

AM Luke 1:26-38

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[0 : 00] I'd like us to read together from the Holy Bible, from the Gospel of Luke, chapter 1.

! We're on page 1031 of the Church Bible.

We're reading from Luke, chapter 1, from verse 26.

Just to set the scene before this in Luke, chapter 1, it records how the angel Gabriel visited Zechariah, who was a priest, on duty in the temple, the house of God in Jerusalem.

And Gabriel announces the birth of John, a son to Zechariah and his wife Elizabeth. John, who we know as John the Baptist. And then at the end of that section, in verse 24 and 25, Elizabeth conceives.

[1 : 15] And when we read that in verse 26, in the sixth month, that's the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy with John. So let's read from verse 26 to 38.

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. And he came to her and said, Greetings, O favoured 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. And the angel said to her, Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God.

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.

[2 : 30] And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever.

And of his kingdom there will be no end. And Mary said to the angel, How will this be, since I am a virgin?

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.

And 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.

For nothing will be impossible with God. And Mary said, Behold, I am the servant of the Lord.

[3 : 38] Let it be to me according to your word. And the angel departed from her. May God bless to us that reading of his word.

Let's join together again in prayer. Amen. I'd like us to turn back to the passage that we read, to Luke chapter 1, verse 26 to 38, page 1031 of the Church Bible.

In John Buchan's famous novel, The 39 Steps, it begins with the hero, Richard Hannay, living in London, and thoroughly bored with life.

And he arrives home one evening, after another dull day, which he's fairly fed up, to find a visitor, standing outside his flat, who wants to come in.

So he invites him in, and what this visitor tells him, will turn Richard Hannay's life, upside down, and set him off on an adventure, which ranges across London, and across southern Scotland, in an action-packed spy thriller, just before the outbreak of World War I.

[5 : 09] Well, you might be able to think of other, unexpected visits, that were life-changing, in literature, or in film, or indeed, in real life.

And today, we're focusing on an unexpected visit, a visit to Mary, in Nazareth.

Perhaps Mary was just, she started the day, it was a very ordinary day, she was just going about her mundane business. And then she received, this visit, that would, transform, not only Mary's life, but would also, change, the world, forever.

So today, we're looking at this event, that's called the Annunciation, this visit, of, the angel Gabriel, to Mary, to announce the birth, of her son, Jesus.

Now just a word about angels, because, we perhaps don't think about angels, very much. We sing about them, at this time of year. But angels are created beings, they are heavenly creatures.

[6 : 20] They are usually unseen, by humans, but occasionally, they appear. And there are a number of instances, in the Bible, where angels appear, to human beings.

There are myriads of angels, countless angels, but only two, are named, in the Bible. One is Michael, the other is Gabriel. And it is Gabriel, the angel Gabriel, who appears to Mary, on this occasion.

So I want to look at this passage, under four headings. First, where, second, who, third, how, and fourth, yes.

So first of all, where? Luke, begins his, gospel, in the temple, in Jerusalem. With the angel Gabriel, appearing there, to, to Zachariah, while he's on, priestly, duty.

And then, very briefly, the scene shifts, to Zachariah's house, where, Elizabeth is, is pregnant. And now the scene moves, to Nazareth, a town, of Galilee.

[7 : 34] And there's something, of a contrast here. The temple was, the house of God, the holy house, the center of Jewish, faith, Jewish worship, of the Jewish, nation itself.

It was a splendid building, in the center, of the capital, Jerusalem. Nazareth, was the very opposite. It was the pits.

It was in the region, of Galilee. And, people in Jerusalem, and Judea, looked down, on, Galilee. In, in John chapter 8, verse 52, the Pharisees, say to Nicodemus, Nicodemus has been, defending, Jesus.

And the Pharisees, say to Nicodemus, are you, from Galilee too? Look into it, and you'll see, that a prophet, does not come out, of Galilee.

So, that's how the people, of Jerusalem, and Judea, regarded Galilee, the region. But then, within Galilee itself, people looked down, on Nazareth.

[8 : 40] In, John 1, 46, Nathanael, hears from Philip, about Jesus. And then, when he hears that, Jesus is from Nazareth, he says, Nazareth, can anything good, come from there?

In, in, in, in, Nathaniel's mind, and I think it was, probably shared by others, nothing good, came, from Nazareth. Nazareth was, the pits.

That tells us that, it doesn't actually matter, where, we're from, or who we are. God is no respecter, of persons, or, of place, or of background.

And so, he sends, his angel Gabriel, to Mary, of, Nazareth. And it doesn't matter, where you are from today. It doesn't matter, what your background is.

