

Luke 1:26-38: "Mary's Blessed Curiosity and Blessed Yes"

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[0 : 0 0] Hi, my name is George Sinclair. I'm the lead pastor of Church of the Messiah. It is wonderful that you would like to check out some of the sermons done by Church of the Messiah, either by myself or some of the others. Listen, just a couple of things. First of all, would you pray for us that we will open God's Word well to His glory and for the good of people like yourself?

The second thing is, if you aren't connected to a church and if you are a Christian, we really, I would really like to encourage you to find a good local church where they believe the Bible, they preach the gospel, and if you have some trouble finding that, send us an email. We will do what we can to help connect you with a good local church wherever you are. And if you're a non-Christian checking us out, we're really, really, really glad you're doing that. Don't hesitate to send us questions. It helps me, actually, to know, as I'm preaching, how to deal with the types of things that you're really struggling with. So God bless.

Stanley, let's just bow our heads in prayer for a moment, please. Father, as we come to your Word, we ask, Father, that your Holy Spirit would use your Word to help us to see ourselves ourselves and to understand ourselves, to recognize ourselves. And we ask, Father, as well, that your Holy Spirit would use your Word to help us to understand you, your heart, your plans, your purposes for us. And we ask all of these things in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Savior. Amen.

Please be seated. So one of the ways, if you, there's lots of ways, obviously, to insult Canadians. No lack of ways to insult Canadians. But one way that you could insult most Canadians is if you were to say to them, you completely, you lack curiosity. You're an incurious person. I can guarantee that. If you're, if you don't believe me, just say to your neighbors over the next couple of weeks, by the way, you're an incurious person. You have no curiosity. And they will not like you for saying that. It's a way to insult Canadians. Now, I think whether or not many of our friends and neighbors would say this, I think it's probably a fairly common belief amongst many Canadians that Christians by nature are not very curious. I think many Canadians would say something like this, we haven't made any particular decision about God or anything like that. We, we're open. We're searching. We're curious. Christianity, become a Christian, you have to believe in dogma and all these beliefs, and you have to sort of believe them and all of that. And, and once you have to believe these certain types of things, then you can no longer be curious. Whether or not they say it very clearly, for many Canadians, I think that they would believe that Christianity is where curiosity goes to die. Now, I guess just a couple of things.

First of all, curiosity is a wonderful thing. And we should try to be as curious as possible. But the question is, do I say that just because I'm trying to be a very good Canadian?

[3 : 27] Or am I saying that because I want to be a good Christian? We have to acknowledge that there are many Christians, just like there are many Canadians who aren't Christians, who are in fact not curious at all. Curiosity has died within them. But is not being curious a feature of Christianity, or something which shows that we're not being a good Christian? The text that we're going to look at today, believe it or not, is a, says a lot about curiosity and what it means to be a Christian.

So if you would turn with me, we're looking at Luke chapter 1, verse 26 and following. Luke chapter 1, verse 26 and following. And we'll begin by reading verse 26. And just in terms of the context, if you go back later on and read the first 25 verses, the book of Luke is an ancient eyewitness-based biography of Jesus, written by someone who was not an eyewitness, but interviewed eyewitnesses, and wrote when many, many eyewitnesses were still alive. So that's what the book of Luke is. That's what it began as. Later on, it came to be recognized as scripture, but it began as this ancient biography. And what's just happened is Luke just basically tells us what I just said, like how he searched out these things to find the truth and give a good account. And then there's this story of a very elderly man named Zechariah who has this angel come and appear to him and promise that his elderly wife is going to get conceived and have a baby. And that actually happens. But Zechariah doesn't believe it and he's struck dumb. And this is the next story in the Gospel of Luke. And it begins like this. 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. Now, just a couple of things here. The first thing is this. The word virgin here is, in a sense, a biological description. It is not a title. It is referring just the way we would understand it today. It's a woman who's not had any type of sexual knowing at all. She's a virgin.

