

³⁵ The angel answered, “The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.

³⁶ Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. ³⁷ For no word from God will ever fail.”

1. While God enabled elderly couples to bear children throughout Israel’s history, Jesus’ birth will be far more remarkable. What is unique about Jesus’ birth?
2. The creation account begins with the words “And the Spirit of God hovering over the face of the water... (Genesis 1:2). The creative power of God that brought the world into being would enable Mary to have a son.
 - a) What would be the ultimate result of the “Holy Spirit coming on Mary and the power of the Most High overshadowing her?”
 - b) What is the ultimate result of the Spirit’s work in our life?
3. Why is it vital for us to remember, “No word from God will ever fail,” or “nothing is impossible with God?”

MARY RESPONDS WITH REMARKABLE GRACE (v. 38)

Mary has no idea what lies ahead. She will bear a child outside marriage. People will talk. Her son will be everything we are and everything God is. He will be misunderstood, hated, and finally nailed to the cross. Mary’s heart will be broken. Her path will not be easy, but she responds to God with remarkable grace and courage.

³⁸ “I am the Lord’s servant,” Mary answered. “May your word to me be fulfilled.”

1. What are some of the difficulties we may encounter as we pursue God’s will for our lives?
2. What is remarkable about Mary’s response to God’s plan for her life?
3. How does Mary’s response serve as a model for the way we should respond to God?

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One of the most remarkable people in Scripture is a small-town girl in her early teens. She does not deserve the adoration she received in the medieval church, but she is worth a second look. Her story is messy. She occasionally steps on the plot-line. But few respond to God with the grace and courage of Mary.

We first meet Mary in the opening chapter of Luke’s gospel. As important as her story is, Luke opens with another story. Zechariah is an aging priest serving in the temple. He is married to Elizabeth, and the godly old couple has long since given up on the possibility of having children. As Zechariah is burning incense at the altar, the angel Gabriel suddenly appears and announces that Zechariah and Elizabeth will have a son in their old age. Their son will be named John, and although he will be great in the sight of the Lord is merely a forerunner of the greater One to come.

Six months later, Gabriel makes an appearance in Nazareth. It is a study in contrast. Nazareth is nothing like Jerusalem. Mary is nothing like Zechariah and Elizabeth. Mary’s response is nothing like Zechariah’s. And of course, Jesus is nothing like John.

Luke not only sets up the contrast, but he also weaves the announcement of our Lord’s birth deep into the fabric of the Old Testament story. We are left with little doubt that God is about to do something big, but it all starts with a teenage girl in a small town.

GABRIEL VISITS MARY IN NAZARETH (vv. 26-28)

When Luke introduces us to Mary, we are a long way from Jerusalem. The temple is no longer in view. We are in a dusty little village, where a teenage girl, whose name is all but an afterthought, is merely going about her business. The scene is as ordinary as they come. The event is far from ordinary.

²⁶ In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, ²⁷ to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary.

²⁸ The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you."

1. Gabriel is one of only two named angels in the Bible. We first meet Gabriel in the book of Daniel, where he is dispatched to convey wisdom and understanding to Daniel. The visions in Daniel center around a coming king and a future kingdom that will displace all the kingdoms and rulers of the world (see Daniel 2:44 & 7:13-14). In Luke, Gabriel appears to announce the arrival of that king.

How does Gabriel's role in Daniel set us up for the role he plays in Luke?

2. On hearing of Jesus for the first time, one of Jesus' early followers asks, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth (John 1:45)?" The city is not mentioned in the Bible before the announcement of Jesus' birth. It will not show up in Jewish literature for decades. It is an inconsequential little village in the middle of nowhere.

Why do you think God delights in choosing ordinary people in ordinary places to accomplish his purposes?

3. Gabriel's greeting is a play on words, we might translate it, "Grace to you, on whom God has lavished the riches of his grace." These words are foundational. God's call always begins with God's grace. He never calls us to do anything he, by his grace, will not enable us to do, and he promises to be with us every step of the way.
 - a) Why is this important for Mary to know?
 - b) Why is it essential for us to know?

MARY WONDERS WHAT KIND OF GREETING THIS MIGHT BE (vv. 29-33)

When Zechariah encounters Gabriel, he is "gripped with fear (Luke 1:12)." In spite of their disparity in age, Mary seems to perform much better under pressure. She is not nearly as troubled by the angel's presence as she is by his words. Angelic encounters are rare, and they are never without meaning. Mary knows God is up to something big. She has no idea how big.

²⁹ Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be.

³⁰ But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. ³¹ You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus.

³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, ³³ and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end."

1. Before Gabriel addresses Mary's concern, he reassures her of God's grace one more time.
 - a) What might have given Mary an occasion for fear?
 - b) How would God's grace diminish her fear?
 - c) What are some of our greatest fears?
 - d) How does God's grace diminish our fears?
2. How does Gabriel describe Mary's child?
3. The name Jesus means "Our Lord Saves."
 - a) Why is this name particularly fitting for Mary's son?
 - b) What does Jesus rescue us from?
 - c) How does he rescue us?
4. God promised David that he would always have a son reigning over Israel (2 Samuel 7:11-14). Isaiah later describes the extraordinary nature of that son (Isaiah 9:6-7). David was probably thinking in terms of a dynasty. God had one particular son in mind.

How would Jesus fulfill God's promise to David in a way far grander than David ever imagined?

MARY WONDERS HOW THIS WILL BE (vv. 33-37)

When Gabriel announces the birth of John, Zechariah asks, "How can this be?" He should have known the answer. The story of Israel begins with an aged Abraham and Sarah, who are unable to have children. Abraham and Sarah are not alone. There are other miraculous births, as well. Zechariah should have reasoned, "This is no big deal for God," but he has his doubts. Mary, on the other hand, does not doubt God's ability. Her question is not, "How can this be," but "How will this be?" She wants to know the details.

³⁴ "How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"