

## A Unique Conception

Luke 1:26-38

~~If you're watching on FB Live today, we're giving away Ferrari's to everyone in the audience.~~ Growing up I loved the ninja turtles. My favorite one was Michaelangelo. He said dude a lot and always ordered the pizza. My kind of guy. But there were three others Rafael, Donatello, and Leonardo. And of course you know that the ninja turtles go their names from 4 renaissance artists, M and L being the most famous. And if you look up here [\(pic\)](#), you'll see Leonardo Da Vinci's first major work, he did this when he was 20 years old and it's a picture of what's called The Annunciation. It's the scene in Luke 1 where Gabriel announces to Mary that she's going to have a son and it's this text that we're going to take a look at today... Pray.

**"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."**

We've got a visit from angel here named Gabriel. He's one of two angels whose names we know in Scripture, the other one being Michael (and technically Abaddon in Rev. 9:11). Gabriel is never identified as an archangel—Michael is (1 Thess. 4:16, Jude 1:9) And Gabriel appears to three people throughout Scripture. His first appearance is to Daniel in Daniel chapter 8 when he is helping him understand a vision that he's had, the second comes right before the passage we read today. Gabriel appears to a man named Zechariah and tells that even though his and his wife Elisabeth are barren and far beyond, childbearing years, they're going to have a son named John. You and I know him as John the Baptist, and he would prepare the way for Mary's Son...

Now the text says that Mary was betrothed to a man named Joseph. What does it mean that she was betrothed? The closest thing we have today is engagement, but engagement is far less binding than betrothal. Betrothal was the first step in the two-step Jewish marriage process. It was a legal pledge where a man and a woman formally and publicly pledged to be married and the Bride's father received a bride price—essentially compensation for the fact that their family was losing a household helper. At this point the bride was legally bound to the groom and was referred to as his wife. And about a year later, the actual marriage ceremony would take place and they would consummate the marriage.

But when it comes to this story, it's very important that we realize that the second part of the marriage process—the consummation—has not happened yet. The text makes it clear that that this woman was a virgin. The text says it twice in vs 27, and then Mary calls herself a virgin in vs. 34. And this really sets the stage for the miraculous nature of the announcement that's about to take place.

**"And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!"**

Now before we continue with the narrative we have to pause and chat for a second—not because I really want to but because I feel like we need to. This is a Protestant church and you may or may not know that Catholics and Protestants have very different views when it comes to Mary, or as they would call her "The Blessed Mother". And I want to look at this for just a second because the way that Rome has interpreted this phrase has had a massive effect on Catholic doctrine and even pop culture when it comes to Mary and it's based in large measure on this verse...

The Bible was originally written in Greek and Hebrew and in the 4<sup>th</sup> century a guy named Jerome translated the Bible into Latin. And it's the Latin Bible that the Catholic Church adopted in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Why is this a problem? Well, it's actually a decent translation but Jerome made an error on this

verse and his error will live on in Catholic doctrine forever. Where your Bibles say, “Greetings, O favored one” Jerome translated it, “Hail Mary full of grace.” It’s this combined with vs. 42 (...blessed are you among women) that serves as the ground for Roman Catholic Mariology. Specifically, vs 28 and 42 are the grounds for the Catholic Hail Mary (and you thought it was just a football play), the third prayer in the Catholic Rosary. And it’s been popularized even in the Protestant world through, “Ave Maria”.

Now it’s a beautiful song, but it communicates the Catholic doctrine that Mary can give grace to people; that Mary is a dispenser of God’s grace. But it’s simply not true. Not only is that a mistranslation, but even “full of grace” was correct it doesn’t mean that Mary can dispense God’s grace. How do we know that? Acts 6 says that Stephen was, “full of grace” and he was actually performing signs and wonders and we never led to believe that we should be coming to him for mercy. And I suspect that many of you have never prayed to Mary and this may seem like a foreign concept to you, but some of you have a Catholic background and you may even have firsthand experience here, just know that we come to God and God alone for grace and because only He gives grace only he is worthy of our praise...

Now having said all of that, it’s still worth noting that being the mother of the Messiah is an unbelievable privilege that no one else will ever get. God has certainly shown her unique favor and blessing and it’s right to recognize that. And yet as the angel announces this to Mary, she’s doesn’t rejoice immediately. She’s perplexed. The text says, **But she was greatly troubled at the saying and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be.** This is understandable. It’s not every day that an angel talks to you.