And that's who Mary is. And the second thing is that for many people, if they were hearing this story for the very, very first time, they would think, oh, okay, this is going to be interesting.

I understand how stories like this work because it's part of the story of how religions in general work. Religions in general are often based on private revelations with no external corroboration.

If you think about it, that Mormonism is started by these tablets that nobody's ever seen and an angel talking to somebody, and nobody ever saw that. You just have to take, I think it's Joseph Smith's word on it. You just have to take Muhammad's word on the fact that the angel spoke on behalf of Gabriel, on behalf of Allah and spoke to him. You have to, in a sense, take Gautama Buddha's word that he hadn't achieved enlightenment. You just have these private things that have happened to people. And some people, many people end up going along with it. And so in some ways, as this story happens, we need to think about it, that on one level, this sounds, okay, we're in familiar territory here. You know, this is how things work in Hinduism and Buddhism and Islam and lots of other religions. There's going to be a private revelation, and we're sort of set to hear it.

[7 : 07] But, and in fact, the rest of the story shows that this is, in fact, what does happen. This is, in fact, a private revelation to Mary. Look at what happens in verse 28. And he came to her, and by the way, in the original language, came to her implies entering a house in the original language. So she's by herself, and the angel appears to her, and the angel speaks to her.

And what does he say? Well, he came to her, verse 28, 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. Now, just, I'm just going to want to take a bit of a one-minute aside.

As we're going to see as we go through the story, Christians, in a sense, are unique amongst the world religions, because our religion is based on Jesus and the Bible, in that it's not based on a private revelation, but on things that can be corroborated by history. Because, as I said, the book itself is a biography, historical biography of Jesus, based on eyewitness accounts written while eyewitnesses were still alive. It's, in many ways, more like reading the newspaper, although nowadays, I think increasingly, newspapers are more like myths and fantasies than they used to be many, many years ago.

But back in the day, when they were, in fact, trying to tell you what actually happened, that it's more like a newspaper type of account. The only reason that we believe Mary, by the way, is because of the resurrection of Jesus, which is an event in history that can be corroborated.

And if Jesus rising from the dead changes everything, it's as simple as that. And if, in fact, Jesus really did predict that he was going to die in that manner, he really did die, the tomb is empty, he did rise from the dead, he did appear to people, if that's true, then all of these other things are looked at in a very different light. The fact is, there are other types of reasons to believe Mary that fit with this. Mary does become pregnant, and we all know that dreams don't make you pregnant. And the second thing is that later on, we have different times when Jesus's enemies said, well, at least we know who our daddy is, implying that there were questions about the fatherhood, so to speak, who begat Jesus. But we believe this story ultimately because of the resurrection, and it fits. But there's another thing in here as well. Some of you hearing this story of, oh, you know, a favored one, there's a very, very common genre of books and movies where something like this happens. It could be any one of you, and one day somebody comes, and it's from the future or whatever, and you just think you're an ordinary person. But actually, you're originally from some faraway planet, and you have some special powers or something like that. And in fact, the whole history and the whole saving of the world depends upon you finally realizing your real nature and your real destiny. And this angel comes and picks you out, and that you're not actually ordinary, you're actually very, very special. And it's a very, very common genre. Many, many books and movies are all based around this type of genre. That's not what's going on here. It's far more obvious in the original language, but it's not that there's anything special about Mary. In fact, partly what is going to trouble

[10 : 40] Mary is that Mary knows she's not special. And when it says, oh, favored one, it doesn't mean that she's sort of a source of grace, that she has this power that she didn't realize up until this moment where she could bestow grace on people and favor on people. What it's saying very clearly in the original language is she's receiving it from God. So it's not that type of a story that we're very, very familiar.

So what is it about? What is it that the angel is going to say about Mary? Apart from the fact that God is bestowing great grace upon her, what is it that's going to happen with Mary? Well, we know the story, but listen to how they put it. It begins in verses 30 to 30. It's in verses 30 to 33.

