

# Annunciation: God on Display

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, good morning. In light of the announcement that Nick just made, it's not easy to get up here. It's the Christmas season, characterized by joy, peace, festivities, and celebrations.

And yet, we gather this morning also to mourn the loss of Noah and to grieve with his family. It didn't seem right for me to begin my sermon with the lighthearted introduction that I had written, one that began with a man who ate an airplane, or to talk about our cultural predisposition to make God small and limit what we think he can do in light of our understanding of science.

That's actually what I wrote, what I had prepared, and what I'm not going to talk about. But it does seem right to turn our hearts and our minds to God.

As we grieve with the Hodgkins and we remember Noah and the way that he was a blessing to his family and to our church and to the world, we want to do so in a way that turns our hearts to God, even in the face of unexpected tragedy like this.

For it is God that we need most at this time. We need God to be our help, our comfort, our hope, and our stay. And we need not just the idea of God, but we need his person, his character, his nature.

[ 1 : 35 ] And we need to know with confidence how he interacts with this world and with us. And with that, we turn to our text this morning, which is in Luke chapter 1.

It's page 803 in your pew Bible. It is a part of the Christmas story that is well known, the Annunciation. A story central to our faith.

One that is so well known that we are in danger of it becoming overly familiar. It comes on the heels of a passage that Nick preached on last week about God who came to an ordinary woman, Elizabeth, and opened her womb when she was barren so that she might bear a child who would proclaim the coming redemption and deliverance of God's people.

And in this passage, in the Annunciation, what I want to do this morning is to look at it to see what it has to say to us about God.

So that's what we're going to do. Let's read it together, and then we'll pray, and then we'll spend a few minutes meditating on this together. Luke 1, verse 26. 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.

[ 3 : 00 ] And the virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her 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.

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.

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. 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.

[ 4 : 09 ] 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. Let it be to me according to your word. And the angel departed from her. Let's pray together.

Lord, as we come to this passage this morning, we ask for your help. Lord, your help to open our eyes to you in light of this well-known passage for us to see you afresh this morning.

To know your character, to know your purpose. Lord, to see you, Lord, clearly. And that you might, Lord, work in our hearts so graciously that we would respond to you in faith.

That we would believe what we see about who you are in this passage. And that in believing, Lord, we would find hope and life in you. We pray this in Jesus' name.

[ 5 : 18 ] Amen. I love the narratives of Scripture. And this is a great narrative story. It begins with a setting.

The angel Gabriel came in the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy to a woman named Mary who lived in Nowheresville. If Mary was an ordinary person, Mary was a nobody.

And God chose to come to her and make an amazing proclamation to her about what he was going to do. And if you look through this through the lens of a narrative story, the story builds with tension.

What kind of greeting is this? Don't be afraid. Here's what I'm going to do. And it climaxes. It reaches its high point of tension in verse 34 where Mary says, how can this be?

For I am a virgin. And in the answer to that, we begin to see the character of God on display.

[ 6 : 22 ] And the other thing we see as we read through this narrative is that there are times when in the middle of narrative stories, there are speeches or announcements or proclamations. And in this one, verses 31 through 34 give us a very particular proclamation about who this baby would be and how this baby would expose and show and display the character of God to us.

And so that's what we're going to look at this morning. Those two questions. One, how could this be? And two, who is this child? So first, let's look at this first question.

How can a virgin give birth to a child? Now, we brush over this so easily because this has been something that the church has affirmed for 2,000 years.

But stop and think. This is a miracle that God would bring to a woman who had never had intercourse, had never known a man, would impregnate her, would make her, make inside of her a child.

And this was amazing back then. They knew even then it took a man and a woman to create a baby. This announcement was against the science even back then and even more so now that we need this, that this is the way it is.

[ 7 : 43 ] And so for the last 2,000 years, people have asked this question, how could this be? Now look, we need to think through some of the questions that are behind that.

Some people, if we hold to the world being a closed system, if we hold to a naturalistic scientific worldview that excludes the possibility of supernatural activity, then we have a priori denied God's existence and eliminated this possibility.

