

THE MIRACLE-SON AND THE GOD WHO CAN

An Advent Sermon on Luke 1:26–38

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In Genesis 3:15 Yahweh God promised to raise up an offspring of the first woman to crush the head of the serpent. He then declared how he would multiply difficulties in relation to childbearing, and this informs the numerous challenges with conception in the Bible's storyline, all of which highlight the need for those hoping in the coming deliverer to depend in faith on God. To figures like barren and aged Sarah and barren and battered Hannah Yahweh gave miracle children in contexts that explicitly predict Jesus's coming (e.g., Gen 21:12; 22:17–18; 1 Sam 2:10). Last week we saw how God let barren Elizabeth conceive John to prepare the way for Christ, and this week we'll see an even greater miracle in relation to Mary's conception of Jesus. All these miracles prove what God declares through his messenger in Luke 1:37, that "nothing will be impossible with God."

In this second week of advent, we celebrate the miracle-working God who can accomplish all we need for life and godliness. In our passage, God promises to use the virgin Mary to bring forth Jesus to reign forever as God's Son on David's throne. Let's read Luke 1:26–38 Pray with me for God's help.

The Arrival of the Messenger

We open with a fresh appearance of Gabriel, who also announced John's conception to Zechariah. Gabriel appears "in the sixth month," which signals that he met Mary at the end of Elizabeth's second trimester and one month since this older relative came out of hiding (1:24). The angel Gabriel is only named twice in Scripture—here and in Daniel 8–9 in relation to God's promise of a progression of kingdoms culminating in the kingdom of God. The use of Gabriel's name, therefore, recalls Daniel's prediction that God would, in the days of the Messiah, "finish the transgression ... put an end to sin ... and ... atone for iniquity, ... bring in everlasting righteousness, ... seal both vision and prophet, and ... anoint a most holy place" (Dan 9:24). For all careful readers, the mere mention of Gabriel should heighten hope in the kingdom that God had promised.

Luke now gives us the source, location, and recipient of the angel's message. "Gabriel was sent from God," which marks God as the initiator of good news. "*God* so loved the world that he gave his only Son" (John 3:16). The coming of Jesus arose out of "the definite plan and foreknowledge of *God*" (Acts 2:23). "While we were still sinners," Christ came (Rom 5:8), and "even when we were dead in our trespasses," *God* acted on our behalf to save us by grace (Eph 2:5). "Thanks be to *God* for his inexpressible gift" (2 Cor 9:15).

Next, we're told Gabriel came "to a city of Galilee named Nazareth" (Luke 1:26). To foretell John's birth, the angel appeared in Jerusalem's holy temple, but to declare Jesus's birth, he went to a remote village in a disparaged part of the promised land (John 1:46; 7:41, 52). This highlights how much the divine Son humbled himself to save the poor, rejected, weak, and worn (Luke 4:18; 7:22; 14:13). The "good news of great joy ... will be for *all* the people" (2:10), not just the elites of the society, and this is great news for most of us in this room. Isaiah earlier foretold this region—"Galilee of the nations"—would be the very place where light would break into the darkness as God raised up a child-king who would reign "on the throne of David and over his kingdom" (Isa 9:1, 6–7).

Finally, Luke indicates that Gabriel's target recipient was "a virgin" named Mary (1:27). The miraculous conceptions of barren women like Sarah, Hannah, and Elizabeth are one thing, for the natural means of intercourse for conceiving a baby is still present. However, to declare that a virgin will conceive is a completely new level of miracle and distinguishes Jesus from every other human in history. Whereas Mary's status as a virgin moved Matthew to cite Isaiah 7:14's prediction that "the virgin shall conceive and bear a son," Luke simply mentions her virginity and moves on, developing through the story why he will be "God with us."