And the angel said to her, do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. It's the second way time that the angel says this. 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. Now we just have to pause here. We see on one hand that the baby is going to be very clearly a human baby. It says, if you notice, that he's going to have the throne of his father, David, which means forefather. So there is, in fact, a biological continuity, just like there is with any one of us, with our forebears that go before it. But there's a very massive claim which has been made in these simple words, which are lost to us in our day and age because we don't think about it very much. If you could put up the first image, Claire, that would be very helpful. So hopefully you can see that. What the image is showing is that there's only one God hyphen the most high. And then underneath that is a line. And underneath the line is everything else.

And so that is what, in a sense, the Tanakh, the Old Testament, teaches us. It's also, on one level, what the New Testament teaches us, that there's this very, very solid line. On one side of the line is the most high God. On the other side of the line is everything else. It doesn't matter if that everything else. It could be angels, demons, everything else. There's God on one side of the line. Underneath the line, there is only, there's everything else. And it's one of the things which made Judaism massively unique in the ancient world. There was no other religion that had that type of a very, very clear distinction. And it was so unique that constantly the Jewish people were being sucked back to believe that, well, there's the most high God, there's a whole pile of other gods and goddesses and demigods, et cetera, et cetera, all above the line with complicated relationships and lots of other lines and all that type of stuff. But that's a very, very simple way to put it. But when it says that what's going to be conceived in Mary is the son of the most high God, if you could put up the second figure, this is now what is being said. On the top of the line, they're still saying there's only one God. If you read through the rest of the book of Luke, it's a very clear, consistent message.

[13 : 59] There is only one God. But now there's a hyphen, and with that is the most high and his son. And everything underneath the line, and underneath the line is everything else.

Now, someday you might take a theology course with somebody like Steve here, who's a very good person at teaching theology. And when he teaches his Christology systematic theology, he will tell you that in some ways, the whole first four centuries of debate or five centuries about Jesus was all of them trying to find language to get that and keep it straight and solid. But that's now what's being claimed. Why do I say that? Well, some of you know, maybe all of you know, I have nine kids. They have the same nature as me. They are my sons and daughters. They have the same nature as me.

And so when, and it's going to be emphasized again in the next little bit, the angel says that something's going to happen, and what's conceived in you is the son of the most high God. That's what the angel is saying. It's a radical, radical, a radical new way of understanding things.

Now, by the way, I'm going to talk about this again in a moment, but there's something else you need to understand here, because this is the beginning of a story that's going to end quite a few chapters later. And what this is saying is that when you see Jesus dying on the cross, who is dying on the cross? God is dying on the cross.

God is dying on the cross. That's what the story is telling you. We'll return to that in a moment. Now, I love the next verse. I love verse 34. In fact, if I was to give this title like a really boring title, why George loves verse 34 and verse 38. I love these two verses. And both of these two verses, they just completely and utterly transform your understanding of what Christianity is all about.

[16 : 05] Verse 34 and verse 38. What's verse 34? Well, this is Mary's answer, right? So the angels just said this to her, and she responds, and Mary said to the angel, how will this be since I am a virgin? And literally, it says, since I have never sexually known a man. Now, there's something about this whole encounter which makes Mary realize that there's something urgent about it. But here's why I love this. And this is what transforms, to be gripped by this sentence is to begin to be gripped by how revolutionary it is to embark on following Jesus. The first thing is it shows she's not gullible.

She's not gullible. She knows how babies come about. We have a couple of babies here today. We all know. If one of the moms told us, by the way, I had a dream, and the next morning I was pregnant, like none of us would believe her. And Mary's not stupid. She's not gullible.

And one of the things which is so wonderful about this is, as you're going to see, Mary is in many ways, in this chapter, Mary is the archetype of the perfect disciple of Jesus.

