

The Beauty of Christmas

The Holy Spirit Will Come Upon You

Luke 1:26-38

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In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. 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, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?" 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. 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. For nothing will be impossible with God." 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 (Luke 1:26-38).

I'd like for you to think with me this morning about your favorite Christmas traditions. I trust that you have some. For some of us, they are connected to our childhood, family heritage, or a great memory.

Here's a few of mine:

- I remember a Christmas countdown calendar with candy canes. In the month of December, our morning ritual was untying a candy cane from the calendar and eating it before breakfast.
- My family celebrated on the morning of Christmas Eve because on Christmas day we would join with extended family with my grandparents on my mom's side of the family.
- We'd also have another family gathering with the Vroegop side of the family, which usually meant about 50 people, and the main activity was watching my grandma open presents from all of us.
- There was special food: banket pastry, pigs-in-a-blanket, olibollen, and shrimp cocktail. After I married Sarah, their family had sliced filet, stuffed pork loin, and artichokes steamed in vinegar.
- We have many of our own traditions like cutting down a real Christmas tree, putting up personalized ornaments, and an hors d'oeuvres feast on Christmas Eve.

Traditions are important, aren't they? I remember coming home from college and being grateful for these things. Not just because they were enjoyable, fun, or delicious. There was something about the

traditions that grounded me. As life changed, it was reassuring, even comforting, to have these experiences remain.

In some respects, traditions are foundational. That can be why we become overly committed to them: “What!? No shrimp cocktail this year? Christmas is ruined.” But they are important. Traditions connect us to something consistent, meaningful, and memorable.

For Advent this year, we’re going to walk through the traditional texts associated with the Christmas story in the Gospel of Luke. We’re going to walk through chapters 1-2 of Luke to be reminded about the beauty of Christmas.

What we’ll talk about is probably not new although I hope to share some insights that are not entirely familiar. We’re going to consider some foundational texts regarding the advent of Jesus. And today our primary focus is going to be on the angel Gabriel’s visit to Mary and the announcement of the virgin birth.

The Gospel of Luke was likely written around 60 A.D. That date might sound familiar because it’s about the same time that Paul wrote Ephesians. We know that Luke was a physician, and he frequently traveled with Paul on his missionary journeys. The Gospel of Luke is part one of two. Luke and Acts go together. They have the same purpose: to help strengthen the faith of a man named Theophilus.

Here’s what Luke says at the beginning of the Gospel:

Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught (Luke 1:1-4).

The book of Acts sounds similar:

In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen (Acts 1:1-2).

Luke’s Gospel is designed so that “you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught” (v. 4). The ESV Study Bible says, “Luke emphasized the truthfulness of the Christian traditions his readers had been taught.”¹ And more than any other Gospel writer, Luke provides more details regarding the birth of Jesus.

So, the first two chapters seem like a good place to be when we think about the beauty of Christmas and some foundational truths related to the advent of Jesus.

¹ Crossway Bibles, [The ESV Study Bible](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2008), 1936.

Four Foundational Statements

As we look at Luke 1:26-38, I'd like to highlight four foundational statements that both stand out in the text, communicate important statements, and connect to our lives. And in so doing, I hope that you, like Theophilus, will have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.

"The Lord Is with You" (vv. 26-29)

Luke begins his Gospel with two pregnancy promises. The first is a promise given to Zachariah and Elizabeth regarding their son whose name was John. He became known as John the Baptist. This promise was redemptive and miraculous because Zachariah and Elizabeth were barren and they were "advanced in years" (1:7).

It's interesting that Luke starts his Gospel with two birth narratives. Keep that in mind when we start our new series on 1 & 2 Samuel because we'll see the same thing. The parallels between Luke and 1 Samuel are not coincidental.

Our focus begins, however, with verse 26, and this section is the account of Gabriel's announcement to Mary.

Luke identifies several critical details in verses 26-27. Let me highlight them for us:

- "in the sixth month" – This is connected to Elizabeth's pregnancy with John.
- "the angel Gabriel was sent from God" – The naming of the angel serves to highlight the importance of this divinely ordained mission and connect it to the previous story (see 1:19).
- "to a city of Galilee named Nazareth" – The location will matter later, but there's nothing particularly special about the village of Nazareth.
- "to a virgin betrothed" – We'll unpack this more in a moment, but this sets the stage for the shocking announcement that will come.
- "to a man whose name was Joseph of the house of David" – This is the first person named in the story, and it's important to notice his connection to the messianic line of the house of David.
- "and the virgin's name was Mary" – Luke returns to the virgin at the end of this list of important details, and he concludes with her name: Mary.

All of this information is critical, and it will inform what is coming next. But the focus of these verses is on the greeting by the angel: "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you." It's a very interesting statement.

Now, it doesn't appear that Mary knows immediately that Gabriel was an angel. In fact, verse 29 tells us that she's disturbed by the greeting and she wasn't sure about the angel's intentions. It would have

been culturally taboo for a man to greet an unknown woman, and to do so with a betrothed woman would have been viewed very poorly by everyone, especially the future husband.²

What Gabriel says, however, is loaded with grace even if it's confusing to Mary at first. He calls her "favored one," a word that only appears here and (guess where?) Ephesians 1:6—"to the praise of his glorious grace which he **blessed** us in the Beloved." The word means to be the recipient of God's grace and goodwill. It means to bestow favor on someone. Mary is a woman who has been graced by the Lord. She is not the giver of grace. She's receiving grace, and she has no idea what is about to happen.

