great Jesuses. There is absolutely no competition here. He is not great in one or two areas, like Alexander or Frederick. He is great in every way, in all areas. Gabriel is quoting Micah: "for now shall he be great unto the ends of the earth" (Mic 5:4 KJV). Jesus' greatness is unlimited, both extensively and intensively. He is great to the ends of the earth; He is supremely great in every area of human excellence. He is great politically, great ethically, great aesthetically, great athletically, and more.

2. Son of the Highest

Why? Because of His background. He is the Son of the Most High. And thus, no wonder He is going to be great. He is the exact image of the Father, and thus He too is most high. He is the highest, the greatest, the best, the most wonderful. I cannot put it better than to say "Worthy is the Lamb!" The most fantastic, wonderful, worthy human being who ever lived is going to come from Mary, through the unaided agency of God Almighty.

3. King on David's Throne

The angel also tells Mary that, however Joseph's family has fallen in status such that the true heir of David is a mere carpenter in Nazareth, this son of hers is going to reclaim the throne. He will be Joseph's legal son, though Mary (and of course, thanks to Luke's account, the whole world) will know that He is not Joseph's biological son. Right here, at the heart of the Christian message, is an adoption for the ages. Jesus is adopted into David's line, for His Father is greater than David. He will rule on David's throne, and He will rule there better than David did.

4. Ruler Over Israel's House

He will reign over the house of Jacob — all twelve tribes, plus the tribes of Joseph and Levi for a total of all fourteen tribes. David ruled a united Israel too, starting in the eighth year of his reign. Before that, he ruled only Judah and Benjamin. But Jesus' rule is going to be over the whole people of God. The angel still speaks in old covenant terms, referring to the "house of Jacob," but the referent is not just to Israel according to the flesh, but to all the children of God of every tribe, tongue, people, language, and nation.

5. King of an Everlasting Kingdom

The other problem with David's dominion, aside from it being based primarily on Judean territory and interests, was that it was temporary. David reigned for only forty years. Jesus is going to reign forever. His kingdom will never come to an end. In other words, not only will He be great in every area of human endeavor; He will be great in longevity, indeed, He will be utterly immortal, living and reigning by the power of an indestructible life.

This is the picture the angel drew for Mary. As we know, the life of Jesus is even better than all these wonderful things that Gabriel said about Him. He is great, to the end of the earth and to the end of time and beyond.

IV. Question: How?, v. 34

Yet though we know that the Annunciation fits into a bigger story, the story of God overcoming human weakness and impossibility in order to save us from our sins, we resonate with Mary when she asks "How can this be, since I have not ever known a man?"

This question is asked in fact, unlike Zechariah's. It's not built on worldly categories but on natural categories. In God's world, it takes two to tango and it takes two to make a baby. Mary knows that she is only one, and that no man has known her. Thus, in faith, she asks how she can possibly bear a son.

V. Answer: The Most High, the Son of God, the Holy Spirit, v. 35

The angel's answer is fully Trinitarian. He names the Father and the Spirit and says that their power will cause Mary to give birth to the Son of God. The whole Trinity is involved in the Incarnation. The Spirit comes on her, the power of the Most High overshadows her. There is no sexual connotation in either of these verbs. This event is not to be compared with Zeus' erotic escapades. God will not impregnate Mary the way a man would. He will instead sovereignly create a fully formed fertilized egg within her, and in the moment of its creation He will unite that human body and nature personally to His Son.

How can that be? We do not know. We do not know how the spirit comes to the bones in the womb of a woman with child. We do not understand how our children are just like us, yet so different. What we do to beget children or to get pregnant is utterly incommensurable with the result. The activity is natural, the result supernatural. We do not and will not ever understand the mystery of human life, even in its “natural” form. How much less, then, should we expect to understand what exactly happened at the Incarnation? Suffice it to say that God came and joined Himself completely to a fully formed human being in the person of His Son.

VI. Sign: Elizabeth’s Pregnancy, v. 36

To back up his words, Gabriel makes two points. The first is an empirical observation, a piece of evidence from this world. Elizabeth is six months pregnant. Human medical science had officially declared her infertile. She was not supposed to be able to do this, and yet here she is, six months along. The Annunciation is news not only of Jesus’ coming, but of John’s too.

VII. Statement: Nothing Will Be Impossible with God, v. 37

The other thing Gabriel does is to make a theological point: With God, nothing is impossible. He can give a child to a woman who is too old to have children. He can overcome the deficiencies of nature. That means that even virginity is no obstacle in His way if He wants to give Mary His Son.

As C.S. Lewis points out, this does not mean that God can do nonsensical things like make a square triangle or a rock so big He can’t pick it up. Rather, it means that any natural obstacle that stands in the way of His plan to save His people doesn’t stand a chance. He can overcome Elizabeth’s barrenness and Mary’s virginity. He can cast all our sins into the depths of the sea. He can transform our vile bodies to be like His glorious body, by the power with which He is able to subdue all things to Himself.

Do you worship this God today? Do you have complete faith in His mountain-moving power? You should. With Him, nothing is impossible. There is nothing too hard for the LORD.

VIII. Servant: Mary’s Submissive Heart, v. 38

The correct response to God’s saving power is to work with it, not against it — to say “I will obey you and serve you however you ask, Lord.” Mary does not say “Since nothing is impossible with God, I refuse.” She says “The servant of the Lord.” Obviously she is talking about herself in the third person and saying “I am the Lord’s maidservant. I am available for any task whatsoever, including carrying, birthing, nursing, and mothering the Son of God.”

“Every time you bear a child, you go down into death for that child.” So my mother told me, and since she gave birth to eleven live babies I don’t doubt her. She knows what she’s talking about. Mary is not taking on an easy responsibility, in other words. She is not volunteering to chip in fifty cents for the salvation of the world. She is ready to give her life, just about literally. Pregnancy is hard. Birth is hard. Mothering is hard. To all of you moms, just remember that Christmas is also a kind of Mother’s Day. You genuinely have to be a servant of the Lord to be willing to carry and care for the babies He sends to you. It’s the hardest job you could ever do. Corporate America is way easier. But Mary is not complaining. Instead, she is submitting.

Also, as one of the commentators pointed out, in calling herself the “servant of the Lord” she is alluding to Scripture, and specifically to Isaiah’s Servant Songs. She is putting herself in the company of the Suffering Servant. She’s changed the gender of the term from male to female, but the message is clear: to carry the Son of God is to identify with the Son of God. He will be His Father’s Son, true God. But He will also be His mother’s son, ready to serve the LORD with unreservedly whole heart.

There is no “how shall I know this?” or “Why should I put up with a baby that isn’t even Joseph’s?” Instead, she identifies herself with the Servant of Yahweh and says “Just as my Son will serve, so I will serve too.”

The new creation is dawning, and it demands our service. God sends His Son to Mary, and through her, to the world. The king is coming! And in His presence and through His work, we learn what it means to truly serve God.

So be servants of the Lord this week. Submit to the reign of Christ in your lives by obeying everything He says. And when you are tempted to despair, then say this: with God, nothing shall be impossible — not even the salvation of the human race. Amen.