God, values you. God cares for you. And God can save you. And give you the privilege, of calling you, into, his service.

[9 : 49] And it's an amazing thing, that, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Saviour of the world, and the Lord of all, was known as, Jesus, of Nazareth.

So that's where. Well second, who. And there's actually, two parts to this. First of all, to whom, and then about whom. So first of all, to whom, and it's to Mary. In verse 27, we're told that, Gabriel, Gabriel, visited a virgin, betrothed, to a man, whose name was Joseph, of the house, of David.

And the virgin's name, was Mary. So Mary is engaged, to someone, in the royal family. That sounds really good, doesn't it? But, that royal family, had fallen on hard times.

No king, had reigned, for many centuries. And, the fact that they lived, in Nazareth, indicated that they were, probably not very, high on the social, ladder.

They were probably poor. Mary, was probably in her teens. That was usually the age, for girls to get, married. She would, have had, her hopes, her aspirations.

[11 : 09] She, maybe looked forward, to getting married, to Joseph. And then becoming, the mother, of as many children, as God, would give her. And she would have, shared with other Jews, that the hope, that one day, her nation, her people, would be freed, from foreign, occupiers, and rulers, and empires.

And then came, this visit, that changed, Mary's life, and changed, world history, forever.

Verse 28, the angel, came to her, and said, greetings, oh favored one, the Lord, is with you. Mary was, greatly troubled, at the saying, and tried to discern, what sort of greeting, this might be.

This was, utterly out of the ordinary, strange, weird even. Why should she, be picked out, for such, high favor? In verse 30, the angel said to her, do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found, favor, with God.

And, in the Bible, when it speaks of people, finding favor with God, that favor, that grace, is not something that, Mary or anybody else, achieves. It is something that is, granted and bestowed, given as a gift, by God.

[12 : 35] But then, the second part of this, second heading, who, it's about whom, and it's about Mary's son. In verse 31, Gabriel says to Mary, behold, you will conceive, in your womb, and, bear, a son.

and you are to give him, the name, Jesus. In, Aramaic, or Hebrew, the language, that Mary would have spoken, it's something like, Yeshua.

The name, Joshua, in English, comes from that also. And, it means, the Lord saves. It was actually, quite a common name, at that time, there were quite a number of people, with that name.

But for this child, for Mary's son, there was a special reason, for, him being given that name. It's spelled out, more clearly in Matthew, Matthew chapter 1, verse 21, where, it's actually Joseph, who is told, that you will, give him the name, and Jesus, because he will save his people, from, their sins.

And salvation, and salvation from sins, is, is one of the, the huge, great themes, of, of Luke's gospel, and of, of the whole Bible. Well then, Gabriel goes on, in verse 32, he will be great, and will be called, the son, of the most high.

[14 : 04] And the Lord God, will give him, the throne of his father, David. Later on, in verse 35 also, we're told, that he will be called, the son, of God.

How would Mary, understand that? How would Mary, understand this term, this title, the son of God? Well, I think it would, sort of, it would conjure up, two things in her mind, which were from, very, very different, sources.

One, was, the Roman Empire. Galilee, Nazareth, was under, Roman rule, under the, rule of the Emperor, Caesar Augustus.

Now the previous Emperor, who was Julius Caesar, was assassinated, in, in, the year, 42, BC. And, he had been, sort of, made into a god, by the Romans.

They regarded him, as a god. Augustus, was, Julius Caesar's, adopted, son. And so, Augustus, Caesar Augustus, gave himself, the title, son of God.

[15 : 13] I've got here, a picture, I don't know if you can, see that, I'll maybe, wander down a bit, but, these are, just common coins, Roman coins, which, were used, across the Empire.

And, I don't know, I hope you can see that, but you've got, the head of, Caesar Augustus, on that, and I don't know if you can see, those letters there, it says, Divi, F. That's Divi, Filius, that means, son of God.

So, every time, Mary, you know, went to the shop, went to the market, to buy stuff, she'd be, using coins, and it said, Caesar Augustus, the son, of God.

So, that was one, one source, of, this title, that Mary, would be familiar with. And, what the angel, is saying to Mary, is that, this title, son of God, does not belong, to Caesar.

It does not rightfully belong, to Caesar Augustus. It rightfully belongs, to your son Mary, who is Jesus. He is the rightful, king.

[16 : 19] He is the true son, of the true, and only, God. So, that was one source, of, just, just, how this term, would be familiar, to Mary.

The other source, was, the Bible. Or, of course, she didn't have the, the full Bible, that we have, it was what we call, the Old Testament. But for Mary, it was just the Bible, the scriptures.

