



Silverdale Baptist

A CHRISTMAS MIRACLE ~ A VIRGIN CONCEIVING ~ LUKE 1: 26-38 ~ 12/3-4/22

Big Idea

Jesus shows up in the most improbable places to reveal Himself to the most unlikely people.

Getting Started

What is the worst Christmas present you have ever received?

What was the best?

For many people, Christmas is all about gifts. The presents are the focus of the season. However, we know Christmas isn't all about the gifts. Christmas is about celebrating the Gift, the Gift of Jesus who saves His people from their sins. For the next few weeks, we will focus on the miracle of Christmas. Today, we will look at the miracle of a virgin conceiving.

Learn

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ LUKE 1:26-32

1. An improbable place.

What is the main point of this passage?

Nazareth seems like an odd place for the mother of the future Messiah to live. Nazareth has no biblical significance until Gabriel brings his message to Mary. The village was on the outskirts of the Roman city, Sepphoris, the jewel of the Galilee. Sepphoris was wealthy and beautiful. By most accounts, Nazareth was the dirt-poor suburb for people who couldn't afford to live in Sepphoris.

The announcement of the soon-coming Messiah didn't come to Rome, Alexandria, or Jerusalem. Instead, it came to a poor town with a terrible reputation. But, on the other hand, a poor village with a sordid reputation is precisely the place that needs the good news.

2. An unlikely person

How does Gabriel describe Mary?

How does Mary respond to the greeting?

What do you learn about Mary in this passage from Gabriel's greeting and Mary's response?

In the culture of the day, women were married in their early teens. Since Mary was engaged, she was most likely 13 or 14 years old. How unlikely is it that Gabriel would appear to a poor Jewish teenager in Nazareth, of all places?

3. An impossible gift.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER RE-READ LUKE 1:26-38.

How is Jesus described in this passage?

To a poor teenage girl living in a small, poor village with a lousy reputation can the news of the promised Messiah whose kingdom will never end. Impossible? Not for God.

- The gift of God is salvation through Jesus.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ EPHESIANS 2:1-5.

How are we described in this passage?

What is the gift that God gives according to these verses?

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ PHILIPPIANS 4:19.

What does God provide for us? How?

- Jesus brings me _____ .

Apply

What difference should Christmas make in your life?

Have you gotten caught up in the lights and presents of the season and missed the real point? If so, what will you do differently this year?

What do you need Jesus to bring you this year?

The announcement of the impossible gift of salvation came to the most improbable place and the most unlikely person. But, it is just like God to do that. He is always reaching out into the craziest places to touch the desperate and hurting.

How has God reached out to you in this study?

Who is the one you want to see God reach? Will you be God's voice in their world?

Pray

Father, thank You for the gift of Your Son, Jesus. Amazingly, You gave sinners like us the gift of salvation. You provided grace when we deserved judgment. Please let us be Your voice of grace to those around us this Christmas season. In Jesus' name, amen.

Dig Deeper

Context

Having just described the announcement of John the Baptist's birth, Luke proceeded with a description of the announcement of Jesus' birth. This account is tied to the first not only by the parallelism between the two accounts but also by the mention of the sixth month (1:26) and of two of the main characters from the previous account: the angel Gabriel (1:26ff.) and Elizabeth (1:36–37). An even more important tie between the accounts is that the whole significance of John the Baptist's ministry, as pointed out in 1:17, is found in his preparation for the One coming after him who was more powerful than he (3:16). The parallels between the two accounts are found both in content and form.

This passage assumes and builds upon the previous one. The mighty work God has done in John the Baptist's conception would be surpassed by an even greater miracle in the virginal conception of Jesus, God's Son. The mighty work God foretold he would do through John the Baptist's ministry would be surpassed by an even greater work through his Son's ministry. Whereas John would be "great in the sight of the Lord" (1:15), Jesus would be great without qualification (1:32) and would be called the Son of God (1:35).

