

The Most Wonderful Promise
(How Would You Respond?)
Luke 1:26-38

Luke is re-telling the story of Jesus through eyewitness accounts that he has researched so his reader, a Greek named Theophilus, can have certainty about Jesus and Christianity.

- 1 – He places his biography in time by naming Herod and Judea.
- 2 – He introduces us to real people in real places

So far, Luke is demonstrating his research in personal interviews, introducing us to

- Zechariah
- Elizabeth
- and now, Mary, but he introduces Joseph first. 27
- and then Mary

Luke is following the Genesis blueprint of introducing Adam first, and then Eve.

Why? So that his account can be verified and trusted.

First: Luke's Introductions 26-27

Six months after Gabriel appeared to Zechariah, he appeared to Mary who is destined to be the mother of the Lord Jesus.

- a) Galilee (vs) Judea. 26

Gabriel first visited Zechariah in Judea, the county in which Jerusalem is located and the center of Jewish life.

The scene shifts from the temple to a nontemple setting, from the holy city to a village of no consequences [nowheresville]. The prestige of the character the angel visits shifts from an elder male with high status to a young female with no status. The contrasts portend that the reign of God will turn everything topsy-turvy.

David E. Garland in Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament

Galilee is overrun by Gentiles, but God has promised glory there –

Isaiah 9:1b-2 - *...In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali; but in the latter time he has made glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations. The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone.*

Matthew 4:12-17 - *Now when he heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew into Galilee. ¹³ And leaving Nazareth he went and lived in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, ¹⁴ so that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: ¹⁵ "The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles— ¹⁶ the people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light, and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death, on them a light has dawned. From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."*

b) Nazareth was even worse, scorned even by Jews. 26

When Philip found his brother Nathaniel, (James and John, as well as Peter and Andrew were also brothers, disciples, then elders in Jerusalem) and identified Jesus as "*him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote,*" but from Nazareth, Nathaniel responded, "*Can anything good come out of Nazareth?*" (John 1:45-46).

Nothing good may come out of Nazareth, but God can do something good there.
Watch!

a) Mary is a virgin 27a & c

Virgin = parthenos – said twice, before she's named, to emphasize the reality and its importance. Jesus had brothers and sisters who were natural born to Joseph and Mary, but he was not one of them.

(Jesus had four brothers: James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas (Matt 13:55). He also had sisters, but they are not named or numbered (Matt 13:56; Mk 3:31)).

- b) Joseph is of David's house.
- c) Mary was of the tribe of Judah.

Judah was the brother of Joseph whose life was most changed of all the brothers, offering to substitute himself for Benjamin, a foreshadowing of Jesus for you.

d) They are betrothed.

Betrothal means that Joseph has paid the bride price, and her father has granted consent for their marriage.

It is the first part of a two-part Jewish marriage, the legal contract, like a marriage license, before the religious ceremony.

It's the law before grace, Sinai before Zion. It's the gospel portrayed in marriage.

Can you imagine the moment? Gabriel came from a city whose streets are gold, walls are jasper, and the gates are made of pearl. Mary's house probably had a curtain between the space where people and animals lived.

Second: The Pronouncement 28-30

What we are about to hear is the best news the world has ever heard, the greatest event in human history.

The angel doesn't introduce himself to Mary primarily because he only introduced himself to Zechariah when the priest doubted his word.

a) Mary is favored. 28

1 - Favor = grace = κεχαριτωμένη / 'kexaritomene' from 'charito' = to be highly favored, to make lovely.

It is in the passive tense, meaning, 'to be graced.' God is showing grace or favor to Mary. This means it is something God has done. It is nothing intrinsic to Mary.

IMP: What is the immaculate conception? Protestants say it is the virgin conception of Jesus. Catholics say it is Mary's own conception and birth, that Mary is preserved from sin.

But Mary is not the source of grace for Jesus, but the object of Jesus's grace. This is an important point because many people are led astray at this point. Mary doesn't help us by giving grace but by showing that she needs grace.

In Heaven's economy, we are not naturally lovely. Grace makes us lovely. We are not naturally loveable. Grace makes us loveable.

This is an incorrect statement from one of my commentaries – *“Ever since Eve, God had been looking for a woman upon whom He could bestow His favor and trust, one upon whom He could bestow the highest of honors, the honor of becoming the virgin mother of God’s incarnate Son. City after city, century after century, woman after woman, God was looking for someone sweet enough, strong enough, and spiritual enough to give birth to the Christ. The search was over! The woman had been found!”* That is so wrong. Can you imagine trying to be sweet enough, strong enough and spiritual enough to be God’s mother? The emphasis is not on Mary’s inherent grace, but God’s grace/favor.

