

God's Life Changing Announcement to Mary

Luke 1:26-38

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Sometimes announcements can bring great change to our lives.

Sometimes the same news can have different effects on people. For an example of this let's watch this video.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lsvRXxzs4ug>

Announcements affect people. Sometimes we receive good news. Sometimes we can receive bad news. Sometimes news is life changing. Think about how your life has changed or might change if you heard some of the following statements. "The business is closing and everyone is laid off. You have been granted admission to the program. Would you want to go out for coffee sometime? Would you be willing to be my girlfriend? Would you marry me? Honey, we're going to have a baby. I just received an offer for a better job 500 km away. We're going in a different direction so your position is no longer needed. I'm sorry to say the tests reveal cancer. We did everything we could but it wasn't enough."

News comes along that informs us of some possibility or reality we suddenly have to deal with. Some brings joy. Some brings sorrow. Some brings worry or confusion. Yet it is inevitable we will be surprised by news throughout our lifetime. No one has infinite knowledge about what is happening or will happen except God.

The good news is that no matter what the news, God is with us. He is especially present when we receive really tough news. He is there in the depths and meets us in our sorrow. But He's also there for the good announcements because He is the giver of every good gift.

Today, we get to look in on a moment when a young woman will receive news that will change the trajectory of her life. It might be a familiar story to you. But maybe you could ask the Lord to open your eyes to see something you haven't seen before or to reveal something about Himself that will help you. We will look at what God announces, how this young woman responds and then think how we might respond when the Lord intervenes or speaks into our life.

Luke 1:26-38 (ESV)

²⁶In 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.²⁸ And 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."

³⁴ And Mary said to the angel, “How will this be, since I am a virgin?”^[c]

³⁵ 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. ³⁶ 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. ³⁷ For nothing will be impossible with God.” ³⁸ And Mary said, “Behold, I am the servant^l of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.” And the angel departed from her.

Luke begins this story by using the Zechariah Elizabeth story as a point of reference. In the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy, the same angel that visited Zechariah is again sent out by God. Luke identifies the town and region the angel goes to – a city in Galilee named Nazareth. But Nazareth was not a city in the ancient sense of the term. The Greek language didn’t have a word for small town so Luke uses the common term city. But Nazareth was more like a country village.

Gabriel goes to Nazareth to visit a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph of the house of David. Now there’s a lot of identity packed into that statement. Gabriel will visit likely a young woman 13-14 years of age – not like the 20 something we see in the slides. But 13-15 was considered marrying age in the villages. She’s also betrothed. It was a bit like our engagements today. They involved a promised to marry. But unlike our engagements, betrothal was legally binding. You had to get a divorce to get out of a betrothal. Luke also tells us the name of this girl’s betrothed husband – Joseph of the house of David. This means that Joseph was a descendent of Israel’s great king David. God had promised David that someone from His line would always be on the throne and reign. Most Jews expected their promised Messiah to come from the line of David.

At the end of verse 27, Luke tells us that the woman’s name was Mary. But he again identifies her as a virgin. This will become critical to the encounter about to occur. The angel greets Mary with words of reassurance and kindness. “Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you.” He reassures her of the Lord’s presence.

But just like Zechariah in the previous scene, Mary is troubled at first by the appearance of Gabriel. Luke links her struggle with the greeting. She wondered what sort of greeting this might be. Perhaps she wondered why she would receive such a visit from a special messenger when she was just an ordinary girl in a faraway village. Yet God chooses the weakest and least likely to succeed in the world’s eyes so that all glory is clearly His and does not come through the agency of men or women.

Gabriel senses her struggle. He encourages her not to be afraid because she has found favor with God. Then Gabriel gets to the main purpose of his visit. **What does God reveal to Mary through Gabriel's announcement? God will send the most unique person in all of human history to be supernaturally conceived in her.** Who is this person and what will they be like?

In verse 31, the angel begins to describe the person. Mary will conceive in her womb and have a baby boy. She is to call him Jesus a form of the Hebrew Joshua or English Joshua which means "the Lord saves". The name Jesus appears to have been fairly common around this time. Now someone actually took the time to compile a "most popular male names list" among Palestinian Jews from 330 BC to 220 AD. Their sources included the Gospels and Acts from the Bible, the writings of Josephus the Jewish historian, the writings of Judean desert texts and the names carved into grave boxes. The study revealed that Jesus was the 6th most popular male name after Simon, Joseph, Lazarus, Judas and John.

