



The unfolding of your words gives light.

To Seek and to Save

An Exposition of the Gospel of Luke

²⁶Now in the sixth month^a the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city in Galilee called Nazareth^b, ²⁷to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph^c, of the descendants of David; and the virgin's name was Mary^d. ²⁸And coming in, he said to her, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you^e." ²⁹But she was very perplexed at this statement, and kept pondering what kind of salutation this was^f. ³⁰The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; for you have found favor with God^g. ³¹And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus^h. ³²He will be greatⁱ and will be called the Son of the Most High^j; and the Lord

^a 1:26 **in the sixth month.** It is good to ask whether this is the sixth month of the Hebrew calendar or the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy. Likely the latter. Since the conception of John coincided with the priestly service of Zacharias (see my note on Luke 1:5), the sixth Jewish month *Elul* could not have been the date referred to here. Verse 36 also supports this.

^b 1:26 **the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city in Galilee called Nazareth.** Gabriel was sent. Angels are messengers from God. They not only travel from eternity into time, they are personal spirits who appear to take on bodies and arrive at specific geographic locations to do God's bidding. Nazareth is located on a ridge that looks south across the historic Jezreel Valley, where many of the world's armies had marched by the time this was written.

^c 1:27 **a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph.** The betrothal period in Mary's day was in some ways similar to what we call "engagement." It was a period of preparation for the marriage. The biggest difference is that a couple was legally married before the relationship was physically consummated. This is what made Mary look to Joseph like an adulteress instead of simply an immoral woman who could not save herself for her husband.

^d 1:27 **the virgin's name was Mary.** Mary was, like so many Jewish women of her day, named after the sister of Moses. Just as Miriam was a servant to care for Israel's deliverer in his infancy in Egypt, this "Miriam" would be the servant to the ultimate Deliverer.

^e 1:28 **coming in, he said to her, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you."** Why was Mary a "favored one"? We might well ask the same of Elizabeth, upon whom God cast a favorable glance (1:25) and Noah, who "found favor in the eyes of the LORD" (Genesis 6:8). The song of the angels at Jesus' birth was one of "peace among men with whom He is pleased" (Luke 2:14). Those God favors are not so because they have performed up to expectations. As Ephesians 2:1-10 explains, God brings the dead to life and makes them do what is good.

The statement that Lord was with Mary reveals the truth that made all the difference in the life of David (1 Samuel 16:13, 18; 17:37; 18:14, 28; 20:13).

^f 1:29 **she was very perplexed at this statement, and kept pondering what kind of salutation this was.** The word used to describe Mary's attitude here is a stronger form of a word used to describe how Zacharias felt when he saw the angel (1:12) and to describe what legalism was doing to young believers (Acts 15:24; Galatians 1:7; 5:10). It even described turbulent waters (John 5:4, 7). Here, in the stronger form Mary is described as "very perplexed."

^g 1:30 **Do not be afraid, Mary; for you have found favor with God.** The grace of God is the remedy for fear.

^h 1:31 **you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus.** Jesus (likely pronounced *Yeshua* in Hebrew) means "savior" or "salvation." Joseph was also given this name by the angel who appeared in his dream: "She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21).

ⁱ 1:31 **He will be great.** This gives us His character. Remember that the was spoken during in days of Herod the "Great" (see note on 1:15).

^j 1:32 **will be called the Son of the Most High.** This gives us His identity.

The Gospel of Luke
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God will give Him the throne of His father David^a,³³ and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end^b.”³⁴ Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin^c?"³⁵ The angel answered and said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you^d; and for that reason the holy Child shall be called the Son of God^e.”³⁶ And behold, even your relative Elizabeth has also conceived a son in her old age^f; and she who was called barren is now in her sixth month^g.”³⁷ For nothing will be impossible with God^h.”³⁸ And Mary said, "Behold, the bondservant of the Lord; may it be done to me according to your wordⁱ." And the angel departed from her.^j

^a 1:32 **the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David.** This gives us His destiny. This statement of the angel is part of Luke's argument that Jesus had a legal right to rule over the people of Israel. The biological link of Jesus to the royal line of David is not stated directly by Luke until the genealogy of chapter 3 (Luke 3:23-31).

