

Jesus: Son of David, Son of Mary, Son of God

Luke 1:26-38

Sunday, November 17, 2024

Is it just me, or does the Christmas season seem to arrive earlier and earlier every year? Starting this new sermon series on the Gospel of Luke in November certainly didn't help. The passage we're looking at today is typically one we save for the Advent season in December. We're still a couple of weeks away from flipping the calendar, but here we are looking at the story of the angel Gabriel's announcement to Mary. One way or another, in a sermon, as part of a kids' Christmas program, or in the lyrics of an Advent hymn, we seem to come back to this section of Scripture every year. Only this year, we're arriving a little early.

But this year we're approaching this text in a way we haven't before. This year—and likely all of 2025—we'll look at familiar passages like this one in their more complete context. We're not just looking at Luke's version of the Christmas story this November and December. Over the next six Sundays, we'll look at how the Christmas story we know fits into the larger narrative of Luke's Gospel.

Picking things up in Luke 1:26, you'll notice immediately that this passage flows out of the one we explored last Sunday. If you heard Pastor Jerry's sermon last week, you'll remember we were introduced to a priest named Zechariah and his wife Elizabeth. This couple will reappear in the story in the weeks to come. We were introduced to a third figure last Sunday as well, an angel sent from God named Gabriel. Notice how Luke ties last week's passage to today's in verse 26.

“In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee” (Luke 1:26, NIV).

Remember, Zechariah and Elizabeth's story took place in Jerusalem where Zechariah served as a temple priest. Luke now tells us that our story takes place up the road in a tiny town called Nazareth.

It may be a familiar story but let's look again at how it begins.

“In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, “Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.” Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be” (Luke 1:26-29, NIV).

In our Life Group this past Tuesday we talked about what it might be like to meet an angel face-to-face. How do you think you would respond to seeing an angel? Think back to last week when we read,

“When Zechariah saw [Gabriel], he was startled and gripped with fear” (Luke 1:12, NIV).

As Pastor Jerry said last Sunday, Zechariah was *freaked out*.

Mary had a similar response to her angelic visitor in verse 29. Luke says that she “was greatly troubled at [Gabriel’s] words” (Luke 1:29, NIV). Gabriel’s response to Mary is the same one he gave to Zechariah,

“Do not be afraid, Mary” (Luke 1:30, NIV; cf. 1:13).

Similarly, just as Gabriel announced to Zechariah that his wife Elizabeth would bear him a son and that they were to name him John, the angel likewise revealed to Mary that she would soon be expecting a baby. In both cases, these two pregnancies would be the result of God’s gracious intervention.

“But the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus” (Luke 1:30-31, NIV).

Careful readers of Luke’s narrative might anticipate Mary’s question in verse 34,

“How will this be, ...since I am a virgin?” (Luke 1:34, NIV).

Not once but twice Luke mentioned in verse 27 that Mary was a virgin and highlights that she was not yet married to Joseph her betrothed.

Mary’s question is a perfectly valid one. *How?* But whereas Zechariah’s *how* in verse 18 revealed his doubt and unbelief, Mary’s *how* in verse 34 revealed her humble faith.

Mary’s perfectly valid question received a perfectly valid but somewhat mysterious answer.

“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. 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” (Luke 1:35-36, NIV).

We could spend the rest of our time comparing these two passages and noticing how these two birth announcements are linked together. There’s the angelic messenger connection. There’s the miraculous supernatural birth connection. Even Elizabeth herself serves as a bridge between these two passages. Even Gabriel’s announcement that Elizabeth was six months into her pregnancy was to serve as a sign to Mary that, as the angel said in verse 37,

“No word from God will ever fail” (Luke 1:37, NIV),
to which Mary replied in verse 38,

“I am the Lord’s servant, ...May your word to me be fulfilled” (Luke 1:38, NIV).

I must confess that, at first, I didn’t like the way the NIV translates verse 37. I resonate more with the way the ESV translates that verse:

“For nothing will be impossible with God” (Luke 1:37, ESV).