So that means God doesn't want you to be gullible. Gullible is not a fruit of the Spirit. It is, in fact, a refusal to follow Jesus, if you're gullible. And here's the second thing, which is so wonderful about this story. She's curious. Like, if you go back later on and read Zechariah's response, Zechariah's response is almost identical to Mary's. But as we know with languages, this is the problem with emails. This is the problem with transcripts, is that somebody can say a sentence, and you don't know if they're being snarky, if they're being mean, if they're trying to put you down, if they hate your guts, if they're making a joke, if they're saying it with affection. You don't know any of those types of things. And that's one of the things. It's so hard to have conversations with people who are still wearing masks. You lose most of that other stuff that communicates, whether they say it to you and they're smiling, you know, or they say it to you with a frowny, angry face that you can't pick up. Well, it makes all the difference in the world.

And so what if you see the two things as the angel picks up that when Zechariah says something like that, he realizes that Zechariah is actually being, oh yeah? But Mary's not. Mary's curious.

[18 : 36] You know, in a sense, Zechariah is standing like this. Oh yeah? Oh yeah? Mary's like, really? How's that going to happen? If you could put up the first slide, the first point. Here's one of the things which is so wonderful. The Lord does not want his children to be gullible. He does want his children to be curious. The Lord does not want his children to be gullible. He does want his children to be curious. If you're an incurious Christian, you need to follow Jesus.

Jesus will lead you in the way of curiosity. Curiosity is a great virtue. Now, one of the things, this next bit of the story, you know, if anybody, I really recommend you try to read Tom Holland's book, *Dominion*, which is too long. If you can't read it, just watch some things online about Tom Holland or read Glenn Scrivener's *The Air We Breathe*. And one of the things they and guys like Douglas Murray have brought out is how deeply influenced we are by the Christian worldview. And that comes with what happens next. So we have an angel who's come to Mary who says that Mary's going to conceive and have a particular special baby. Now, of course, we all know the story, but in the Roman world, hearing this for the first time, so if you were an ancient, the Roman Empire, it doesn't matter what type of background you are, whether you're a Roman citizen or one of the other, you know, pagan people that they had all conquered, if you hear this story, you instantly can start to place stories like this and how they work. Just as we, in a sense, if we think about it, we can place private revelation stories and we put that, okay, we have a category for that, okay, Christianity fits, right? Or then we hear this, you have your favorite and, oh, okay, we have stories about special powers. We have, you know, but the Bible blows both of those all up. That she's not special in having any type of power and it's not, the private revelation is going to be dealt with with proof and all of that. But now we come to another story in the ancient world. They are all very familiar with stories like this. And in stories like this in the ancient world, the god rapes the woman. The god rapes the woman. What is the founding myth that the Roman Empire is based on? The founding rape, that the founding myth of the Roman Empire is of the rape of Romulus and

Remus' mother by the god Mars and then Romulus murdering his brother Remus. That is the founding myth of Rome is based on rape and murder.

That's the founding myth of the Roman Empire, the great Roman Empire, rape and murder. Those of you who have a classical education will tell you that the constant, the gods are always raping women. You see, we have here for the ancient Romans, they're now prepared. Okay, we know what happens next. And you know what? In the ancient Roman world? And we're fine with it. We're fine with having the myth that governs our story be based on rape and murder. Like, we're fine with it. We're just expecting a Christian retelling of that, right? Like, a lot of the Greek myths and the Roman myths are just retelling of Greek myths. We're all prepared now for a Christian retelling of this myth. But the Christian telling of this is completely and utterly different. And it's only in that that you begin to understand how much the modern world is dependent upon Christianity. To be political for a moment, the general, but not overwhelming, but the large revulsion of what Hamas did shows a Christian mindset, even if it is said by people who think they definitely, they don't even like Christians.

They reject founding a nation on murder and rape. That's a Christian insight. In fact, what's the Christian story going to be? The Christian story going to be, in a second, is that the Lord God, the Triune God, requires Mary's consent. And in this very simple story, a radically different worldview of the integrity of women is created and established at a very deep level. Mary has to consent. And the governing story for Christians isn't murder, but God, the Son of God, dying for murderers. It's such a beautiful story. It's so wise and so beautiful.