But if there is a God, then we need to be open to the fact that God could do something miraculous like this. There are some people who think, well isn't this story just a myth?

Just like the other myths in the ancient world about how God would come down and have intercourse with a human woman and produce. And yet what you see here is a unique story because never was there a virgin birth in those stories.

Some people wonder, if this is so important, why is it that the rest of the New Testament ignores it and doesn't say anything about it? Well, it's fascinating to think about the fact that Matthew, the Jewish writer, writing to the Jews to convince them that Jesus is the Messiah, and Luke, the Greek writer, writing to a diaspora trying to give the evidence for why he believes Jesus is the Savior with two very different audiences, yet they both record this.

[ 9 : 19 ] And some have argued that in fact this has not been talked about as much in the later letters because in fact it was so easily accepted as true because those who were there could testify to it during the early church.

And so for the church up until the 1800s, this was rarely questioned. And finally, some people ask questions about the virgin birth because they wonder, doesn't this somehow make it impossible for Jesus to be fully human?

If he was conceived in a way that was not natural but was supernatural, could he actually have the proper DNA? But do we not think that God who created the world and who created the whole process to begin with could miraculously interact with Mary in such a way, not sexually but creatively, to make a life inside the womb of a woman who had never known a man?

So this is what it says in response to Mary's question in verses 35 and 36. 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. That is set apart. Something distinct from everything else you've ever seen. God will come like he came in the temple.

[10:49] The word for overshadow is the same word that talks about when the presence of God enters the tabernacle in Exodus 40. God will come over you, Mary, and fill you with his presence in a special way that will create a child in you.

How do we see God on display in this passage? First, we see God's creative power. He comes to Mary and he makes life.

There are echoes of the Spirit hovering over the chaos of the world and then bringing life and order to it. And friends, if we are honest, every human conception, every human being created in God's image in the womb or even in an in vitro is made in God's image and is a work of God's grace, it is cool that we know far more about that process than we ever did before and yet it is still an astounding mystery and a wonder that life is created in these ways.

And so, friends, let us stop and simply sit in awe that the virgin birth tells us that God is powerful than that He is doing something uniquely powerful in this gracious creation of this one child.

We don't know the mechanics, but we know the outcome of fully God and fully man Savior who's come to rescue us.

[12:28] And this is the second thing that we see about God in the virgin birth is God's initiative. It wasn't like Mary was going around saying, I wonder if God would give me a virgin conception in my womb.

What a great idea. Why don't I do that? Far from Mary's mind, far from the minds of anyone in Israel, God broke into this world.

God initiated with Mary to create this child. We often conceive of our religious life as us seeking God, but here we see God seeking us, initiating to do the very thing that we need so that we might know Him.

Friends, I wonder this morning, as we think about God's power and God's initiative, how do you respond to that? Are there places in your life that feel dead and barren?

Are there ways where you need Jesus to bring renewing life to you? Maybe you're here this morning and you're exploring Christ and you haven't experienced His life-giving power through faith in Him.

[13:41] The God of the Bible is one who makes new creations out of all of us who are dead in our sin. The God of the Bible promises a renewal of all things where creation will be made new.

And if you think that God has forgotten you, if you feel overlooked or ignored or abandoned by Him, this story reminds us that God is a God who takes initiative towards us.

He is seeking us and calling us to Himself. He is seeking out, He is doing, going ahead of us to do the things that we need so that we can know Him and respond to Him.

And this is the doctrine of the virgin birth applied to us. But this story tells us more about God than simply His initiative and His power.

It also tells us through the identity of this child God's purpose and intention. So let's look again at verses 31 through 34 as Mary is trying to figure out what do you, God, what do you mean?

[14:49] What are you doing? Gabriel says this, 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.

In this little speech in the middle of the narrative the angel says this is the point. This is the thing I want you to focus on of all the things you could see here.

This is what I want you to know. I want you to know what God is up to by the way that this child is described. I want you to see God's purpose and I want you to see God's intention.