I’m not suggesting that the NIV translators got it wrong. I just love the reminder that we worship a God for whom nothing is impossible. I remember a song we used to sing at VBS as a kid that went,

My God is so big, so strong, and so mighty! There’s nothing my God cannot do!

Translators have a tough job working from New Testament Greek to bring a readable text into modern English. In this case, both the NIV and ESV translators have it right. It is certainly the case that the God of the Bible is a God who is unmatched in power.

But the more I reflect on what Gabriel’s words meant in verse 37, the more I have come to appreciate the way the NIV says it.

“For no word from God will ever fail” (Luke 1:37, NIV).

What does this mean and why does the angel Gabriel finish his announcement to Mary with these words? When Gabriel said that no word from God will ever fail, he was affirming the fact that what God says he will do, he will do. In sending Gabriel as his messenger, God declares to his people that he is a promise-keeping God.

Our God is a promise-keeping God.

When we read Scripture, we discover this about God. He is not only a promise-maker, but God shows himself again and again to be a promise-keeper.

On one level, our passage teaches that just as God promised Elizabeth that she and her husband would have a son, Elizabeth’s pregnancy served as a sign for Mary that she too would conceive and give birth to a son. What God says he will do, he will do. Our God is a promise-keeping God. But there’s an even greater promise and fulfillment revealed in Gabriel’s announcement to Mary about the son to be named Jesus.

There are two verses in this passage that we’ve not touched on yet. But before we examine verses 32-33, I would like to take us to a key passage of Scripture in the Old Testament. We’ll return to Luke 1 in a few minutes, so keep a bookmark there. Turn with me to 2 Samuel 7.

Have you ever given someone some bad advice? Not on purpose, mind you. Have you ever given someone some advice that you thought at the time was wise but turned out to be unhelpful? King David had an advisor, a prophet named Nathan. As a prophet, Nathan would on occasion speak a prophetic word to David from the LORD. This was not one of those occasions.

I'm going to read 2 Samuel 7:1-17. It's a long section but I promise it connects to our passage in Luke 1.

“After the king was settled in his palace and the LORD had given him rest from all his enemies around him, he said to Nathan the prophet, “Here I am, living in a house of cedar, while the ark of God remains in a tent.”

Nathan replied to the king, “Whatever you have in mind, go ahead and do it, for the LORD is with you.”

But that night the word of the LORD came to Nathan, saying:

“Go and tell my servant David, ‘This is what the LORD says: Are you the one to build me a house to dwell in? I have not dwelt in a house from the day I brought the Israelites up out of Egypt to this day. I have been moving from place to place with a tent as my dwelling. Wherever I have moved with all the Israelites, did I ever say to any of their rulers whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, “Why have you not built me a house of cedar?” ’

“Now then, tell my servant David, ‘This is what the LORD Almighty says: I took you from the pasture, from tending the flock, and appointed you ruler over my people Israel. I have been with you wherever you have gone, and I have cut off all your enemies from before you. Now I will make your name great, like the names of the greatest men on earth. And I will provide a place for my people Israel and will plant them so that they can have a home of their own and no longer be disturbed. Wicked people will not oppress them anymore, as they did at the beginning and have done ever since the time I appointed leaders over my people Israel. I will also give you rest from all your enemies.

“ ‘The LORD declares to you that the LORD himself will establish a house for you: When your days are over and you rest with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, your own flesh and blood, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his father, and he will be my son. When he does wrong, I will punish him with a rod wielded by men, with floggings inflicted by human hands. But my love will never be taken away from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. Your house

and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever.’ ” Nathan reported to David all the words of this entire revelation” (2 Samuel 7:1-14, NIV).

Oh, that I had enough time to fully unpack this text! This is such an important passage of Scripture. So many other passages of Scripture, both Old and New Testament, look back to this story, including our text in Luke 1. One Old Testament commentator has claimed that this is “the most crucial theological statement in the Old Testament.”¹

Well-meaning King David felt bad that his accommodations in the palace were far nicer than the shabby tent where the ark of God rested. Why not build God a palace of his own, a proper temple? The plan sounded good to Nathan, so he green-lighted it.

