

**Luke 1:26-38**  
**The Annunciation**

Our world has seen some amazing births. The first of each kind to survive infancy include the Gehri quadruplets (1880, Switzerland), Dionne quintuplets (Canada, 1934), Rosenkowitz sextuplets (South Africa, 1974), McCaughey septuplets (U.S., 1997), and of course the Suleman octuplets (U.S., 2009). Scripture recounts some extraordinary births as well, Isaac, Samuel, even John the Baptist, but none compares to the virgin birth of Jesus Christ.

This passage also introduces us to another personality who will shape Christian culture as well - Mary. Throughout Church history and in western culture in general, there has been a tension regarding women. It was through Eve that sin entered the world, and through Mary that Christ was born. Therefore, woman is seen as the source of both great evil and great blessing.

**The setting**

The insignificant city of Nazareth. During the time of Christ, Nazareth probably contained only several hundred people and was situated about 80 miles north of Jerusalem. It was obscure, not on main trade routes, and is not mentioned in either the OT, Talmud, or by Josephus. It was so unknown that Luke was compelled to remind Theophilus that it was in Galilee. It reminds us that no place is too remote for God to work.

**The virgin and her betrothed**

The passage contains no other information about Mary other than her virginity and engagement.

According to Jewish practice young girls were engaged at 12-13 and married one year later. Marriage was arranged by the parents and, under Jewish law, it was legally binding. It could only be cancelled by death or divorce. If the husband to be died before the wedding day, the engaged young girl was considered a widow. At the end of one year there was a seven-day feast at the end of which the marriage was consummated.

Why did God provide for Mary to be betrothed? First, to provide a husband for the new family. Second, to prevent shame falling on a young, unwed mother.

Joseph was a descendant of David. His adoption of Jesus places Jesus within that lineage by both Roman and Jewish law. Mary, too, could trace her lineage back to David (Luke 3:23-38). So both legally and physically Jesus was the Son of David.

It would have been humbling for God to come as a king; consider him as the son of a tradesman. We can learn from this that there is no shame or embarrassment in poverty. The world looks to wealth and power but God does not.

**The Greeting**

Gabriel refers to Mary as the “favored one.” His point is to let Mary know she is richly blessed. It is not that she can bless others as the Catholic Church teaches. In the Latin Vulgate, *gratia plena* is translated “full of grace” but that rendering gives a double meaning. If Mary is “full of grace” then she can use that surplus of grace to bless others.

This interpretation led to Mariolatry. Beginning in 431 at Council of Ephesus, Mary was claimed to be *theotokos*, the Mother of God. By c. 600 there are recorded prayers to her. This misconception continued to grow throughout history, and in 1854 Pope Pius IX declared the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception (that is, Mary was also conceived without original sin). In 1950, the Catholic Church declared the bodily assumption after death, and in 1965 she was proclaimed the Mother of the Church.

It is clear from Scripture that Gabriel offers Mary neither worship nor excessive praise.

### **The message**

Gabriel focuses on the description of Christ.

He shall be great -- His greatness is unequalled and unencumbered. Not great “in God’s sight” as was John the Baptist. What Christ possesses He does so in and of Himself. He is not dependent, for He is God.

He shall be called the Son of the Most High -- “Most High,” *El Elyon* is the word for God as sovereign, omnipotent, ruler of heaven and earth.

He shall reign on the throne of David -- Fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah 9:6-7,

<sup>6</sup>For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us;

And the government will rest on His shoulders;

And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,

Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.

<sup>7</sup>There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace,

On the throne of David and over his kingdom,

To establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness

From then on and forevermore.

The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this.

His kingdom is everlasting -- His kingdom is eternal because He is eternal.

### **The question**

Mary’s question is not skepticism, but understandable since she was a virgin. It does not reflect doubt, but wonder at how such a thing could happen. She was a young girl from a culture that gave only the barest hints at such things. And remember, God had not interacted with man for some four hundred years. She was understandably perplexed at the prospect of being able to have a child without sexual intercourse with a man.

### **The method**

God's strategy was the same as in Creation. The Holy Spirit would be the agent. The word translated "overshadow" is the same word used in the transfiguration.

What about parthenogenesis? Women do not have a Y chromosome, so even if Mary produced a child parthenogenetically, it would be a female.

### **The Messiah**

The description Son of God is used by Jesus Himself (Luke 22:70), God the Father (Luke 3:22), Satan (Luke 4:3, 9), and demons (Luke 4:41). He is the "radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature," Hebrews 1:3.

The phrase "holy child" emphasizes that Jesus is born without sin. He was holy from birth. He did not undergo a process of sanctification; He never grew in His faith in the way that we do.

### **The assurance**

Gabriel extends grace to Mary when he tells her that her relative, Elizabeth, is also expecting a child.

Mary must have been related to Elizabeth through her mother, since Mary was from the line of David (Luke 3:31) and therefore of Judah (Luke 3:33). Elizabeth from the line of Aaron (Luke 1:5) and therefore Levi (Numbers 26:59).

Elizabeth's conception, which Mary had probably not heard about, was confirmation that God could do the humanly impossible.

### **The response**

It is interesting that Mary did not ask about Joseph. Her submission was unconditional. She knew she would be thought to have committed adultery, the punishment for which was death by stoning. The faith of her innocent response is extraordinary.

### **The mystery**

There is a great mystery in the Incarnation. We cannot comprehend the infinite God contained in a womb. The Creator is born, the pregnant virgin.

To deny the virgin birth is to deny Jesus is both God and man. If He had a human father, He would be a human, not God. If He was not really born, He would not be a man, He would then be only God. The virgin birth is essential to our faith as only it allows for Jesus Christ, the perfect God-man, to enter creation to redeem those God has chosen to save.

### **Take Aways**

Consider the wonder of the Incarnation.

Consider the example of Mary's submission to the will of God.

