

“The Son of the Most High”

(Luke 1:26-38)

Introduction

➤ There is a lot of talk today about miracles. Medicines are advertised as “miracle” products that can cure you of anything ranging from fatness to baldness, and from stress to depression. Books are written on “finding your miracle,” “preparing for your miracle,” and even “keeping your miracle.” Today, even sermons are being preached on topics like “expect a miracle,” “five keys to getting your miracle,” and “how to unwrap your miracle.” We even use the word in as a superlative in our daily language (e.g., sport teams need a “miraculous” turnover or make “miraculous” plays; we talk about the “miracle” of the birth of a child; and say “it was a miracle” when we pass a test that we thought we would fail, or get a job that we thought we could not get).

What is a miracle? Some define a miracle as any unexplained phenomenon, unforeseen occurrence, or unimaginable blessing. And some people do not even believe in miracles at all. Is everything a miracle, or is anything a miracle? What exactly is a miracle? Biblically speaking, we can define a miracle as follows:

A miracle is a supernatural work of God,
which goes beyond the ordinary powers of nature,
and points to a revelation concerning God!

➤ As you can see, miracles are not primarily about us. Ultimately all miracles seek to display God in a very real and absolute way – this is why, biblically, they are often referred to as a “*sign*” (a sign is meant to give information or direction).

By definition, all miracles are supernatural [a “supernatural miracle” is redundant; in the Bible we find “miraculous powers” or “mighty works” (*dynamis*); “signs” (*sēmeion*) and “wonders” (*teras*)]. That is, a true miracle suspends or defies natural law (e.g., raising the dead to life, multiplying bread and fish, walking on water, etc.).

➤ This is true concerning the story found in Luke 1:26-33. This passage is not a lesson on “How to prepare for receiving your miracle.” It is not a formula that we can apply to our lives to ensure that we can elicit a miracle from God (the passage is descriptive, not prescriptive). In fact, it is not about our miracles at all. It is primarily concerning the miraculous birth of Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God. Jesus’ birth was truly miraculous!

Luke 1:26-39 ~ “In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, ²⁷to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin’s name was Mary. ²⁸And he came to her and said, ‘Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!’ ²⁹But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰And the angel said to her, ‘Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.

³¹And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. ³²He 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, ³³and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.’

³⁴And Mary said to the angel, ‘How will this be, since I am a virgin?’ ³⁵And 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. ³⁶And 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. ³⁷For nothing will be impossible with God.’ ³⁸And 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.”

➤ This passage can be outlined into three major divisions, each highlighting the sovereignty of God in the miraculous birth of His Son, Jesus Christ.

i. Jesus was born according to God's sovereign plan (vs.26-30)

➤ Our passage begins with a bit of obscurity: *"In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth"* (vs.26). In *"the sixth month"* of what? The context (vs.24, 36) reveals that this is in reference to the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy. Elizabeth, who was Mary's *"relative"* (vs.36), was six months pregnant with "John the Baptist", when the angel Gabriel visited Mary (Gabriel also visited Elizabeth's husband Zachariah; Lk.1:19). John the Baptist, who was divinely appointed to be the forerunner to the Messiah, actually leapt for joy in the womb when he heard the sound of Mary's voice when she was pregnant with Jesus (Lk.1:41, 44).

So, six months into Elizabeth's pregnancy, *"the angel Gabriel"* (vs.26) visited Mary who was *"a city of Galilee named Nazareth"* (vs.26). Nazareth was a small, obscure, and seemingly insignificant town – about 75-100 miles north of Jerusalem.

John 1:45-46 ~ "Philip found Nathanael and said to him, 'We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.' ⁴⁶Nathanael said to him, 'Can anything good come out of Nazareth?' Philip said to him, 'Come and see.'"

➤ While Jesus was born in Bethlehem, Judea (as fulfillment of Old Testament Messianic prophecies; Matt.2:1-8), much of His public ministry was in Galilee – He had lived in Nazareth, Galilee and set up His Galilean headquarters in Capernaum (after those in His hometown tried to kill Him; Lk.4:16-31) – and many of the miracles He performed were on and around the Sea of Galilee.