Luke tells us this virgin is "betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David" (1:27). Betrothal meant that Mary was legally bound to Joseph as his wife but that they were not yet living together, for the marriage had not been ratified through ceremony and sexual intercourse. Mary's relative Elizabeth was "from the daughters of Aaron," which means that Jesus may have had connections to the priestly line. Nevertheless, Luke only highlights what would become Jesus's biological link through Joseph to ancient King David. Society would recognize Joseph as Jesus's father, and the link to David was vital because Yahweh had promised that the hoped-for royal figure would rise out of the tribe of Judah (Gen 49:8–10) in the line of David (2 Sam 7:12–16). The prophets repeatedly hoped for a new Davidic figure who would realize these kingdom hopes, overcoming God's enemies and reestablishing right order in the world (Isa 9:7; 11:1, 10; 16:5; 55:3; Jer 23:5; 30:9; 33:15; Ezek 34:23–24; 37:24–25; Hos 3:5; Amos 9:11; Mic 5:2–5; Zech 12:7–13:1). With this brief description of Mary, therefore, Luke establishes two necessary elements of the Messiah's heritage: He will be a Judean from the house of David and will have a unique origin that God alone could generate.

The Message Concerning God's Miracle-Son (1:28–33)

Gabriel's Greeting and Mary's Initial Response (vv. 28–29)

We now hear the message the angel delivers. We begin with his greeting and Mary's initial response (vv. 28–29). "[Gabriel] came to her and said, "Greetings, O

favorable one, the Lord is with you!” (v. 28). To say that Mary is “favored” signals that she stands as a recipient of divine grace. The blessing she is about to receive is, therefore, not due to a personal quality but is instead due fully to God’s unmerited favor. Within context, the declaration that “the Lord is with you” likely expresses more than God’s immediate presence for it recalls Isaiah’s promise that the son born to the virgin would be called “Immanuel”—God with us.

Mary was “greatly troubled” by these words, apparently unsure of whether Gabriel intended harm or benefit (v. 29). At this, he proclaimed God’s message (vv. 30–33), first quieting her fear and then reassuring her, “You have found favor with God” (v. 30). Whereas the author described Zechariah and Elizabeth as “righteous before God, walking blamelessly” (1:6), Luke now bypasses all fruit to focus only on root—God’s gracious kindness toward Mary (cf. Gen 6:8–9).

The Message and Mary’s Response (vv. 30–38)

The Message (vv. 30–33)

Now, we finally get to the heart of Gabriel’s message. The angel says, “Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus” (Luke 1:31). Mary will mother a boy through conception, which signals he will be a fully male human. God also designates his name as Jesus, meaning “Yahweh saves” and pointing to his divine mission of deliverance. Through Jesus, God saves us from our failures, pride, and lust, our deceit, laziness, and selfishness. Through Jesus, the Lord pardons us from our anger, immorality, bitterness, impatience, hard heartedness, hard headedness, and lack of discipline. Through Jesus, Yahweh forgives us of our complaining, envy, fear, unbelief, and ingratitude. Most of all, through Jesus Yahweh saves us from his own just wrath. The only way to see the bad news of our guilt and condemnation replaced by the good news of peace with God is through Jesus. Yahweh saves, and this is the meaning and message of Jesus’s mission.

Having addressed the gift Jesus is, the angel now details Jesus’s greatness and glory. “He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High” (v. 32). The Most High God was the “Possessor of heaven and earth” (Gen 14:19) and the one who “gave to the nations their inheritance, when he divided mankind” (Deut 32:8). He’s the one who delivered Abraham’s enemies into his hand (Gen 14:20) and who spoke through the pagan prophet Balaam of God’s exalted Israelite warrior king who would crush his enemies and exercise dominion (Num 24:16–19). In Daniel, the book where Gabriel predicts the Messiah’s triumph over all earthly kingdoms, “the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will” (Dan 4:25, 32). “His kingdom is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom endures from generation to generation” (4:34). He gives everlasting

dominion and glory and a kingdom to one like a son of man (7:13–14), yet in a way that takes no glory away from himself. Mary is a virgin betrothed to Joseph, yet the child in her womb is the Son of the Most High “God of gods and Lord of Lords” (Deut 10:17). Joseph may serve as Jesus’s earthly dad, but Jesus’s primary Father is God himself, whose Most High status and authority extends to his Son.