And, this term, son of God, appears, in a number of contexts, in the Bible, in the Old Testament. And, we'll focus on two. One is, the ancient Israelites, as a nation, were called, God's son.

In Exodus, chapter 4, verse 22 and 23, when Moses is called, to lead his people, out of Egypt, Moses is told, to tell Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, this is what, the Lord says, Israel, is my first, first born son.

And I told you, let my son go, so that he may, worship me. But you, refuse to let him go, so I will kill, your, first born son.

[17 : 31] And of course, that happens, in the tenth plague, that God sends, on the Egyptians. Similarly, in Jeremiah 31, verse 9, God says, I am Israel's father, and Ephraim, is my first born son.

Ephraim was, one of the tribes of Israel, so it really means, the same thing. And at least, in some of the places, where Jesus is called, son of God, in the, in the New Testament, he is, being depicted, as, the fulfillment, of what Israel, was meant to be.

Or Jesus is, really the, the new Israel. Israel, was meant to be, the light, to the nations, nations, a blessing, for all nations.

And Israel, the nation, the people, failed in that, again, and again, and again. But Jesus, the new Israel, the new son of God, succeeds, where Israel failed.

He is the light, of the world. He is the one, through whom, all nations, are blessed. blessed. But then also, this term, son of God, also referred to the, son of David, the king, in the line of David, the Messiah.

[18 : 48] The king, became the representative, of Israel. So, the king would, take on, Israel's destiny, onto himself, and he would share, this title, son of God.

In, verses 32, and 33, Gabriel, says, that he will be great, and will be called, the son of the most high. And the Lord God, will give him the throne, of his father David.

He became son of God. Now, in that psalm in verse 7, the king says, I will proclaim the decree of the Lord. He said to me, you are my son.

Today I have become your father. So the king was the son of God. Now that psalm, Psalm 2, goes on to speak of a universal king, which has never been fulfilled by any king in Israel.

And that is referenced to the Messiah's kingship, that universal kingship that that psalm goes on to speak of. And so Psalm 2 is what we call a messianic psalm.

So this title, Son of God, applies to any king in the line of David, but ultimately and especially to the Messiah. And in many contexts, Son of God is closely related to the title Messiah.

[23 : 09] And so in line with this, Gabriel tells Mary that 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 king. So in other words, he is the Messiah. Your son Mary, called Jesus, he is the long-promised Messiah.

The one the prophets had foretold. Gabriel's language also echoes that prophecy in Isaiah. Chapter 9, verses 6 and 7, which again is often read at this time of year at Christmas.

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given. And the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Of the greatness of his government and peace, there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness.

[24 : 15] From that time on and forever. Again, Gabriel's words to Mary echo that. This kingdom will never end.

It will last forever. All the kingdoms and empires of this world last for a time. And then they lose their power. Including even David and Solomon's kingdoms when Israel was at its height.

Often great hopes are placed in a new leader, a new king, a new government. But even among the best, that expectation is too great to bear.

There is inevitably disappointment. And those governments, those rulers begin to lose their grip. But this kingdom, the kingdom of the Messiah, will last forever.

Here is a leader, here is a king, who will never disappoint. But will bring justice and righteousness and peace. And will bring it forever.

[25 : 17] Well that's the rather long second point. Our third point is how. In verse 34, Mary said to the angel, How will this be, since I am a virgin?

That's a very natural enough question for Mary to ask. Actually, belief in the virgin birth was no easier to believe in the first century than it is in the 21st century.

People then, just as much as now, knew where babies came from. So Gabriel answers in verse 35. The angel answers 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. Doesn't exactly answer Mary's question.

There's mystery about this. But Gabriel speaks of a supernatural intervention by God. And actually the words here echo words in Exodus chapter 40.

[26 : 32] When the tabernacle in the wilderness had been built at Mount Sinai. There in Exodus 40 verse 34 and 35 we read that the cloud covered the tent of meeting.

And the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. Moses could not enter the tent of meeting. Because the cloud had overshadowed it. And the glory of the Lord filled the temple.

So just like the cloud, the glory of the Lord, overshadowed the tabernacle. So the power of God, the power of the Most High would overshadow Mary.

And so her son would be holy, the Son of God. Now many people today will say that the virgin birth of Jesus is just a myth.

It's just a fable. A legend. And it's treated with much skepticism. And yet Luke is not a writer of myths, of fables.

[27 : 41] He is writing as a historian. He claims to be a historian. He claims right at the beginning of his gospel, the beginning of chapter 1. That he's writing what has been handed down to him by eyewitnesses.

There in verse 1. Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us. Just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us.