^b 1:33 **He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end.** This child would be the ruler David could not be. He is the fulfillment of God's promise to David in 2 Samuel 7:16.

^c 1:34 **How can this be, since I am a virgin.** Scholars, believing and unbelieving, have debated various texts testifying to the virgin conception of Messiah. Here you can take it from Mary's own mouth.

You can see the difference between Mary's question and the one Zacharias asked (1:18). Mary started with belief. Zacharias started with unbelief. Mary was not skeptical about God to do such a thing. She was merely puzzled by the biology of the event and asked the logical question.

^d 1:35 **The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.** No question is left about human fatherhood here. In a completely holy act of power, God was going to send His Son into a human body. The only times this word translated "overshadow" is used in the New Testament it describes the glory of God at Jesus' transfiguration and perception that the shadow of Peter might bring healing to people (Matthew 17:5; Mark 9:7; Luke 9:34; Acts 5:15).

^e 1:35 **for that reason the holy Child shall be called the Son of God.** This statement clearly connects the virgin birth (conception) with the deity of Christ. If He had a human father He would have been capable of sinning.

^f 1:36 **your relative Elizabeth has also conceived a son in her old age.** Since Zacharias and Elizabeth were both from the tribe of Levi (Aaron) and Joseph and Mary were both of the tribe of Judah (see Matthew and Luke's genealogies), we may presume that either Mary's mother was of Aaronic descent or that Elizabeth's mother was of the tribe of Judah.

^g 1:36 **she who was called barren is now in her sixth month.** This identity change for Elizabeth was the same as what it should be for anyone else. Outside of the grace of God we are given earthly labels (barren, unloved, drunk, thief...). Inside His grace we are identified by what only He can do (six months pregnant, loved by God, delivered from bondage...).

^h 1:37 **nothing will be impossible with God.** This is the theology behind all the impossible things happening in this chapter. The Almighty Maker of heaven and earth can make old couples conceive and create life in a virgin womb.

ⁱ 1:38 **Behold, the bondservant of the Lord; may it be done to me according to your word.** Mary was ready to serve. This statement is a good one to commit to memory and to have ready for the next time you are called to respond to God's call on your life. This was a great privilege for Mary, but don't think this was going to be a great promotion for her on an earthly level. It was the beginning of a joyful ride that would also include negative public scrutiny, much discomfort and the eventual piercing of Mary's soul (2:35).

^j 1:26-38 The message of the angel to Mary made two important points. First, it clearly identified Messiah. Second, it clearly identified Mary. In God's eyes Mary's identity was wrapped up in His favor and presence, not her performance. You see the same thing in David's life (see 1 Samuel

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16). She was humble enough to ask, “Why me?” This is very different from the way the proud ask that question (again see David in 2 Samuel 7:18). This story is all about the power of God.

Here are some good reasons to worship God for being powerful:

1. Because God is powerful you see ordinary things become spectacular. You do not need to pretend that you are important. This assaults God. He looks greater when your greatness is out of the way. The God who brings down giants with little rocks also sent His Son into the world in an obscure village while a simple couple made wedding plans.
2. Because God is powerful you see why people can be fearless. You can trust Him with the hard stuff. Do not take anything away from Mary. She must have been quite a woman. But the hero of this story is the God of grace who favored Mary. That is why Mary did not need to fear.
3. Because God is powerful you see impossible things happen. Just read the gospels. Here you start with angelic visions, a pregnant old woman and a pregnant virgin. Should this come as a surprise when the whole Bible starts with the same God making heaven and earth? To Whom do you pray?
4. Because God is powerful you see good cause to be a servant. You can be used by Him. God uses means to show His power. We create heroes out of people who stretch the human mind and body as far as they can go. God is shown great when He takes His people farther than they can go. Nothing is impossible with Him.

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