**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.’** Now many of us have heard this story and we just accept it, but if you put yourself in her shoes, moms in the room would be upset. Gabriel ruined the gender reveal party! Like would you be disappointed if someone told you what you were going to name your kid? Can he be Dawson? No it’s Jesus and it’s a transliteration of Hebrew word meaning to save or to rescue...why?

He continues, **“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.”** It’s right here that Mary learns that she is going to give birth to a king whose reign will last forever...It’s not accident that vs. 27 says that Joseph was of the house of David. This is nothing less than the fulfillment of the Promise that God made to David hundreds of years ago.

2 Sam. 7:12-13, **12 When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. 13 He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.”** Ps. 89:3b-4, **“I have sworn to David my servant; I will establish your offspring forever, and build your throne for all generations.”** Isa. 9:7, **“Of 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.”** And if you’re an Israelite you’re longing for that Davidic King to come so it could be like the good ole days, and this angel has come to announce to a Jewish teenager in an obscure city, that that Davidic King is coming and he’s coming into the world through her...

Now again I love Mary’s reaction, now that the angel has explained things, we expect Mary to cheer, and say something like, “Wow that’s amazing I’m so honored” but she’s concerned about the logistics! How’s this going to work—I’m a virgin? (vs 34) And the angel says that the Holy Spirit is going to come upon her and overshadow her—basically it’s going to be a miracle and you know the proof that I’m not even kidding, your relative Elizabeth who’s barren, yea I told her 6 months ago that she would have a son

named John and she's 6 months pregnant. vs. 37, "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... Now when a girl finds out she's going to be pregnant and then finds out that one of her friends is pregnant what happens, they have to get together and talk about their pregnancies forever...

As you might expect, Mary went with haste into the hill country her relative Elizabeth about what happened... and watch vs. 56 "And Mary remained with her about three months and returned home."

So she stayed a while but when happened when she got there is important, "41 And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, 42 and she exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! 43 And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? 44 For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. 45 And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord."

This is what Mary needed. Then is when it clicked and where it all came together for Mary and when she realizes that the Lord himself is going to be born to her, she explodes in praise let me just give you a taste, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name. And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation."

This is only in Luke and he gives more space to Mary's response to all of this than any of the other Gospel authors and I believe it's because he wants us to consider and learn from her response. And so as we look at it, I think it leads us to ask 3 questions... questions that are important for us personally as individuals and collectively as a church...

### **Are you blown away with the thought that God would save and use you?**

Mary is blown away to know she is going to be used as a unique vessel to carry out God's plan of redemption. And it's important that you don't miss her self-evaluation in vs. 48 where she says "for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant." She realizes that she is not a deserving candidate for this position. Like, it would make plenty of sense for the King of the Universe be born to the emperor or some rich family, not some Jewish teenager who isn't even married yet. The text says in vs. 30 that Mary found favor with God but there's not even of hint that Mary has earned or deserves this privilege—God has given his favor by sheer grace and that's one of the reasons she is so shocked. It doesn't make sense that God would use her. And it makes me ask the question, have we lost our sense of wonder when it comes to the favor and love God has shown us by grace?

I remember asking a small group one time, what if God sent everyone to hell, would that be fair? Like when it comes to God and sin, does anyone deserve a shot at forgiveness? And when you read the Scriptures it couldn't be more clear that the answer to that question is no, we don't. But this flies in the face of our culture and perhaps even our personal feelings... we're pretty good people who deserve God's love and when we think about Christ's dying to rescue us, it just makes sense—"Of course Jesus would save me. I'm gifted, I'm talented, I'm kind, I can see why God would want me on his team." But if this is us, then we have overestimated ourselves and we are on dangerous ground.

The Bible says that we've all fallen short, that we're enemies of God, haters of God, objects of wrath because we've rebelled against his perfect holiness and sovereign reign and the only thing that we deserve

is death. And until you get this you won't be amazed by grace—it's not amazing that God would send anyone to hell, it's amazing that he saves anyone. And he saves by sheer grace! The only reason you won't be in hell is because God set his affection on you before the foundation of the world. And it makes no sense that God would save a group of wretches like us.

Keller "If someone asks you if you're a Christian, you should not say, "Of course". There should be no "of course-ness" about it. It would be more appropriate to say "yes I am, that's a miracle. Me! A Christian! Who would have ever thought it? Yet he did it and I am His." It doesn't make sense that I'm a Christian, who would have ever thought that my heart would be captured by anything other than myself, and my quest for personal achievement. Oh friends, stand in awe of the grace you have received...