[Mary in the Magnificat] – *Luke 1:47 - My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior...*

Stop frustrating the grace of God by,

- Denying you need grace.
- Hiding your need for grace.

This just makes you more unlovely and unlovable. (It’s hard to around people under conviction). Instead, sing this song –

*All of grace is my story,
All the way from earth to glory.
Since by grace he lifted me from sin and woe.
Living grace he has extended
As on him my heart depended
And he’ll give new grace when it’s my time to go.
- New Grace by Tom Hayes*

And that brings us to the next thing the angel says –

b) The Lord is with her. 28

There is no verb in the original. This means it is more “the Lord is with you” than “the Lord be with you,” as though he wasn’t already.

Think of all the places ‘the Lord’ was with his people, even if they didn’t know it.

- Exodus 2:23b, 24a, 35a – *Their cry of rescue came from slavery came up to God. And God heard their groaning...God saw the people of Israel – and God knew.*
- [Concerning Hagar] – *Genesis 16:7 & 13- The angel of the LORD found her by a spring of water in the wilderness, the spring on the way to Shur.... So she called the name of the LORD who spoke to her, "You are a God of seeing," for she said, "Truly here I have seen him who looks after me."*

Of course, the greatest example of this is the one Luke is telling. Matthew records it like this,

Isaiah 7:14 (fulfilled in Matt 1:23) - All this happened to make clear the full meaning of what the Lord said through the prophet:²³ "The virgin will be pregnant and will give birth to a son. They will name him Immanuel." (Immanuel means "God with us.")

- c) But Mary was afraid. 29
- d) Gabriel repeats the substance of the Gospel. 30 – *"Do not be afraid, Mary..."*

This 'favor' is a reiteration of Mary as an object of grace.

V 12 -13 - And Zechariah was troubled when he saw him, and fear fell upon him. ¹³ But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid..."

Note: Remember, fearing the right thing – God – will diminish, perhaps even eliminate, other fears that should not rule your life.

Third: The Promise. 31-33

ILL - During his 27th reading of the Bible, Everett R. Storms, a schoolteacher in Canada, came up with a grand total of 8,810 promises, 7,487 of them being promises made by God to people.

- a) You will conceive and birth a son. 31a
- b) You will call his name Jesus. 31b

Unlike Matthew, who explains Jesus's name, Luke's emphasis remains on God's ongoing work, something that both conceives and names the child.

Remember when God turned the leadership of Israel over to Joshua because Moses, the lawgiver, could not lead Israel into the Promised Land.

Joshua is the OT version of the NT name of Jesus whose name means, "*God saves*," or "*The Lord is Salvation*," and of course, in this instance, Jesus is that Lord.

c) He will be great. 32a

John the Baptist is "*great before the Lord*" (1:15) but Jesus is great.

Deuteronomy 10:17 - *For the LORD your God is...the great, the mighty, and the awesome God...*

But Jesus defines does not define greatness as servanthood.

Luke 9:46-48 - *An argument arose among them as to which of them was the greatest.⁴⁷ But Jesus, knowing the reasoning of their hearts, took a child and put him by his side⁴⁸ and said to them, "Whoever receives this child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me. For he who is least among you all is the one who is great."*

Luke 22:24-27 - *A dispute also arose among them, as to which of them was to be regarded as the greatest.²⁵ And he said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those in authority over them are called benefactors.²⁶ But not so with you. Rather, let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves.²⁷ For who is the greater, one who reclines at table or one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at table? But I am among you as the one who serves."*

This is a helpful word for anyone leading anything connected to God's work in the world.

d) He will be called the Son of the Most High. 32b (see v 35 – "Son of God"
This is a favorite term for God from King David – Ps 7:17

e) The Lord God will give him David's throne. 32c. See 2 Sam 7:13-14
Luke 1:27 – Jesus is the rightful heir to David's throne.

f) He will reign forever over the house of Jacob. 33a

g) There will be no end to his kingdom. 33b

Fourth: A Question and Answer. 34-37

a) Mary asks 'how' it will happen. 34

Here, Luke is drawing a definite contrast between Zechariah and Mary.

There is a difference between 'how,' or 'why' and 'Seriously?' questions.