➤ The angel Gabriel came to Nazareth to visit a young woman named Mary (and presumably her fiancé Joseph as well; see Matt.1:20). In verse twenty-seven Mary is described as *"a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph"* (vs.27). In ancient Judaism, to be betrothed was to be pledged or engaged to be married. Which meant, in that culture, Mary was legally bound to Joseph (and he to her), but not officially married yet. To break off an engagement in those times meant you had to write out a certificate of divorce (see Matt.1:18-19). While the engaged couple were legally considered "husband" and "wife", they did not live together nor have sexual relations until after the wedding ceremony. Betrothals could last as long as one year.

➤ The fact that Joseph was *"of the house of David"* (vs.27) is extremely significant. For God revealed that the Messiah would come from the lineage of King David. This was to fulfill God's covenant with David (2Sam.7:12-13), and to be one of the indicators of the true Messiah. That is, God's Messiah would perfectly fulfill all of God's prophecies concerning Him. Through His birth, life, death, and resurrection Jesus has already fulfilled at least 300 Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah – and there are more He will fulfill in His Second Coming. More important than the number of prophecies He fulfilled (which is important) is the percentage of Messianic prophecies He has fulfilled – 100% (He could not be the Messiah from God if He failed to fulfill even one prophecy)!

Every major part of Jesus' birth was a fulfillment of divine prophecy (prophecies given 700-800 years before His birth. Here are just some of the biblical prophecies fulfilled in the birth of Jesus Christ: His incarnation (Gen.3:15; Jn.1:1-3, 14); His virgin birth (Is.7:14; Matt.1:23; Lk.1:27, 34); His birth in Bethlehem (Mic.5:2; Matt.2:1-8; Lk.2:4, 15); His being from the family line of David (2Sam.7:12-13); His trip through Egypt (Hos.11:1; Matt.2:13-20).

➤ Luke's Gospel account of the birth of Christ reveals that, according to God's sovereign plan, it was time for God's Messiah (Son) to be born. God sovereignly chose a young woman named Mary to be the biological mother of Jesus Christ. From a human perspective, there was nothing really special about Mary. She was not wealthy or famous or influential. In fact, she was the opposite of all those attributes. Scholars believe that when Gabriel visited Mary, she was a teenager. She was engaged to be married to a man who was equally unimpressive. What Joseph and Mary had, however, was of the utmost importance – they were humble and godly people who put their faith in God.

➤ The Gospel of Luke gives us the account of Gabriel’s visit to Mary, and the Gospel of Matthew gives us the account of an angel’s (presumably Gabriel) visit to Joseph: *“And [Gabriel] came to her and said, ‘Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!’²⁹ But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be.³⁰ And the angel said to her, ‘Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God’* (vs.28-30).

It is clear that Mary did not deserve the great honor of being the mother of the Messiah, and it is clear that she knew she did not deserve it. She had found unmerited *“favor”* with God [*“favored”* (*charitoō*, vs.28) and *“favor”* (*charis*, vs.30)]. These words could be translated “greatly graced” or “full of grace.” This does not mean that Mary could dispense God’s grace, but that she was the recipient of God’s grace [she is not co-messiah (co-redemptrix), or a mediatrix as some Catholics believe and teach]. She was not able to provide people with grace (or forgiveness) from God, but was one who had herself received grace from God. Mary was indeed “highly favored” from God, as she was sovereignly chosen by God to give birth to Jesus Christ.

➤ Notice the sovereign plan of God. Prior to the angelic visitations concerning the birth of Jesus Christ, there was 400 years of silence from God; four centuries since the last prophecy or proclamation from God. Now, through angelic messengers, God speaks – first to Zechariah (the father of John the Baptist), then to Mary and Joseph, and then to shepherds, etc.). The time for the long-awaited Messiah to come had arrived!

