

The Advent of a King

The Annunciation (Luke 1:26-38)

Preached by Pastor Jason Tarn to HCC on December 5, 2021

Introduction

- ❖ Last week, we started an Advent series, going through Luke 1. It's called *The Advent of a King*. If you weren't aware, the word advent means coming or arrival. In Christian tradition, the first four Sundays leading up to Christmas Day mark the Advent season. And we celebrate by directing our worship and devotion to the first coming of the Messiah – to the arrival of Christ the King some two thousand years ago in the little town of Bethlehem.
 - And at the same time, our celebration of Advent directs our worship and devotion to the future – awaiting for the second coming – a second arrival of our King, to establish his kingdom in its fullness, and to complete the rescue of his redeemed.

- ❖ This morning, in Luke's Gospel, in his recounting of Jesus's birth narrative, we arrive at the **Annunciation**. That glorious day when the angel Gabriel appeared to a young virgin Mary, announcing that she would miraculously conceive and give birth to the Son of God.
 - Now I think it's safe to say that most of us have never celebrated Annunciation Day. Traditionally, it's observed every March 25th, and it commemorates the day the Son of God was conceived in Mary's womb by the power of the Holy Spirit. And if you do the math, nine months later is December 25th. Now when it comes to Christmas, I'm sure that's a day we've all celebrated.
 - **But you could make the case that Annunciation Day is a more important holiday.** Because the Incarnation of the Son of God actually took place then – when he was conceived by the Holy Spirit. Nine months before Christmas!

- ❖ In fact, if you want to dive deeper into ancient Judeo-Christian traditions, March 25th – in correlation with the spring equinox – was celebrated as the day of God's first act of creation when he said, "*Let there be light.*" It has also been traditionally viewed as the day of Christ's death, which is why Good Friday generally occurs in that season. So March 25th commemorates the beginning of creation (Genesis 1) and the beginning of new creation (both the Incarnation and the Crucifixion).
 - **So you can see why some would consider March 25th to be the most important date in the calendar.** J.R.R. Tolkien certainly held this belief. So much so that he carried over that conviction into his fictional world of Middle-Earth. According to the calendar system of Middle-Earth, March 25th marks the day when the One Ring was destroyed in the fires of Mount Doom and the dark lord Sauron was defeated.
 - Everything changed in Middle-earth and nothing remained the same on that March 25th when the One Ring was unmade. **Similarly, everything changed in our world and nothing remained the same on that March 25th when the Son of God was made in the flesh, as a tiny zygote in Mary's womb.**

- ❖ I still plan on observing December 25 and celebrating the birth of Christ on Christmas, but now I'm wondering why I don't celebrate the Annunciation? Now I realize I'm missing out. There's a lot to be learned. Which is why I'm excited to study this text with you this morning.

- ❖ I'd like to draw your attention to four elements in this story. First, consider the lowliness of this setting in which this birth announcement takes place. Second, consider the graciousness of this greeting that Mary receives. Third, consider the impossibility of this promise which the angel Gabriel makes. Fourth, consider the beauty of this response from Mary.

The Lowliness of this Setting

- ❖ **Let's begin by considering the lowliness of this setting in which our story takes place.** It's particularly set in contrast to the greatness of the previous passage we looked at last week. Where Gabriel made another birth announcement, but that time to Zechariah – the father of John the Baptist. That took place in the royal city of Jerusalem. While he was in the holy temple of God. In the holy place, ministering as a venerable priest of Israel.
 - **But starting in v26, the narrative moves from Jerusalem and a priest to a small rural village and a poor unmarried girl.** *“In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth.”* That Luke had to specify Nazareth as a city of Galilee suggests that his intended readers were unfamiliar with the village. Calling it a city is being generous. Nazareth was a small, insignificant rural village situated on the border of Galilee and Samaria. *“Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”* was a common saying in those days (Jn 1:46). Because the village had such a poor reputation.
- ❖ **That's what makes Nazareth such a surprising choice as the setting for this birth announcement.** If the announcement for the Messiah's predecessor, John the Baptist, took place in the holiest of cities and the holiest of spaces, then you would assume that the setting for the birth of the Messiah himself would be even grander and more glorious.
 - But instead God chooses to send Gabriel to a backwater village. **And instead of the temple in Jerusalem, God announces plans to reside in the womb of a poor village girl.** Keep reading in v27. Gabriel is sent *“to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary.”*
- ❖ **According to Ancient Near Eastern custom, betrothal was a formal, legal arrangement that functioned like an engagement period between a couple.** But unlike in our day, a betrothal was legally binding. The groom's family would have paid a bride price, and backing out of the betrothal required a divorce and grounds for divorce like sexual infidelity.
 - Now the betrothal period would typically last a year, and the bride would remain in her father's house. **And though there were legally bound to each other, in the eyes of God, the man and the woman were not yet husband and wife, and so any sexual activity between the two of them was not permitted.**
 - That's the situation Mary finds herself in when Gabriel appeared. **That's why she's accurately described as a virgin.** She has never had sexual relations with any man, including Joseph. She emphasizes that later in v34. There the Greek literally says, *“How will this be, since I do not know a man?”* *Know* being a common euphemism in the Bible for sexual intimacy.