God's purpose is by naming this son Jesus and we know what Jesus means we can look over in Matthew and know that Jesus means Jehovah saves the God that God saves and that He and He in Matthew Joseph is explicitly told you will call His name Jesus for He will save His people from their sins and this is the kind of God that we see a God who has come to rescue sinners like Mary and Joseph like you and me.

[16:28] We see that this child this unique conception has come for a unique purpose to save us and not simply to rescue us from sin but to bring us into a kingdom that He will reign over forever

and ever so this is God's intention if God's purpose is to save us God's intention is to bring us into a kingdom and this is where He layers on all of these descriptions this is why we read the passage from 2 Samuel earlier in our service because in 2 Samuel God makes a covenant with King David as He's establishing His people in the promised land He's saying I'm going to make a covenant with you because this is the next step in the progress of my redemptive plan for me to create a people who will be my people in my creation to worship me and to serve me and to glorify me under my rule and reign forever and we know that in the Old Testament

Israel never succeeded in doing that and we know that at this point in the Gospel of Luke in this time in history the nation of Israel was crying out God show us your plan it feels like we've been abandoned Rome is taken over and we are lost and God comes and He says I'm going to give you this child and He's going to save you from the sin but He's also going to fulfill all of these Old Testament promises that are seen in the covenant and if you went back and you looked at the passage you will see that this son will be called great and it will be a distinct greatness that will characterize His reign a greatness greater than anyone else He will be like a son someone in intimate relationship with God the Father He will be a ruler who will sit on a throne and who will exert His will for justice and righteousness in the world and He will establish a kingdom that will never end the promises made long ago to David are going to be fulfilled in this special baby the unique conception led to this unique individual who will bring this redemption what does this mean for us?

how do we apply God's purpose and intention to our lives? friends it means that in Jesus there is a kingdom that will last forever has there ever been a kingdom in human history that has lasted forever?

I studied Chinese history in college lots of emperors and dynasties thought they were going to last forever and they didn't certainly the Roman emperors thought that the Roman Empire would last forever and it didn't the British Empire upon which the sun never set because it spanned the globe did not last forever and as Americans let us be humble enough to acknowledge that the American Empire will not last forever either no human kingdom past, present, or future will last forever but God has promised that His kingdom will come and it will be a glorious kingdom and this one this baby will reign over it forever a kingdom of peace where strife and warfare have ceased a kingdom of righteousness where justice is established and evil is overcome and done away with a kingdom of joy where sadness and sorrow will be wiped away a kingdom of life where sin and death are defeated and a kingdom that will last forever so these things will have no end but they will simply abundantly continue to be in a glorious and ever expanding way friends isn't this the kingdom that you long for in your hearts it seems impossible in our fallen world to imagine that this could happen but as this passage ends with we are reminded that just as God can bring life into the womb of a barren woman who is too old to have children just as God can bring life into the womb of a virgin who had never known a man so we are reminded that with God nothing is impossible and the most amazing thing that this God has done is sending a savior to rescue people like you and like me this is the most amazing thing that God has ever done because we don't deserve it and if we haven't grappled with that yet it's time to do that because we don't deserve it and yet God has sent this child to come to rescue us from our sin from our rebellion from all the ways that we daily ignore reject dishonor

God he has come and in his initiative he has reached out towards us and in his power he is taking hold of us and he is inviting us to respond to him the way Mary responded to God in response to God's revelation of his power and his initiative and his intentions and his purpose Mary said behold I am the servant of the Lord let it be to me according to your word Mary is not a sinless person for us to pray to but she is a great example of humble faith for us to emulate and to see in her an example of a godly response it is by faith that we cling to God who has come for us in Jesus and as we this morning as a church family both celebrate

[ 22 : 53 ] Christmas and mourn with the Hodgkins this is the God that we need more than anything else so let's pray Lord we thank you this morning Lord that you have not left us alone in our sin and in our barrenness in our sorrow and our grief but Lord you have come for us in Jesus and you have done it in such a distinct such a unique such a wonderful way Lord to show us your character to show us your nature Lord I pray this morning Lord that we would see you Lord I pray this morning that you would give us faith to respond to you and trust and belief in confidence and in joy we pray this in Jesus name

Amen