[23 : 57] Look what happens. Verse 35, and the angel answered her, right? This is now where the Romans are going to be gobsmailed. The angel answers her, well, 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. Again, look, the Son of God. Behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age is also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month for her who was called barren, for nothing will be impossible with God. And everything within this, and we're going to see in a moment, the implication is that Mary has to say yes. Her consent is needed.

Now, just a couple of things about this. How do we understand that? Well, the language of the Holy Spirit coming upon you, that's a very, very, that would, for Jewish years, resonate with the creation stories in Genesis 1 of the Holy Spirit coming and being an agent of creation, and the power of the Most High overshadowing you. There's a whole range of Old Testament references, including poetry, and it implies God's presence that changes things coming upon you. And the way for us to understand this today, by the way, is, I think, is to understand that God creates ex nihilo, out of nothing. God creates out of nothing a zygote. That's a fertilized egg. He creates out of nothing a zygote and implants it in the womb of Mary. That's the request. Will you say yes? And now, with our knowledge of biology, that's, in fact, what's happening, it's a creation out of nothing of a zygote, a fertilized egg, implanted in the womb of Mary. You see, here's another thing to understand about this. If you read the book of Romans, and they talk about Jesus being the second Adam, the reason they can say that is because of this. You see, Adam was created out of nothing, and Jesus was created out of nothing. And just as Adam and Eve rebelled against

God, defied God, and brought death into the world, the second Adam comes, setting aside his glory and prerogatives to even appear like God. And in love of God, and a love of us, and obedience to him, he dies to bring life. And that's a lot of the reason why a lot of the language of Christianity is about how you're to receive Christ. And there's this language, that there's all sorts of different images that the New Testament uses about receiving Christ, but one of the images is of being transferred, that in a sense, I'm no longer under Adam, I'm now under the second Adam, the Adam that reverses the fall, deals with the curse, and brings life. That he is to be my Adam, it's to be Jesus.

Jesus. The gods rape and murder to build an empire on. God asks for Mary to say yes, and then he dies.

And then there's, remember I said I could rename this whole sermon, Why George Loves, verse 34 and verse 38. Well, we have to hear verse 38. This is such a, this, you know, once again, you understand verse 34, you understand verse 38, you understand why Mary is the archetype of the disciple of Christ. What does she say in verse 38? And Mary said, Behold, I am the servant of the Lord. Let it be to me according to your word. Brothers and sisters, friends, on one level, remember I've said that in one level, I've said before that when you read narratives, in some ways we're many of the different characters in the story, not just one. And in some ways, what Gabriel is, is to be a model for us. As hard as it might be in a world like today, our job is to proclaim what God says. Even if it, even if people reject it, even if people think we're nuts or hate our guts, that's our job, just to be like Gabriel.

[28 : 15] He passed on God's message. That's what we're to do. On the other hand, we're more importantly and primary, and first, to be like Mary. You see, in some ways, Mary's prayer is the conversion prayer to move you from being outside of Christ, inside of Christ. Why do I say that? Well, you see, in a sense, God comes to us, whether it's through completely and utterly imperfect people like me or any one of you, and we tell people this very wonderful good news, that God loves you, and he sees that you cannot make yourself right with God and that you're destined for death and judgment. And then God, out of his great love for you, that God, the Son of God, he left heaven's splendors and set aside his divine prerogatives and appearance as God, but still remaining God.

He takes into himself our human nature, and he was God with us. He walked amongst us in all of our mess, out of love for us, and he never sinned. He never rebelled against God. He was always obedient to God. The obedience that you and I should give to God but cannot, he did. And then he ultimately, even though he had done nothing wrong, he dies on the cross. He dies on the cross as your substitute. In a sense, the judgment that you deserve falls on him, and the destiny and the grace that he deserves is offered to you. Will you accept this? Will you accept him?