But the Jesus Mary would bear would not be just one among many boys similarly named. We discover this from verse 32 and 33. Gabriel says "He will be great and called Son of the Most High. Now "The Most High" was one of the oldest names for God. We find it in Genesis 14:18 when Melchizedek, the king of Salem is called a priest of the Most High. Balaam the prophet speaks of the knowledge of the Most High in Numbers 24. King David writes "I cry out to God Most High" in Psalm 57:2. The Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar has three young Jewish men thrown into a fire to be killed because they refuse to bow down to a statue of him. But they are miraculously protected by God. So the king calls out "Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out and come here! Mary is told she will bear the Son of the Most High God.

The angel also reveals that this Jesus will be a king - at the end of Luke 1:32. "The Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David." So this child is not only Son of the Most High God but is somehow son of the human king David. Like his earthly father Joseph, this child will be a descendant of David but also be given the throne of David. The Lord promised King David that his line would somehow reign forever. In 2 Samuel 7:16, the Lord, through the prophet Nathan says, "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. He shall build a house for my name and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever." So Mary's child will receive the throne of David.

But not only will this child have a name that means “the Lord Saves.” Not only will he also be called “Son of the Most High and Son of David” and receive the David’s throne. In verse 33 – “He will reign over the house of Jacob forever and of his kingdom there will be no end.” Jacob was the grandson of Abraham. Jacob had 12 boys who became the heads of the 12 tribes of Israel. The Lord changed Jacob’s name to Israel. So Mary’s boy will reign over the house of Israel forever and have an eternal kingdom. The prophet Daniel spoke a lot about this son of man who would rule over an eternal kingdom. Daniel 7:13-14 – I saw in the night visions, and behold with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days God and was presented before him. And to the son of man was given dominion and glory and a kingdom that all peoples, nations and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.” So this child will reign over Israel and all peoples forever. This is no ordinary Jesus.

Finally in verse 34 Mary speaks. She has somehow grasped that this conception is supposed to take place soon – before her wedding with Joseph. Perhaps she picked up on the angel’s statement in verse 31 “You will conceive and bear a son,” not “You and your husband will conceive and bear a son.” So she asks the obvious question. “How will this be since I am a virgin?”

The angel’s response reveals even more the uniqueness in this child. Verse 35. “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.” So there’s the Most High again. Somehow the Holy Spirit would do a miraculous work in Mary to bring about this conception. This child will be supernaturally conceived. We talked last week. If miracles are a stumbling block for you when it comes to the accounts in the Bible, I would invite you to look up last week’s message where we talked about this or the book “Can a scientist believe in miracles?” by Ian Hutchinson for some perspective on this.

But because God will supernaturally cause this conception to happen, the child will be called holy. He will not be stained with a sin nature. He will not receive it from his earthly father. Somehow, the Holy Spirit would preserve the child from receiving a sin nature from Mary. So this child will be set apart or holy. He will be the only human born since the creation of Adam and Eve without the stain of sin. He would be the only human who had the potential to live a sin free life. He would be the only one who could keep God’s law perfectly. So He would be the only one qualified to offer himself as a sinless sacrifice in place of sinners.

So the uniqueness of Jesus through the virgin conception and birth is the central thrust of this passage. This child will be substantially different than anyone else. He will be God but also human. He will be born a little child yet rise to have great power and reign over an eternal kingdom. He will be unstained by sin. God initiates this great work that through Mary this absolutely unique child will be born.

I think there's a couple of applications of this to our lives. First, if we've heard this account many times, we can begin to downplay the uniqueness of Christ. Or we can undervalue Christ's rarity or we can see in pop culture the way it portrays half god half man beings. The Marvels avengers' series plays on this a little with Thor and his brother and father king. You kind of see a human with superpowers in Ironman or Captain America or Cat Woman or Wonder Woman or Hulk or any of the superheroes. Notice all these human/gods are flawed in some way. They have some incredible powers but they have character weaknesses that others exploit to gain advantage over them. We can allow that image to seep into our understanding of Jesus.

So we must guard against minimizing Jesus' uniqueness. Jesus was without sin. He had no character flaws. He's more powerful than Ironman and Hulk and Thor and Wonder Woman combined. He would grow up to conquer all of our greatest enemies - sin, Satan and death itself. He is unlike any other religious founder or figure. He is the way, the truth and the life. God reveals these astounding truths to this young girl Mary in Nazareth.

But we can also be encouraged because **the absolutely unique Savior is our savior.** Jesus invites us to walk closely with Him and learn life from Him. The Son of the Most High, Son of David, holy Son of God, who reigns from David's throne over the universe in an eternal kingdom is or can be your shepherd. He is infinitely more powerful than any bully, profoundly more intelligent than the smartest person today and wiser than the most expensive counselor and a very present Help in the midst of trouble. God reveals this person to Mary through the angel's announcement.