God chose to have His one and only Son be born not in a prominent city (like Jerusalem or Rome), but in a small and despised town (born in Bethlehem, and from Nazareth); God chose to have His one and only Son born not in a palace, but in a barn or cave; God chose to have His one and only Son born not to royalty or religious leaders, but to a poor and ordinary couple (who ultimately could be shunned for their “out-of-wedlock” pregnancy).

God looked over every prominent region and city. He passed by Judea and Jerusalem. He ignored prominent and rich families. He skipped parents who were kings, priests, or wealthy. He passed over everything that you and I would probably have selected, and over everyone you and I would have probably chosen.

1 Cor 1:18, 25-31 ~ “For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ...²⁵For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. ²⁶For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. ²⁷But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; ²⁸God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, ²⁹so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. ³⁰And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, ³¹so that, as it is written, ‘Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.’”

➤ Mary was a poor, ordinary, uninfluential young woman (teenager) – barely old enough to have a child let alone be mother to the Messiah, and certainly not of the social status, religious rank, or worldly wealth someone might expect for the one from whom the Christ would come. Jesus was born to ordinary parents, not people of prominence or power. He came as a humble servant, not a conquering king (not yet). He was born in an obscure little town (Bethlehem), rather than one of the more prestigious cities of His day.

This is a great and necessary reminder to us that God does not choose us based on our talents, accomplishments, or popularity. He doesn’t need our intellect, our money, or our abilities. God chooses those who will serve Him with all sincerity and humility. In doing so, it is explicitly clear that we are dependent upon Him, and that He deserves and will receive all the glory.

2. Jesus was born for God's sovereign purpose (vs.31-33)

➤ God's sovereign purpose, in the birth of His Son, was to give to us a Savior. The name "*Jesus*" (*Iēsous*; vs.31) literally means "the LORD saves" or "salvation comes from the LORD" (from the Old Testament Hebrew Jeshua or YHWH). This is why Gabriel commanded Mary, and Joseph, to name Him Jesus: "*And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus*" (vs.31).

Matt 1:21 ~ "She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."

1 John 3:5 ~ "You know that he appeared in order to take away sins, and in him there is no sin."

John 1:29 ~ "The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, 'Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!'"

The name Jesus describes both who Jesus is (the Savior from God) and what He came to do (save His people from their sins). Jesus is the one and only Savior from God, the only means by which a person can be saved from (forgiven of) their sins. Salvation comes through no one else (Acts 4:12), for Jesus Christ is "*the way, the truth, and the life*" – no one can come to the Father except through Him (Jn.14:6; Jn.3:18, 36; 1Jn.2:23; 5:11-12).

➤ Jesus is not only the one and only Savior from God, He is also the one and only Son of God. As Gabriel made clear, Mary's baby would not be an ordinary baby: "*He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High*" (vs.32; also "*the Son of God*", vs.35). The phrase "*Most high*" (*hypsistos*; vs.32, 35), is a clear reference to the one true God – the Highest God. People would build shrines in high places to their false gods, God is greater and higher than all. It is a title for God which indicates His unrivaled supremacy over everything. In the Old Testament, in Hebrew, this title for God was "El Elyon" (see Gen.14:18-20). He is the God above all gods; the greatest, strongest, and only true God. God is not merely might, He is the Almighty! He is the Creator of all things, and the sovereign owner and ruler over all things.

Jesus is "*the Son of the Most High*" God (vs.32; see Lk.1:76; 8:28). This is a clear reference to the deity of Christ (see Matt.1:23; Jn.8:58; 10:30; 14:9; Phil.2:6-9; Col.1:19; 2:9).

Heb 1:1-3 ~ "Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, ²but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. ³He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high"

John 1:1-3, 14 ~ "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God. ³All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. ... ¹⁴And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth."

➤ As the one and only Son of God, and one and only Savior from God, Jesus is enthroned as the King of all creation: "*And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, ³³and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end*" (vs.32-33). This is a specific reference to the covenant God made with king David, that the Messiah would come through the lineage of David and reign over God's people forever and ever (2 Sam.7:12-16; Ps.2:6-8; 89:29).