And the Christian life begins, in a sense, when I said, behold, I am the servant of the Lord. Let it be to me according to your word. And how do we grow as a Christian? We grow as a Christian that we now belong to Jesus, and we're part of a small group. We come to church. We maybe have somebody who mentors us. We do our private devotions, and we hear more about the different things that the Bible says. We hear about what the Bible says about financial generosity and the problems we have making money in idol. We hear a little bit about the importance of not just seeking power for power's sake, but to serve. We hear about how we're to rejoice with others and weep with others. And we learn about what the Bible says about sexuality, just as it talks about money. And it goes against the grain of our culture, and we learn about prayer. And as we learn about these different things, and we hear them, how do we grow? We grow when we say to these teachings, behold, I am the servant of the Lord. Let it be to me according to your word. That's how we grow. Lord, I'm not your spin doctor.

I'm not your boss. I'm not the one who knows how to say things better than you. I'm not the one who created everything. I'm your servant. And I've heard what your word said. Let that be for me. Let me live that and grow in that. If you could put up the next point. In a sense, I'm just sort of wrapping this up now, just a couple of points. And just as I've talked about, behold, I am the servant of the Lord. Let it be to me according to your word. You know, if you're, I'm not into tattoos, but if you're going to have a tattoo, put that on your hand. That would be a great thing. That's a tattoo you won't be embarrassed about, like, 5, 10, 20, 30, 50 years about, like, you know, it's all right to have some of those things in your arms, and your arms are big and muscly. They'll look pretty ridiculous when you get old eventually, and they all look flabby or something like that and wrinkly. That's a keeper.

But the other thing, just in wrapping this up, I don't know if you noticed what happens in verse 37 and verse 38, and it's part of the emotional power of walking with Christ, is captured in what's said in verse 37 and verse 38. Listen again. In verse 37, the angel says, for nothing will be impossible with God. And Mary said in verse 38, behold, I am the servant of the Lord. Let it be to me according to your word. If you could put up the J.C. Ryle quote, there's this wonderful quote by J.C. Ryle that says, faith never rests so calmly as that when it lays its head on the pillow of God's omnipotence.

[32 : 43] Faith never rests so calmly as when it lays its head on the pillow of God's omnipotence. See, what's so beautiful about 37 and 38 being together is it shows this wonderful way that God wants us to understand the world? Pray big prayers. Pray impossible things. Pray that there be a lasting peace in Israel.

Pray that the culture of death gets overturned in Canada. A little bit smaller than all of those. Pray we get a building one day. What's six million dollars for God? Pray for a parking spot.

Pray big prayers. Pray big prayers. But at the same time that you're encouraged to pray big prayers, you're also encouraged to say at the end of the day to have a basic confidence. God, let it be according to me. Let it be to me according to your word. I'll take your no. I'll take your not yet. I'll take that too. See the beautiful emotional power to both encourage you to pray big prayers, but also to encourage you to trust and rest in God and his great care and love for you. If I could put it up as a point, that would be good. Claire, almighty God, please make the good news of the person and work of Jesus more and more real to my heart so that I will both pray to you and serve you knowing that you are almighty. And I should have added, and loving. And then just one final thing to bring it to an end.

If you could put up the final point, Claire, that would be wonderful. Almighty God, please deliver me from being gullible and grow within me a great curiosity. Boy, if there's one thing we need in this world right now is people who are going to ask tough questions and not be gullible. And you know what?

Science can't grow without curiosity. Love can't grow without curiosity. Beauty can't flourish without curiosity. Let's pray this big prayer as well for each of us. Lord, deliver me from being gullible.

[34 : 52] And please grow within me a great curiosity. Invite you to stand right now. Let's pray. Just stand and pray. Hopefully the kids are going to be ready in a moment for the pageant.

If not, we'll just keep praying. No, I'm just joking. Let's pray. Father, Father, help us to be more like Mary.

Help us to be curious. Help us not to be gullible. Help us, Father, to be like her and say, yes, God, be it to me according to your word. I am your servant.

Father, help to grow within us that spirit, that attitude, that heart, that desire, that way of looking into the world and just that habit of being. May you grow those within us.

And we ask these things in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Savior. Amen. Amen.

[36 : 03] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.