The text calls the Most High the “Lord God” or “Sovereign God,” adding stress to his absolute supremacy. We read, “And the Lord God will give to him [the Son] 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” (Luke 1:32–33). Whereas the beginning of verse 32 stressed Jesus’s divine origin, now the emphasis is on his human, Davidic descent. This was necessary, for in 2 Samuel 7 Yahweh had promised King David, “I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom.... I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son.... And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever” (2 Sam 7:12, 13, 16). God promised David an eternal throne, and our passage adds that the throne will be eternal because Jesus’s reign will be perpetual and everlasting—“a kingdom that shall never be destroyed” (Dan 2:44; cf. Heb 1:8). Furthermore, the kingdom’s extent is also global with no end. As Scripture says, God’s intent for this Son is “that *all* peoples, nations, and languages should serve him” (Dan 7:14) and that his dominion be “from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth!” (Ps 72:8). Isaiah captures both the eternity and universal extent when he writes,

To us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his named shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. 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. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this. (Isa 9:6–7)

My last comment related to Gabriel’s message concerns the statement in verse 33 that Jesus’s will reign “over the house of Jacob.” Jacob, grandson of Abraham and heir of the promises, was renamed Israel and became the father of the twelve tribes that bear this name. Nevertheless, his house was always expected to grow beyond his biological descendants. Yahweh pledged to Abraham that through him all the families of the earth would be blessed (12:3) and that he would become the father of a multitude of nations (Gen 17:4–5). God then reaffirmed this hope to Jacob, declaring, “A nation and a company of nations shall come from you” (35:11) and “your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south, and in you and your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed” (28:14). The

Old Testament prophets are united in viewing the new covenant people of God as multi-ethnic (e.g., Isa 54:3; Jer 30:9; Amos 9:12; Zech 2:11). So, if you're part of Jesus's kingdom, you're part of Jacob's house—"a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession" (1 Pet 2:9). And we hope for the day when, at Christ's return, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever" (Rev 11:15).

The Response (vv. 34–38)

Mary now responds in 1:34: "How will this be, since I am a virgin?" Unlike Zechariah's doubting desire for corroboration (1:18), Mary simply wants to understand how God will accomplish such a miracle. She has not yet known a man, and in the history of the world a biological father has always been necessary for new life, except in the case of Adam.

"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' (1:35). Just as a human father begets a human son, so the divine Father begets a divine Son, fulfilling Yahweh's promise to David, "I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son" (2 Sam 7:14). And because Jesus's origination as the God-man does not represent fallen Adam's headship, Jesus is conceived not as a sinner but as "holy," imaging the likeness of his holy Father, the Most High. This makes Jesus 100% human and 100% divine, yet with a humanity unstained by the sin passed down through human fathers. Having been made fully human—like us in every respect yet without sin, he could represent us fully before God (Heb 2:17). Yet because he was also in every respect holy and would fully align with his Father's will, even to the point of death, he would be able to stand as the perfect substitute, taking the wrath that we deserved (4:15; 1 Pet 2:22–24). This is why his name is Jesus—"Yahweh saves."

Gabriel now adds proof that God will accomplish what he has promised. The angel declares, "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" (Luke 1:36–37). Throughout Scripture God often predicts short-term prophecies whose fulfillment validates that the larger, more extended prophecies will indeed come about. Here, God uses his womb-awakening power for aging Elizabeth to prove to Mary that the miracle birth that he has promised will indeed come to pass. Indeed, "Nothing will be impossible with God" (1:37).