Much research has been expended in an attempt to explain the origin of the story Luke reported here. It is clear from the first chapter of Matthew as well as the traditional nature of the material in Luke 1–2 that Luke did not create all this material. In the past attempts have been made to explain the origin of the virgin birth story by proposing that the early church borrowed mythical material from pagan sources. Yet it is clear today that one cannot explain the virgin birth traditions as originating from pagan sources. There are simply no clear pagan parallels. The Jewish nature of the virgin birth traditions also

make this theory most improbable.⁴¹ Attempts have also been made to see the virgin birth traditions as originating from Jewish myths. Yet we find no evidence anywhere of a Jewish expectation that the Messiah would be born of a virgin. If one is open to the possibility of God entering into history and being able to transcend the “laws of nature,” it is not difficult to believe that the God who raised his Son from the dead and empowered him to do many mighty miracles could have sent him into the world by the miracle of the virgin birth.

Comments

1:26 In the sixth month. This refers not to the sixth month of the year but to the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy as indicated by 1:36.

Nazareth, a town in Galilee. The qualifying phrase was to help Luke’s intended readers, who were non-Palestinian, understand Nazareth’s location.

1:27 To a virgin. Luke clearly emphasized that Mary was a virgin (not just a “girl” as in the NEB) both before and after conception (1:34–35). For Luke’s tendency to pair men and women, see comments on 13:19.

Pledged to be married. Marriage consisted of two distinct stages: engagement followed by the marriage itself. Engagement involved a formal agreement initiated by a father seeking a wife for his son. The next most important person involved was the father of the bride. A son’s opinion would be sought more often in the process than a daughter’s. Upon payment of a purchase price to the bride’s father (for he lost a daughter and helper whereas the son’s family gained one) and a written agreement and/or oath by the son, the couple was engaged. Although during this stage the couple in some instances cohabited, this was the exception. An engagement was legally binding, and any sexual contact by the daughter with another person was considered adultery. The engagement could not be broken save through divorce (Matt 1:19), and the parties during this period were considered husband and wife (Matt 1:19–20, 24). At this time Mary likely was no more than fifteen years old, probably closer to thirteen, which was the normal age for betrothal.

A descendant of David. This describes Joseph, not the virgin as is evident from Luke’s reintroduction of Mary (“the virgin’s name”) immediately following this description. If it referred to Mary, Luke could simply have said “a descendant of David whose name was Mary.” By this comment Luke was preparing his readers for what he would say in 1:32–33. The importance of the Davidic descent of Jesus is evident from 2:4; 3:23–38 (cf. Matt 1:1–17; Rom 1:3; 2 Tim 2:8). Compare 2 Esdr 12:32, where the Messiah is equated with the Son of David.

Mary. Luke made nothing of the etymology of this name (“exalted one”).

1:28 Greetings. “Hail” (RSV) was a normal form of address in the NT and the Greek world. Some have sought to see in this greeting a special emphasis to “rejoice” (*chaire*, cf. Luke 1:14), but Luke’s readers would not have understood this as anything more than a normal greeting.

You who are highly favored. Mary had been “graced” by God in that she had been chosen to bear God’s Son (1:31, 35). She had not been chosen for this task because she possessed a particular piety or holiness of life that merited this privilege. The text suggests no special worthiness on Mary’s part. Some scholars have argued that behind the Greek term for “highly favored” lies a Hebrew word that translates into the name “Hannah” and that there may therefore be an echo here of Samuel’s miraculous birth to Hannah. Luke, however, made nothing of this, and Theophilus would never have picked up a subtle play on words in Hebrew. The Latin Vulgate translated this “full of grace” (*gratia plena*).

The Lord is with you. Compare Judg 6:12; Ruth 2:4. This is not a wish (“may the Lord be with you”) but a statement and refers to God’s mighty power being present and upon Mary.

1:29 Mary was greatly troubled. Compare 1:12. Mary's surprise was not primarily because it was not customary for a man to greet a woman but because it was not customary for an *angel* to greet a woman.