This is different from Zechariah's doubt – 18 – "...*How shall I know this?*"

It's the difference between "*How can this be?*" (Z) and "*How will this be?*" (M).

Unlike Zechariah, Mary is assuming it will happen but asking for more information and Mary has the larger circumstance. There is OT precedence for older women conceiving. No virgin has ever conceived.

Mary's virginity is not mentioned to establish her purity but an obstacle to God's power.

b) The Holy Spirit will make it happen. 35 – That's the plan.

This is the same Holy Spirit who "*was hovering over the face of the waters*" in Genesis 1:2.

1 - Luke uses this verb, "*to come upon,*" 7 times in Luke-Acts and it's the same word used in the LXX in Isaiah 32:15 – "*until the Spirit is poured upon us from on high...*"

2 – "Overshadow" =

- Exodus 40:35 – "*And Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud settled on it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.*"
- Acts 1:8 - *But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you,*

Note: In apparent modesty, Luke doesn't narrate the conception or the resurrection, two pivotal events in Jesus's life, instead, hiding them from human view but knowing it to be true. How 'sacred' he must have considered these moments.

So, The Holy Spirit will make it happen. 35 – That's the plan.

a) Elizabeth is the model. 36 – That's the proof.

- Like a good historian, Luke gives us the facts about Mary's pregnancy.
- Like a good doctor, Luke places Elizabeth's pregnancy in her 2nd trimester.

Since Elizabeth hid herself for five months, Mary would not have known Elizabeth was pregnant.

b) And nothing is impossible with God. 37 – That's the power.

In reality, Mary asked the same question many modern people ask. "*How can that be?*"

You say, "*Wow. A virgin birth. That's kind of hard to believe.*" Not if you start with Genesis 1:1 and read from there. And that's why, when he starts his story about Jesus, Luke reaches all the way back into the OT with divine promises, and echoes of what God has done in the past. What he's writing is just one part of a very long, unending story with innumerable, incredible proofs/miracles that lead up to it. Basically, God is not just entering the story at this point. He is writing the story.

APP: We need good, long memories. Faith in the present and future is dependent on what God has done in the past.

But, to Jews, it may very well be that the virgin birth is as inconceivable as salvation's offer to everyone (Lk 18:27).

- Jesus is one Person.
- He is one person with two natures.

"Christ...was incomposite [lacking separable or distinguishable parts]. He remained what He was; what He was not, He assumed....Man and God...became a single whole....He was begotten -yet He was already begotten – of a woman. And yet she was a virgin. That it was from a woman makes Him human, that she was a virgin makes Him divine. On earth He has no father, but in heaven no mother. All this is part of His Godhead. He was carried in the womb, but acknowledged by a prophet as yet unborn himself, who leaped for joy at the presence of the Word for whose sake he has been created (cf. Lk. 1:41). He was wrapped in swaddling bands, but at the Resurrection He unloosed the swaddling bands of the grave. He was laid in a manger, but was extolled by angels, disclosed by a star and adored by Magi... He had 'no form or beauty' (cf. Is. 53:2) for the Jews, but for David He was 'fairer than the children of men' (Ps. 45:2) and on the mount He shines forth, becoming more luminous than the Sun (cf. Mt. 17:2...."

– St. Gregory of Nazianzus, Bishop of Constantinople (c320-390 AD)

For more wonder, read: <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/how-can-jesus-be-god-and-man>

This is how he hungered, thirsted, and died yet, knew people's hearts, calmed the storm, raised the dead, and could not stay in the grave, etc.

- He is completely, simultaneously, God and man.
- Each nature remains eternally distinct. (Jesus will always be God and human. That's how we will see God in Heaven)

Caveat: It's not a stretch to say that Jesus's dual modality as the God-man reflects the soul/body, immaterial/material status of human existence. Just as Heaven and earth were present in Christ, two worlds, the spiritual and material, are present in you as an embodied soul. It is for this reason that when you, as a Christian, are seeking a remedy from any effect of the Fall (sin), i.e., looking for the cause of any human problem, that you must consider the spiritual and physical realities of your being. Any potential solution that disregards the spiritual you or fails to offer an answer with Jesus as the model, and the Scripture Holy Spirit as agents of real change, cannot properly address your humanity and can harm more than help you.

Fourth: A Confession. 38

It is impossible for us to put ourselves in Mary's shoes; a young, unmarried, but betrothed, smalltown, Hebrew girl through whom God is going to miraculously birth his son. No amount of imagining will suffice. But her response is only praise and faith.