And then the angel says, "The Lord is with you." It's not a wishful hope. It's a statement of fact, and it has significant connection to other moments of divine deliverance. Consider the burning bush where God is near ("I have come down to deliver them . . ." Exod. 3:8) and his promise ("I will send you to Pharaoh . . . but I will be with you . . ." Exod. 3:11-12). Or consider the promises to Joshua: "As I was with Moses, so I will be with you" (Josh. 1:5); "Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go" (Josh. 1:9).

This is a remarkable and hopeful statement. Mary has no idea what it means right now. But it's true. God is with her. She is graced by God. And in time she'll understand all of what that means. As is so often the case, God's people don't get an opportunity to see ahead. They just have to know how to receive grace and live by faith that God is with us.

I wonder if you need to allow these familiar—even traditional—words to wash over your soul: "The Lord is with you."

"You Shall Call His Name Jesus" (vv. 30-33)

The next section details the substance of the promise. It's a stunning statement connected to the fulfillment of biblical prophecy.

But first, the angel senses Mary's dismay, and he seeks to encourage her: "Don't be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God" (v. 30). This seems to be less about calming her emotions as much as it is pointing her toward the grace that God is going to give her.³ Mary has found grace from God. Darrell Bock, in his commentary, says this:

² James R. Edwards, [*The Gospel According to Luke*](#), ed. D. A. Carson, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; Apollos, 2015), 44.

³ James R. Edwards, [*The Gospel According to Luke*](#), 46.

*God has acted on her behalf and not because of her. In fact, Mary is totally perplexed by the sudden announcement. She did not ask for or seek this role in God's plans; God has simply stepped into her life and brought her into his service.*⁴

What follows (vv. 31-33) is a stunning promise that is rooted in the Old Testament hope of a coming messiah. This statement connects to the Davidic covenant from 2 Samuel 7:8-17, Psalm 89, Psalm 132, Isaiah 9:5-6, and Isaiah 11:1-5. This is it! The promise is being fulfilled!

He begins by telling Mary that she will conceive a son and his name will be Jesus, the Greek transliteration of the Hebrew name Joshua, which means God saves. In Matthew's account, it's an angel that appeared to Joseph in a dream and told him that the child will be named Jesus "for he will save his people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21). But there's more.

The angel communicates specifically about the messianic promises. Take note of all the "ands."

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, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end (Luke 1:32-33).

What an amazing promise and what an incredible fulfillment of the Old Testament hope. In the Old Testament, the prophecies sounded like this:

And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever (2 Sam. 7:16).

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace (Isa. 9:6).

There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit. And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD (Isa. 11:1-2).

Advent is a time to remember that it may take a while, but God always keeps his promises. God has a track record of "promise made, promise kept." That's an important truth to keep in mind, but it's a truth to remember and rehearse this time of year. The plan of redemption is rooted in fulfilled promises.

"Nothing Will Be Impossible with God" (vv. 34-37)

⁴ Darrell L. Bock, [Luke](#), The IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), Lk 1:26–28.

Apparently, Mary understands what the angel is saying about conceiving a child because she asks a relevant question: “How will this be, since I am a virgin?” (v. 34). This isn’t a question revealing unbelief. Rather, it’s born out of the reality of the world in which she lives. She’s a betrothed virgin.

The angel provides an explanation, and this is where the doctrine of the virgin birth of Jesus comes from:

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 (Luke 1:35).

Jesus will be miraculously conceived—fully God and fully human. This is necessary for his future death on the cross to be both acceptable and applicable. This is an essential doctrine of the Christian faith.

For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Cor. 5:21).

And to reassure Mary, the angel tells her about Elizabeth’s pregnancy despite her old age and barrenness. What we find here is that God intervenes in human history, providing the means of redemption. And the angel makes a powerful statement of affirmation: “Nothing will be impossible with God” (v. 37).

What an important and true reminder! As we celebrate this Christmas season and enjoy all our traditions, let this season point us to the truth underneath it all: nothing will be impossible with God.

“Let It Be to Me According to Your Word” (v. 38)

Our text concludes with a single verse, and it’s a statement from Mary. She says something remarkable, and it’s loaded with faith.

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 (Luke 1:38).

Consider the implications for Mary! Who is really going to believe her? “An angel appeared to me, and I’m pregnant with the Son of God who has no earthly father.” People are not going to believe her. Would you? Her entire life will be shaped by this question and potential scandal. Yet she embraces the will of God for her life.

Her faith is remarkable, and it serves as a model for what it means to be faithful and obedient. Even at great cost to herself, Mary embraces the will of God for her life.

Four foundational statements:

- “The Lord Is with You” (vv. 26-29)
- “You Shall Call His Name Jesus” (vv. 30-33)
- “Nothing Will Be Impossible with God” (vv. 34-37)

- “Let It Be to Me According to Your Word” (v. 38)

As we begin our celebration of Advent and enjoy our “traditions,” it’s fitting, helpful, and instructive to consider this traditional and foundational text so that we, like Theophilus, might have certainty regarding the things we have been taught.

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