1:30 Do not be afraid. This parallels 1:13.

You have found favor with God. Here as in Judg 6:17; 2 Sam 15:25 (cf. 1 Sam 1:18) the issue is God's gracious choice, not Mary's particular piety (cf. Gen 6:8); for unlike Luke 1:6, nothing is made of Mary's personal piety either before or after this verse. The emphasis is on God's sovereign choice, not on human acceptability.

1:31 You will be with child. For the combination of *conceive*, *bear*, and *call*, which we find in this verse, see Gen 16:11; Judg 13:3, 5; Isa 7:14; Matt 1:21. For other instances in which women "name" their child or are told the name of their child, see Gen 16:11; 30:13; Judg 13:24; 1 Sam 1:20.

You are to give him the name Jesus. This means "He shall be called Jesus." (Cf. Matt 1:25, where Joseph named him "Jesus" as a sign of his legal adoption.) This is fulfilled in Luke 2:21.

Jesus. Although heaven-given names usually have etymological significance, nothing is made of this by Luke. Contrast, however, Matt 1:21.

1:32 Here Luke began a fivefold description about "who" Jesus is.

He will be great. This greatness contrasts with the rest of humanity, which is not great, and also with the greatness of John the Baptist, whose greatness was not "absolute" but qualified with "in the sight of the Lord" (Luke 1:15). Thus Jesus and John were both alike ("great") and different (Jesus' greatness is an unqualified greatness). This adjective functions not as a name but rather indicates his being and nature.

He ... will be called the Son of the Most High. This means "will be the Son of God." This is evident from Matt 5:9 and Luke 6:35, where "will be called" in Matthew has the same meaning as "will be" in Luke (cf. also Rom 9:7; Heb 11:18; Gen 21:12). "Most High" is a circumlocution for God (Luke 1:35, 76; 6:35; Acts 7:48). Once again Jesus is shown to be greater than John the Baptist, for John is described as a "prophet" of the Most High (Luke 1:76) whereas Jesus is described as "Son" of the Most High. The mention of Jesus' divine sonship before mention of his Davidic messiahship in the next part of the verse indicates that the latter is grounded in the former and that Jesus' messiahship should be interpreted in terms of his sonship.

The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David. Clearly 2 Sam 7:12–13, 16 and Jesus' role as Israel's Messiah are in view here. Compare Luke 1:69; 2:4, 11; Acts 2:30 for this same emphasis. Jesus' Davidic descent already has been alluded to in Luke 1:27, where Joseph is described as "a descendant of David."

1:33 He will reign over the house of Jacob. Like the previous description, this description depicts Jesus as the awaited Messiah. Thus, like David, he is the King of Israel. The "house of Jacob" was a traditional term to describe Israel (Exod 19:3; Isa 2:5–6; 8:17; 48:1).

Forever. The eternal rule of the Davidic kingship is taught in 2 Sam 7:13, 16; Pss 89:4, 29; 132:12; Isa 9:7, but in this verse it is the final Davidic King, the Messiah, who will reign forever. Compare also Dan 7:13–14, where one "like a son of man" is given an everlasting kingdom.

His kingdom will never end. This may be an allusion to Isa 9:6 (LXX) or to Dan 7:14. The kingdom of God that is realized in the coming of Jesus and is to be consummated at the parousia will continue forever.

1:34 How ... since I am a virgin? Literally *since I know no man*. Although technically Joseph was Mary's husband (see comments on 1:27), no sexual consummation had as yet taken place (cf. Matt 1:25). The word "know" is used to describe the sexual act. Attempts to interpret the Lukan account as portraying a normal birth by a virgin who will give birth in a normal way, i.e., by later sexual intercourse with her husband, are impossible since the angelic message had not mentioned Joseph or the normal marital relationship. Furthermore, since it would be natural to assume that a young woman would in the marital

relationship bear children, the angelic message is interpreted by Mary as meaning that she, as she was then, i.e., as a virgin, was to bear a son; and she asked, "How?" That this was to be a virgin birth⁴⁹ is also confirmed by the fact that, since Jesus is greater than John the Baptist, his birth must also be greater. If John's birth was miraculous but Jesus' birth was the result of a normal sexual relationship, then the whole parallel between 1:5–25 and 1:26–38 breaks down at this point. Jesus' birth had to be greater than that of John the Baptist, and this requires us to understand his birth as a virgin birth. Luke told his readers this to prepare them for 1:35.