What is faith? "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." (Hb 11:1).

Zechariah's doubt led to speechlessness. Mary's faith leads to this confession -

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.

Is it possible to say that Mary is the first Christian?

Talk about an application built into the text. This is it!

She's basically saying, *"I don't know what this all means, but I will trust the Lord."*

Servant = doule = slave, and used of

Joshua – Judges 2:8 – *“And Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died at the age of 110 years.”*

Israel – Isaiah 41:8-9 - *But you, Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen,*

IMP: Gabriel’s departure is significant. It means that no Heavenly presence or voice will walk with her through Jesus’s childhood, his ministry or at the cross. But she will never forget this moment. It will enable her to get through her darkest moments and she will eventually share it with Luke, who shares it with us.

Conclusion:

Mary, as God’s willing servant, becomes, what Luke hopes for Israel, and every reader.

This is what Luke wants Theophilus to say. This is what he wants you to say.

Community Groups

- 1 – Read the text.
- 2 – List the people who Luke mentions thus far in his Gospel.
- 3 – If you wanted to know something about Christianity, whom would you ask?
Don’t let your CG say, “you.”
- 4 – What do we know about Mary from the text?
- 5 - How does Gabriel say Mary will conceive?
- 6 - What does Gabriel say about Jesus?
- 7 - How did Mary initially respond to Gabriel’s announcement?
- 8 – How is this different from Zechariah’s response?
- 9 – Are you more like Zechariah or Mary and why?
- 10 – Why does Luke reference the OT so much, so early in his Gospel?
- 11 – What does the reference to David and David’s throne mean?
- 12 – How does Mary end the conversation?
- 13 – Talk about a challenging time in your life when God miraculously intervened.
- 14 – What is the benefit of remembering God’s past faithfulness?
- 15 – How do you apply Luke 1:37 to your life?

Daily Devotion

Mon, Jan 22nd. Read Lk 1:1-4 & 26-27. Early in his Gospel, Luke is very specific with names, places, and times in order to give Theophilus confidence about the Gospel's truthfulness. This reflects Jesus who claims to be the "truth" (John 14:6). We don't need to exaggerate the Gospel or make false claims about it. It is God's power (Ro 1:16). This challenges us in our personal words and deeds. Think about what you say today, as you speak with friends, family, and co-workers, ensuring that your words are indeed, truthful.

Tues, Jan 23rd. Read Lk 1:27 & Mt 1:18-25. The virgin birth is a pillar of the Christian faith. Without it, Christianity collapses. Luke twice says that Mary is a virgin and Matthew stresses that Joseph and Mary were not intimate before Jesus's birth. Jesus must be God to be perfect and pay for our sins. But he must be human in order to die for our sins. It's a paradox answered by the virgin birth alone. Take time today to think about the virgin birth and frame the thoughts/words in your mind such that you could explain it to a friend.

Wed, Jan 24th. Read Lk 1:28-30, Eph 2:1-9 & 1 Jn 1:9. Gabriel tells Mary that she is the recipient of God's favor, mercy, or grace. It's not Mary who is sinless, but Jesus. It is not Mary who atones for our sin, but Jesus. This is true for all of us. Denying your sin only makes life hard and hardens our hearts. Instead, we can confess our sin because we know that God's grace is greater than our sin (Ro 5:20). Do you think this is true? Then don't deny or hide from your sin. Instead, confess it and accept God's incredible forgiveness.

Thur, Jan 25th. Read Lk 1:31-33 & Ro 10:13. How many promises are in the Bible? What Bible promises are precious to you? Can you preach the gospel of God's goodness and faithfulness to yourself by recounting some promises right now? Which ones? God made Mary certain promises, every one of them coming true. One of the best parts of the Gospel is that everyone can inherit the most important of God's promises, Jesus himself and all the other promises come from and are found in him. Be on the lookout today for someone who needs to hear and receive the best and most important promise, Jesus himself.

Fri, Jan 26th. Read Lk 1:34-38 & Hb 11:1. It is impossible for us to put ourselves in Mary's shoes; a young, unmarried, but betrothed, smalltown, Hebrew girl through whom God is going to miraculously birth his son. But her response is only praise and faith. What might God be asking you to believe? In what areas of your life is your faith being challenged? What will it take for you to say with Mary, "*Behold, I am the servant of the Lord, let it be to me according to your word?*" Talk to God about that today.