Isa 9:6-7 ~ "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. ⁷Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this."

John 18:36-37 ~ “Jesus answered, ‘My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world.’ ³⁷Then Pilate said to him, ‘So you are a king?’ Jesus answered, ‘You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world – to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.’”

➤ Christ will come again, and He will bring final (eternal) judgment to all unbelievers and all Satan forces. At His Second Coming, He will also bring final (eternal) salvation to all who received Him and Lord and Savior, and establish His earthly kingdom of righteousness, peace, and truth.

Rev 19:11-16 ~ “Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. ¹²His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. ¹³He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. ¹⁴And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. ¹⁵From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. ¹⁶On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords.”

He “*will reign ... forever*” and “*of His kingdom there will be no end*” (vs.33). The magnificent words of Handel’s “Hallelujah Chorus” perfectly describe the conclusion: “He shall reign forever and ever!”

3. Jesus was born by God’s sovereign power (vs.34-38)

➤ To be sure, Gabriel’s message was a lot to take in all at once, and Mary undoubtedly had questions. Her first question, as recorded in Luke’s Gospel, was “*How will this be, since I am a virgin?*” (vs.34). This was an honest question. She, unlike Zechariah (Lk.1:18), was not doubting God’s power but asking for some clarification. The implication of Gabriel’s message seems to be that this pregnancy would happen soon – if not immediately. Mary understood that she and Joseph would not consummate their marriage in time to fulfill this prophetic announcement.

In addition, according to Gabriel’s announcement, she was to give birth to “*the Son of the Most High*” (vs.32). There were undoubtedly lots of questions. It seemed as though Gabriel was saying to Mary that she would become pregnant with God’s Son without while remaining a virgin. And, indeed, that is exactly what the angel was telling her. So, Mary simply wondered how this was possible. Gabriel gave her the answer: “*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’*” (vs.35).

The birth of Jesus was definitely supernatural miracle. This was a display of the sovereign power of God, but enabling Mary to conceive was not difficult for God. He is the Creator of all things. He who made Adam from dirt, and Eve from a rib, He who created the world out of nothing, is more than able to create life in a woman’s womb.

God, through His “*Holy Spirit*” (vs.35), “*the power of the Most High*” (vs.35), merely needed to “*overshadow*” (vs.35; *episkiazō*, lit. to cast a shadow over; Matt.17:5; Acts 5:15) Mary. There was no sexual (physical) union between God and Mary (as liberal scholars and pagan mythology suggest). Jesus was miraculously (supernaturally, divinely) conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the virgin Mary.

Matt 1:20-25 ~ “But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, ‘Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.’ ²²All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:

²³‘Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel’ (which means, God with us). ²⁴When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, ²⁵but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.”

- As we have seen, this was to fulfill Old Testament prophecy, but it also enabled Jesus to be (simultaneously) fully God and fully man (see Col.1:19; 2:9). Jesus is the incarnate Son of God. That is, the Son of God in human flesh.

John 1:1-3, 14 ~ “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God. ³All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. ... ¹⁴And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

The belief that Jesus was born of a virgin is foundational and central to the Christian faith. As Christians, all that we believe about Christ begins and is built upon the true and proper understanding that Jesus Christ was virgin-born! To be sure, the birth of Jesus Christ is the most extraordinary and most unusual birth that has ever, or will ever, occur. There has never been, or will ever be, another birth like His. Why? Because Jesus is the only one who was born of a virgin! To put it another way, Jesus is the only person who while having a biological (human) mother does not have a biological (human) father. To put it still another way, Jesus is the only person who has been born of a woman and conceived by Almighty God. That is why Jesus’ birth is so critical for our understanding and faith.