Attempts to interpret Mary's words in this verse as expressing a vow of perpetual virginity (several early church fathers) are incorrect. (Such explanations clash with Matt 1:25, which implies that after the birth of Jesus, Joseph and Mary had a normal husband-wife relationship.) Although Luke and Matthew both clearly affirmed that Jesus' conception was miraculous in that Mary was a virgin when she conceived, what is most important in the NT teaching of the virgin birth (or virginal conception) is not the manner in which God sent his Son but the fact that he sent him. To use later terminology we might say that what is of primary importance is not the virgin birth but the incarnation. In other words it is not the "how" but the "what" of Christmas that is most important.

Mary's question should not be understood as reflecting the same kind of doubt Zechariah possessed (Luke 1:18), since there is present no rebuke as in 1:19–23.

1:35 The Holy Spirit will come upon you. For similar wording see Acts 1:8. Whereas John the Baptist was filled with the Spirit from his mother's womb (Luke 1:15), Jesus was conceived by the Spirit, and this witnesses to his being greater than John.

And the power of the Most High will overshadow you. This sentence stands in synonymous parallelism with the preceding one. Luke was fond of referring to the Spirit's influence as "power" (see comments on 1:17). For "overshadow" cf. 9:34. There is no allusion here to the shekinah glory "overshadowing" Mary.

So. "So" (literally *Therefore*) is causal and has been explained in two ways: (1) Jesus is God's Son because of the Spirit's activity in causing the virgin birth, and (2) Jesus is holy because of the Spirit's activity.⁵² According to John's Gospel, Jesus was God's Son before creation (John 1:1–3), so that the manner of his birth would have nothing to do with his nature or being. Yet it is dangerous to read into our passage John's teaching on preexistence, since Luke did not explicitly teach this theological concept in Luke-Acts. A determining factor in this issue involves how the rest of this verse should be translated.

The holy one to be born shall be called the Son of God. The other possible way of translating this sentence is "the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God" (footnote in NIV; RSV). Both are grammatically possible; but in light of Luke 2:23, where there is a similar construction, "holy" is the object of the verb. Thus the marginal translation of the NIV and the RSV is better. If we have "holy" and "Son of God" here, we have a better parallel to the twofold description in 1:32, where we have "great" and "Son of the Most High." It is better therefore to understand the Spirit's activity as resulting in the Son of God's being called, i.e., being (see comments on 1:32) "holy." In light of 2:23 the term "holy" is best interpreted as designating not a particular ethical quality (as in Acts 3:14) so much as indicating that the Son of God was to be dedicated or set aside for a unique, divine purpose. Each firstborn male (Luke 2:23) was consecrated to God. This does not mean that the firstborn possessed a moral or ethical quality over his brothers at birth. Rather he was dedicated to God in a unique way because God had a special claim on the firstborn (cf. 2:23). In a similar way the Son of God through his conception by the Spirit was set apart by God for a divine task. In this sense "holy" is related to "anointed," which also points out that God set apart (and equipped) his Son for a particular task (cf. how "anointed" and "holy servant" are closely related in Acts 4:27). For Jesus as "holy," cf. Luke 4:34; Acts 3:14; 4:27, 30.

One should not read into this verse the thought that since Jesus was not conceived through sexual intercourse he was as a result “uncontaminated” by such a natural birth. Rather, Luke sought to teach that since Jesus’ birth was entirely due to the “overshadowing” of the Holy Spirit, Jesus would be uniquely set aside for God’s service, i.e., he would be “holy.”