But there's something else I want to point out to you that God revealed through this communication to Mary. **God shows His deep compassion for Mary through this communication.** He shows it in multiple ways. He sends this messenger to prepare Mary. Imagine what might have happened if Mary did not receive this visit? All of a sudden she becomes pregnant. She has no idea what's happening or who she carries/ She has no explanation to offer. She has no inner peace or help. She has no reassurance from God. But God shows His great love for her by sending someone to communicate with her.

God also shows His compassion by reassuring her of His presence. “Greetings, O favored, one, the Lord is with you.” He could have just announced that this was going to happen and left. Instead there is deep consideration for her.

God also senses her fear. And instead of taking advantage of it, he encourages her in it. “Don’t be afraid Mary, for you have found favor with God.” This is not bad news. This is ultimately good news.

Then after explaining how the miraculous conception will occur, the angel points to another work God has done in her relative Elizabeth’s life. This is another measure of assurance. “Yes, that which has been announced sounds impossible, but God has already accomplished the impossible in the life of someone you know.”

He concludes with the great reassurance “For nothing will be impossible with God.” These words are similar to those spoken by the angel of the Lord to Abraham back in Genesis 18. The circumstances were very similar. The angel promised childless Abraham and Sarah, that they would have a son within the year. Even though they were beyond child bearing age, the angel says “Its anything too hard for the Lord?” The Lord kept His Word then and now reaffirms that nothing is impossible with God. Genesis 18:14.

The way God communicates with Mary shows His compassion, concern, intervention and care for the individual and the world. God reveals the coming of this Lord who is absolutely unique, powerful, holy, savior and He reveals His compassion towards Mary.

How might we respond today to this news from the Lord? You must receive the Lord for the first time. You must put the trust of your life upon Him and not yourself. If you’ve never done that, you can talk with a Christian friend who maybe invited you here today - about actually taking that step.

If we’ve already received Christ, we need to respond to God like Mary responded. “I am the Lord’s servant. Let it be to me as you have said” This is an incredibly challenging response to imitate. It involves a statement of identity. “I am the Lord’s servant.” Are we willing to identify as the servant of the Lord? A servant does the will of his or her master. A servant obeys the master. A servant carries out their Lord’s instruction. Are we the Lord’s servants?

Or is it all about what we want and our plans and our will and our preferences. It seems we more often act like we’re the Lord’s partner, not His servant. If what the Lord wants fits into our plans, wants and dreams, we might consider agreeing to be his partner. But His servant? That implies that He has lordship over every part of our lives.

We might think it was easy for Mary to say this because she only had a life of poverty to look forward to with little opportunities. We have so many more decisions to make and opportunities before us. But she actually faced scorn, a break up of her betrothal and possible death if the community responded with fierceness to an unwed pregnancy. The life she anticipated of obscure poverty in a faraway village was turned upside down and would take her all the way to Egypt and back culminating in the public execution of her son. This yes for Mary was no small thing. Yet it was God's great call on her life to play the role he called her to play in His great plan.

So are we willing to say, "I am the Lord's servant?" and He is Lord over my career path; life direction; relationships; spending; savings; future; leisure time, dreams?

That's the high calling of Christ upon our lives. Though we might think at first it is a deep sacrifice, the more we follow Christ's call and live as His servant, the more we will discover and experience the greatness of being part of His work and doing what He created us to do. .

I remember 24 years ago when the news came to us as a young couple while living here in Edmonton that the church in Ottawa had extended a call. To accept it, we would need to move 3 provinces and about 3400 kms away. We left behind here in Alberta much of our support system. We moved into a situation where we knew the church was fragile and there were great challenges ahead. Yet there were many times when I sensed God providing for us – older believers who looked after us like family; friends who adopted us into their circle; and most of all – the sufficiency of Christ to be our strength through all the twists and turns we faced. It was a difficult calling. Yet any calling of Christ will involve some difficulty. But there was also a tremendous sweetness we tasted through much of what we experienced during that time.

Some of you have received challenging news this past week, month or year. Some of it has been good news yet has demanded much from you. Others have received tough news. You may not know if you will make it. But as a Christian, you have the most unique, all-powerful Lord Jesus with you and beside you. He will never leave you. He will guide you and walk with you through whatever you face until He brings you into His eternal kingdom.

Others of us may have received some call from God this past week, month or year. He's calling us to act or obey or step out or decide. Maybe you've been holding back on that. But today is the day you need to say "I am the Lord's servant. Let it be done to me as you have said."