Jesus needed to be born (fully God and fully man; Col.1:19; 2:9), so that He could be our substitute – to live the sinless life that we could not live, and to die the death we deserved to die. The Bible emphatically and repeatedly states that Jesus Christ was, is and will always be sinless (see Is.53:9; 2Cor.5:21; Heb.7:26; 1Pet.2:22-24; 1Jn.3:5). Jesus is the only person to be absolutely sinless. Jesus is the Savior, He never needed a Savior! He perfectly fulfilled all of God’s requirements, obeyed all of God’s commands. He, therefore, died on the cross not for His own sin but for the sins of all who would ever believe. This is referred to as His “substitutionary death” (or the “substitutionary atonement” of Christ). Meaning, Jesus died in our place for our sins. God treated Jesus as if He had lived our sinful lives, and God treats those who are saved as if they lived Jesus’ perfect life. This has been called “the great exchange” – Christ bearing the punishment and death for our unrighteousness while we receive the glory and reward for His righteousness (see Is.53:4-6; 2Cor.5:21).

- What this is difficult for us to comprehend, we must acknowledge that this is not difficult for God to accomplish. Gabriel told Mary about Elisabeth as an example of God’s sovereign power: *“And behold, your relative Elisabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren”* (vs.36). Elisabeth’s pregnancy was also a miracle from God.

Elisabeth’s pregnancy was a miracle because she was *“barren”* (Lk.1:7), as well as the fact that her and her husband were also *“advanced in years”* (Lk.1:7, 18). Consequently, it was biologically impossible for them to conceive a child. However, there is a huge difference between Elisabeth’s miraculous pregnancy and that of Mary’s. God supernaturally enabled Elisabeth and her husband (Zechariah) to conceive a child, where Mary conceived a child by the Holy Spirit of God.

- Why did Gabriel tell Mary about Elisabeth. One reason was to convince her that *“nothing will be impossible with God”* (vs.37). God has no weaknesses, no limitations outside of His divine nature. In that sense, there is nothing that God cannot do (see Matt.19:26).

Isa 46:8-11 ~ “Remember this and stand firm, recall it to mind, you transgressors, ⁹remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, ¹⁰declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose,’ ¹¹calling a bird of prey from the east, the man of my counsel from a far country. I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass; I have purposed, and I will do it.”

Psa 115:3 ~ “Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases.”

- Mary humbly and faithfully submitted to God's calling upon her life: *"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"* (vs.38). She would then visit Elizabeth (almost 100 miles south to "a town in Judah", Lk.1:39), where John the Baptist would leap in the womb in recognition of the presence of the Messiah (Lk.1:41-44). Then, Mary would burst into a magnificent proclamation of praise to the Lord (Lk.1:46-55).

Conclusion

- It is interesting, and important, to see that although the stories of the announcements of the miraculous births John the Baptist and Jesus seem very similar, they are in reality stories of contrasts: . Zechariah and his wife were elderly; Mary and Joseph were young. Zechariah and Elizabeth were married; Mary and Joseph were engaged to be married. Elizabeth was barren; Mary was a virgin. Zechariah doubted the angel's message; Mary (and Joseph) believed. Elizabeth gave birth (possibly) in her home, Mary gave birth in a barn or cave.

What makes these contrasts so important? It reveals the vast difference between John the Baptist and Jesus. While John the Baptist was a great man, Jesus is the greatest man. John the Baptist was humanly conceived, Jesus was divinely conceived. John the Baptist had biological parents, Jesus had a biological mother but God is His Father. John the Baptist was a man, Jesus was a man and is the Son of God. John the Baptist was the forerunner for the Messiah, Jesus is the Messiah. John the Baptist was to call Israel back to the Lord their God, Jesus is the Lord and their God. John the Baptist preached for people to repent of their sins, Jesus died for the sins of all who would ever believe.

What is so significant about this? It reveals that Jesus Christ is indeed the true Savior sent from God. Jesus Christ is fully God and fully man – the Son of God (divinity) and the Son of Man (humanity). The birth of Jesus Christ is indisputable proof that Jesus is the one and only Savior from God, and the one and only Son of God. At Christmas we celebrate the coming of God's Messiah – Jesus Christ – the Son of the Most High.