### **Do our lives serve to magnify God's strength or our own?**

After explaining to Mary that she's going to conceive as a virgin he caps it off with, "For nothing will be impossible with God." That that statement takes on new significance when you consider who it's coming from. Flip back with me to verse 18, and here Zechariah John the Baptist's father is doubting the angel's message that they're going to have a son vs. 18, "How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years." (Note men—he doesn't call his wife old) And listen to the first ten words out of his mouth vs. 19, "I am Gabriel, I stand in the presence of God..." This angel stands in the presence of God so when he gets to Mary and the last words out of his mouth are, "For nothing will be impossible with God" it's coming from someone who has a unique knowledge of God's power because he stands in his presence. And he's saying, "I know this whole virgin birth thing may sound impossible, but take it from someone who stands in his presence, He can do anything—things that you could never even dream of—this is nothing. You should have been there when he made the world. He just spoke and billions of stars were formed. Trust me when I say, nothing is impossible with God."

You say Chase the probability of joy and life being restored in my marriage because of all the things that have happened is about the probability of a virgin conceiving—then it is so possible with God. Chase the probability of me beating that anger, that crippling fear and worry, that greed that lust is about the probability of a virgin conceiving, I'd say, "It's so possible with God."

Now we have to be careful not to turn this into a self-help slogan. "Nothing will be impossible with God" magnifies God's strength not your potential. The takeaway is not "I can do everything I want in life with God's help" but "God can do anything he wants through your broken life!" And this goes against our culture that says you can do it. We live in a culture of "I can." But we can't—Jesus did. Unbelievers— isn't it exhausting earning your identity? Don't look inside to find the strength you need. You look outside and then he places the spirit inside so that you can operate with his strength—nothing is impossible with God.

And I include that phrase, "with God" intentionally because that's the key and that power is available to all of us—certainly Mary is unique in that she's Jesus's mother, but it would be a huge mistake to think that Christ's dwelling within Mary is a privilege reserved only for her. In Col. 1:27 Paul says that the mystery of the Gospel is Christ in you, the hope of glory! Isa. 7 said that child would be called Immanuel which means 'God with us.'" And he's still with us. He has unzipped us and placed himself inside of us so that his power is available to us and his glory and strength can be displayed in our failures, and weaknesses, and struggles. We don't think of God's power as something that's up in heaven that he rains down when we need it. If you're a believer. God's power indeed his very presence—take a deep breath—is in our hearts. God is with us which means he can do whatever he wants through us and when it comes to living with radical devotion to Christ, we are without excuse.

## Will we follow the Lord at all costs?

You look at Mary's response of faith here vs. 38, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." Now this obedience is amazing when you consider the potential cost for Mary. Her reputation could, in all likelihood be completely destroyed. While sex and pregnancy is common in our culture it's hard to express how taboo it was in this culture. Everyone would think that they either had sex before they were married, or that she cheated on Joseph and got pregnant with another dude. Because this virgin birth—in her small hometown of Nazareth—she could forever be that girl who you warn your sons about. Not only that but she risked losing economic security in being abandoned by Joseph, which is what he was going to do until the angel showed up and told him the story. And it's understandable right? Who would believe that? And she's even giving up control of naming her own kid. And yet despite severe social, relational, perhaps economical consequences her response to God's will for her is, "Let it be to me according to your word." If that's God's will, bring it on. When it comes to Mary her life is a blank check. It's a blank check for God to write for whatever he wants. Can we say the same about ourselves?

**SLOW** I say this especially with a view towards 2019 and the plans that God has for New Century Church—elder planning retreat. I pray 2019 will be nothing short of revival as we focus intensely on making disciples—and that may sound like inspiration, but it comes with cost. Is everything in your life, on the table to be spent for God's glory? Our comfort, our time, our talents, our money? Because so many of us hear God's plan and say with Mary "Let it be to me according to your Word...as long as" and then we give a list of things that we want to protect from God. And while in America following Christ will not cost you your life but it may cost you your reputation and will almost certainly your comfort. Simply put, we cannot afford to follow Christ at a safe convenient distance where we try to enjoy the therapeutic benefits of his love while avoiding sacrifice that comes with his call. J.C. Ryle said that a religion that costs nothing is worth nothing.

God is saying, "I will be with you and nothing is impossible for me, will you step into those spaces? I will work powerfully through you if you will walk in sacrificial obedience..." Will we? I say we risk it all. I say we bet the house on God's faithfulness and see what he will do.

Are the things that you're living for worth Christ dying for? (Ravenhill)  
Unbelievers don't need to live for Christ first—they need to trust Christ.