But that wasn’t what God had in mind. God revealed to Nathan his plans for an even greater house than David could conceive of. David wanted to build a *house* for God—a temple. But God would instead make a *house* for David, not a physical structure, but a kingdom. Yes, David’s son Solomon would soon build a temple for the LORD, but God would establish a kingdom through David’s line. And God promised that it would be a kingdom that would last forever.

There are two ways that David’s kingdom would last forever. The first way was to ensure that King David’s son Solomon would have a son, who would have a son, who would have a son, etc. forever and ever. However, within a generation, that plan came to a disastrous end.

The other way to ensure that a descendent of David would sit on his throne forever would be to have a descendant of David who could reign as king forever and ever.

Fast-forward a thousand years to first-century Nazareth. Listen once again to Luke’s account of Gabriel’s visit to Mary.

“In the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, “Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.” Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. 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, and he will reign over Jacob’s descendants forever; his kingdom will never end” (Luke 1:26-33, NIV).

¹ Robert D. Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, Vol. 7, The New American Commentary, 1996, B&H Publishing Group, p. 336.

The angel Gabriel's announcement deliberately pointed back to God's promise made in 2 Samuel 7. We know from the second chapter of Luke that Mary and Joseph were (much like Zechariah and Elizabeth) faithful, righteous, and obedient Jews. There's no way that Mary would have missed the reference to God's promise made to King David in Gabriel's birth announcement.

The son Mary would conceive and give birth to was to be named Jesus. Years later, in his hometown of Nazareth, Jesus's neighbors would say of him,

“Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know?” (Luke 4:42, NIV).

There's no question that the child Gabriel spoke of would be—to quote the Advent hymn— *the babe, the son of Mary*. He would be called Jesus.

But he would also be declared to be the Son of the Most High. Even the demons would one day confess this to be true of Mary's son (cf. Luke 8:28).

When Mary asked Gabriel, “How will this be ...since I am a virgin?” the angel responded,

“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” (Luke 1:35, NIV).

I doubt that Mary had at this point what we would call a fully-formed trinitarian understanding of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And yet Gabriel spoke of, and Luke hints at the fact that the one to be called Son of God was intimately connected to the Most High God and the the Holy Spirit. Jesus, the son of Mary would also be called Son of the Most High, the Son of God.

There is good reason to believe that Luke's account of Gabriel and Mary's meeting came to the Gospel writer from a first-hand source, perhaps from Mary herself or from someone who knew Mary. Yet it's interesting that even though Luke mentions that Mary was a virgin, he makes no mention of Isaiah's famous prophecy that

“The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel” (Isa. 7:14, NIV).

Nor does he follow Matthew's example and tell us that the name Jesus points to the fact that

“he will save his people from their sins” (Matt. 1:21, NIV).

What Luke does tell us, and what he does want us to take notice of is that

“The Lord God will give to [the son of Mary, the Son of the Most High God] the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever” (Luke 1:32-33, ESV).

A promise God made to David a thousand years before the birth of Christ was now going to be fulfilled. The son of Mary, the Son of the Most High God would finally and forever inherit the throne of his father David. God is a promise-keeping God. What God says he will do, he will do.

As we work through Luke’s Gospel together this theme will reappear. God is a promise-keeping God. What God says he will do, he will do. But our takeaway from this passage needs to be more than just that God keeps his promises. True as that may be, this passage is more than just a comment about God’s character. Certainly knowing that God is trustworthy and that he will do what he says he will do is a great source of comfort and assurance.

A better question to ask as we study Luke’s Gospel is what do the promises of God revealed in Scripture point us to? I would argue that every single promise God makes in Scripture finds its fulfillment in Jesus Christ. From the promise of his coming to the promise of his identity to the promise of his saving work to the promise of his glorious return. Our God is a promise-keeping God. What he says he will do, he will do. And what God has said he will do is on full display in this passage.

“Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. 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, and he will reign over Jacob’s descendants forever; his kingdom will never end” (Luke 1:30-33, NIV).

Jesus’s kingdom will never end. Now that’s a promise we can rejoice in.

Let’s pray.