Son of God. At times this title is a synonym for Messiah/Christ (4:41; Acts 9:20, 22). We find a similar paralleling of the title “Son of God” and of the Davidic Messiah in Rom 1:3–4. Yet Jesus cannot be described simply in messianic terms such as the Son of David. He is more than this, and the title “Son of God” carries with it other implications as well. The title does not demand an ontological sense of preexistence, but it allows for this.⁵⁵

1:36 Sixth month. Compare 1:26. Elizabeth’s conception of John the Baptist when she was past childbearing age reveals God’s miraculous power and confirms the angelic message to Mary. God already had done the impossible in Elizabeth’s case so that the problem Mary raised in 1:34 is insignificant.

1:37 For with God nothing will be impossible. Compare Gen 18:14 (LXX), where the same expression is found; cf. also Matt 19:26; Job 42:2; Zech 8:6 for the same thought. This refers primarily to Mary’s conceiving as a virgin, but it also alludes to Elizabeth’s conceiving referred to in the previous verse.

1:38 I am the Lord’s servant.... May it be to me as you have said. Compare 1 Sam 1:18. Whereas Zechariah and Elizabeth provide an example for the reader of true discipleship in their obedience to the commandments and regulations of the OT (1:6), Mary is exemplary because of her submission to God’s will.

Then the angel left her. Luke frequently concluded an account with such a departure (cf. 1:23, 56; 2:20; 5:25; 8:39; 24:12).

The Lukan Message

Although the present account involves a conversation between the angel Gabriel and the virgin Mary, the key figure in this section is clearly Mary’s future offspring—Jesus, just as the key figure of the previous section was Zechariah and Elizabeth’s future offspring—John the Baptist. As might be expected, Luke used this section dealing with Jesus’ conception to reveal Christological insights to his readers. He did this through the same reliable messenger from God which the reader already met in 1:5–25. The angel Gabriel, coming from God’s presence (1:19), informs us of what we should know about Jesus of Nazareth. Luke in no way minimized John the Baptist’s greatness in describing Jesus. Rather he showed that whereas John was great, Jesus is greater still. This is shown in several ways. John was “great in the sight of the Lord” (1:15), but Jesus is “great” (1:32), and his greatness is unqualified. Whereas John is later described as “a prophet of the Most High” (1:76), Jesus is the “Son of the Most High” (1:32). Whereas John’s birth was miraculous and had OT parallels, Jesus’ birth was even more miraculous. John’s conception, like that of Isaac, Samson, and Samuel, was miraculous; but Jesus’ conception was absolutely unique. It was not just quantitatively greater; it was qualitatively different. Whereas John’s task was to prepare for the Coming One (1:17, 76–79), Jesus is the Coming One who will reign forever (1:33); and whereas John was filled with the Spirit while still in the womb (1:15), Jesus’ very conception would be due to the Spirit’s miraculous activity in a virgin (1:35–37).

Various aspects of the Lukan Christology that appear in this passage are Jesus as the Son of God (1:32, 35), Jesus as the Davidic Messiah (1:32–33) and King whose reign is eternal (1:33), and Jesus as the Holy One (1:35). Jesus’ greatness described in our text is not due to any human achievement on his part. The greatness of Mary’s son is not a result of his human striving. In light of this account no adoptionist Christology can be found in Luke. Jesus is the Messiah and Son of God from birth. In fact he was this before birth as 1:41–45 indicates. Luke sought to show his readers that Jesus, who was already

well known to them, was born in a unique way and was already Son of God, Christ, and King before his birth.

Several other Lukan emphases also appear in this account. These involve the Holy Spirit once again acting in history and his association with the power of God (1:35). We also have present a model of Christian obedience in Mary's acquiescence to the divine will (1:38). Finally, as in 1:5–25, we are not dealing with the literary genre of myth here. On the contrary Luke was using the literary form of historical narrative and expected his readers to understand that he was recalling history.¹

¹ Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, vol. 24, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 80–88.