So he's claiming there that what he's writing is based on eyewitness testimony. And it seems most likely that this testimony is based on Mary's own testimony.

She would be the one who could narrate this and give her own account of this. Whether directly to Luke or through someone else. Just over 100 years ago, there was a famous historian, archaeologist called Sir William Ramsey.

He was born in 1851. Died in 1929. And he was very skeptical about the historical accuracy of the New Testament.

[28 : 55] And he went to Asia Minor. It was modern day Turkey. With the intention of showing that the New Testament is not really history. That it's myth, legend.

And Ramsey was especially interested in Luke's account. Accounts in Luke and Acts. Because they contain many geographical and historical references. But dig after dig.

Archaeological dig after dig. He found that the evidence, without fail, supported Luke's accounts. So for example, governors that were mentioned by Luke.

That many historians at that time believed had never existed. Were confirmed by the evidence that was excavated by Ramsey's archaeological team. And Ramsey came away with that.

With making this conclusion. He said, Luke is a historian of the first rank. Not merely are his statements of facts trustworthy. This author should be placed along with the very greatest historians.

[30 : 02] Luke writes about the virgin conception, birth of the Lord Jesus. As history. And of course, this is in the context of God's work.

God who made this universe in the first place. And so if God can make this vast universe. A virgin birth is not too difficult for him. What about the significance of the virgin birth?

We might believe it's a fact. But why? Why did it happen that way? Well, I think the significance of it is that salvation had to come from outside the human race.

Through a break in the normal course of procreation. And reproduction. It signifies God breaking into human history from outside.

And yet, at the same time, becoming fully human in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus is called the Holy One. To be called Holy means to be separate.

[31 : 08] To be different. To be set apart from the ordinary. And that's true of everything to do with Jesus. Including his conception. And I think there's a further suggestion of the meaning of Son of God here.

In response to Mary's question. Jesus has no human father. He is conceived miraculously. By the power of the Holy Spirit. However, the reality is not that Jesus is God's Son because he was born of a virgin.

Rather, it is that Jesus is born of a virgin because he is God's Son. He is the eternal Son of God. Well, Gabriel goes on in verse 36.

That even your relative Elizabeth in her old age has conceived a son. This is the sixth month with her who was called barren. This old woman, Elizabeth, has also conceived.

It's not as big a miracle. But it is still a miracle. It's kind of a trailer to demonstrate in verse 37 that nothing is impossible with God.

[32 : 17] It's God who made the world, the universe in the first place. He's able to do this. Well, fourth. We have... The heading is simply yes.

In verse 38, Mary says, There must have been hundreds of questions racing through Mary's mind.

What will Joseph think? How will I tell him? What if he refuses to marry me? What will my family say? What about my reputation in the wider community? Will I be stoned to death for adultery?

How am I going to bring him up if I survive that law? All these questions must have sort of rushed through her head. But Mary believes and submits to the word of the Lord.

She leaves all the problems, all the questions with him. Let it be to me according to your word, she says. Mary is just such a great example to us of faith.

[33 : 26] Faith in God. Faith in God's word. As if she says, the Lord has got me into this situation, he will take care of all the details. Now, Mary's task was given to her by God and it was unique, unique to Mary.

We are all given tasks by God. We are given ministries. We are given callings. We are given paths to follow by the Lord.

Which sometimes may be scary. It may cause us worry and anxiety. And for you today, the future may seem very encircled. And following God's path may seem very difficult for you.

Perhaps you have a difficult situation at work or in your family or in your neighbourhood. And maybe the easy way for you is to be dishonest or to be ruthless.

Or just to give in to some temptation. And the hard way is to be faithful to God. Be faithful to God's word. And to do the right thing. Well, our role, like Mary's, is to believe and to obey the word of God.

[34 : 37] And to leave the details with him. Or maybe this morning you're not yet a believer. You're not yet following Jesus Christ.

And maybe you hear his call to you. Come and follow me. And something in you is attracted by that call. Something compelling about it. And part of you wants to do that.

But maybe you're holding back. Maybe you're thinking of all the obstacles in the way of that. You're thinking, well, what will my family say? What will my friends say? What about things I might have to leave behind?

Maybe relationships, habits, lifestyles that I'll have to leave behind. What sort of trouble could that lead me into?

And all of these questions and issues are there in your mind. And they're obstacles. Hindering you from obeying that call. To follow Jesus Christ.

[35 : 40] But you can also learn from Mary. Leave those questions. Leave those issues with God. Jesus Christ calls you. Come and follow me. You must obey that call.

Leave the consequences and trust the consequences to him. Mary found that God was faithful to her. God always keeps his promises.

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