These are the same words in the Greek (but here made as a statement) that Yahweh declared to barren Sarah, the matriarch, after he promised that, in her old age, she would bear Isaac, through whom the promised offspring-deliverer would be named (Gen 21:12). God queried, "Is anything too hard for the LORD?" The

answer she was to recognize was, “No!” Similarly, in the days of Jeremiah, Yahweh claimed, “Behold, I am the LORD, the God of all flesh. Is anything too hard for me?” (Jer 32:27). This was in response to his promise that, out of his people’s exile, he would make a new covenant with a transformed Israel in whose heart would be his law and all of whom—from the least to the greatest—would know him because their sins would be forgiven.

Brothers and sisters, Luke wants us to recognize that, since God indeed brought Jesus into the world through a virgin, he can meet all our needs. “Nothing will be impossible with God.” Jesus’s virginal conception and birth are not just facts of history. They prove how it is that Jesus is fully God and fully human, and they provide us a foundational reason for hope, letting us know, with Job, that God “can do all things” and that “no purpose of [his] can be thwarted” (Job 42:2). The Most High is able and willing to work on our behalf.

The importance of the virginal conception and birth clarifies why throughout history the church has drawn significant attention to it. For example, in AD 325, the church Council of Nicea shaped the Nicene Crede, a faithful and foundational summary of the Christian faith that has guided the church for the last 1,700 years. In the part focused on Jesus, it stresses:

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one being with the Father. Through him all things were made. For us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven; by the power of the Holy Spirit he became incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and was made man.

Why do we plead with the Lord to save our loved ones? It’s because we believe that what is impossible with man is possible with God—he can overcome their hard hardness and let light shine into their darkness just as he did with us. Why do we pray that he would heal sickness? It’s because we believe that at the cross the one who is fully God and fully man “took our illnesses and bore our diseases” (Matt 8:17). We know that one day, when every tear is wiped away, all that is broken will be fixed and all that is wounded will be made whole, so we ask God to let the future realities enter the present. Yet we do so believing that the God who heals is also the God who can help us endure through suffering, and this is often his will. He commonly chooses to magnify his greatness not by removing our pain but by carrying us through it. And one reason we believe he can do this is because he did the impossible for us by awakening new life in a virgin’s womb.

This truth also informs our battle with repeated sins—recurring impatience, lust, a short temper, selfishness, ugly or evil reactions. Christians don’t give in to despondency because we trust “nothing will be impossible with God.” You believe

that “he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil 1:6). You look to the day that “the God of peace [will] himself sanctify you completely,” and you believe that “he who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it” (1 Thess 5:23–24). When you lay down at night, grieved by your reactions and spiteful words, hope in the God who said, “I will make an everlasting covenant, that I will not turn away from doing good to them. And I will put the fear of me in their hearts, that they may not turn from me” (Jer 32:40). God wants us to hope today, for “nothing will be impossible with God” (Luke 1:37).

I urge you, keep praying, dear ones. Cast your cares, your longings, your fears, your pains, and your griefs his way. He is not caught off guard by our distresses or our sins, nor is he outdone or outsized by our burdens. He is able and faithful and “nothing will be impossible with God” (Luke 1:37).

I love Mary’s final response to Gabriel’s words: “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.” As this young woman looked ahead toward the impossible, which she knew would bring questions and concerns from others, she simply says, “Lord, bring it on! Come what may, just as you say, let it be!” May God give us such hearts that receive his providential declarations with, “I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.”

Jesus declares, “You will be delivered up even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and some of you they will put to death. You will be hated by all for my name’s sake. But not a hair of your head will perish. By endurance you will gain your lives” (Luke 21:15–18). We respond, “I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.” Jesus states, “‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you” (John 15:20). We say, “I am the Lord’s servant; let it be to me according to your word.” Paul says, “Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22). We say, “I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.”

By what strength do we endure, and in what hope do we walk? The promise: “Nothing will be impossible with God” (Luke 1:37). Take courage today, beloved of God. If the Most High “God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?” (Rom 8:31–32). The virginal birth and conception declare that “neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (8:38–39). If you are in Jesus, you can rest today knowing that the Most High is for you and with you and that, therefore, your life is fully secure. Look to him. Trust him. Hope in him. “Nothing will be impossible with God” (Luke 1:37).