- ❖ Now don't be alarmed, but in those days, the usual age for a woman to be betrothed was twelve or thirteen. **So Mary was very likely, at this time, a teenage girl.** And she was from a poor family. And she was marrying into another poor family.
 - Apparently, Joseph wasn't well off either. Later in Luke 2:24, when Joseph and Mary take baby Jesus to the temple to present him before the Lord, it says they offer up two turtledoves. Look it up in the Law (Lev 12:8). Most people would sacrifice a lamb because most people could afford it. But the poorest of the poor in Israel were allowed to substitute two turtledoves. That's Mary. **A poor, teenage girl from a poor, insignificant town, in the backwaters of Galilee.**

- ❖ Consider the setting of our passage in contrast to last week's. The prominence of Jerusalem, a priest, and the temple are set in contrast to the lowliness of Nazareth, a poor village girl, and a virgin womb. I believe it's all intentional. **The lowly setting of his birth announcement is meant to forecast the lowly, humble nature of Jesus's character and ministry.**
 - Contrary to popular belief in those days, Israel's Messiah would not be associated with political power or military might. Now that's not to deny his royal lineage; his strength or sovereignty. He *is* the Lion of Judah – but he appears as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (Jn 1:29). He *is* a mighty king – but he came in the form of a servant (Phil 2:7). He came not to *be* served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many (Mk 10:45).
 - **For thirty years, Jesus lived in obscurity.** Apprenticing under his earthly father, learning his trade as a carpenter and craftsman. And even during the three short years of his public ministry, he was a wandering nomad traveling from town to town with his band of disciples, surviving on the charity of others. *“Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.”* (Lk 9:58)

- ❖ And his public ministry ended in shame and disrepute. He was arrested and tried as a blasphemer. He was tortured and executed as an insurrectionist. **His life and ministry was marked by lowliness and humility.** And it all stems back to his birth announcement in this morning's passage.
 - **Which serves as a much-needed rebuke to the contemporary church's obsession with power and prominence.** We seek to grow our churches. And rightly so. But growth has been reinterpreted with worldly categories and definitions. Churches seek to grow in political power and societal prominence. Church leaders seek to grow their individual platforms and popularity.
 - If Christians are more known, in the eyes of the world, for their efforts to grab or to retain power and influence – to win all their arguments and defeat all their enemies – if that's the prevailing attitude that we are known for, then we've completely lost sight of our Messiah. We need to go back – all the way back to his Annunciation – to recover the lowly and humble heart of Christ.

The Graciousness of this Greeting

- ❖ So the first element to consider is the lowliness of this setting. **Second, consider the graciousness of this greeting that Mary receives.** In v28, the angel Gabriel speaks, “²⁸*And he came to her and said, “Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!”* ²⁹*But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be.”*
 - Now we’re told that Mary, at first, was troubled and unsure how to interpret this greeting. You’d think that hearing an angel announce “*the Lord is with you*” would be automatically interpreted as a good and comforting thing. But apparently it depends. **It depends on whether the Lord’s presence is with you in bare justice and judgment.** If that’s the case, then Mary (along with the rest of us) are doomed. Because we all stand guilty as sinners. We *should* be greatly troubled in his presence. But if the Lord is with you in grace, in gracious favor, then you have no need to fear. No reason to be afraid of his presence.

- ❖ And that is what Gabriel announces. The Greek word for “*O favored one*” contains the root word for *grace* – for God’s unmerited, undeserved favor. Gabriel is assuring Mary that the Lord is with her in grace. He goes on to say in v30 that she need not be afraid because she has “*found favor with God.*”
 - That favor is not something she merited. She didn’t do anything to prove herself worthy of God’s kind favor. That favor is rooted in grace. In God showing someone kindness in spite of their unworthiness.
 - **That’s one of the differences between Protestants and Catholics.** We all think highly of Mary. She *is* the Blessed Mother of our Lord. But the text doesn’t say she is *full of grace*. As if there is something inherently grace-giving about her. **She’s not a source of grace. She (like all believers) is an object of grace.** That’s why Protestants don’t pray to Mary. We don’t treat her as a repository of grace. We honor her instead as a recipient of grace.

- ❖ Now we’re told in v31 that this grace that she receives takes shape in the form of a baby. Listen to vv31-33. “³¹*And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus.* ³²*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,* ³³*and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.”* Notice three key descriptions of this baby to be miraculously conceived in her womb. First, he’s a Savior. Second, he’s a Davidic King. Third, he’s the Son of God.

- ❖ **First, notice how this child will be a Savior.** That’s what the name Jesus means. It translates to “*The LORD (Yahweh) saves*”. Jesus is the Greek transliteration of the Hebrew name Joshua. It was a common name in those days as Joshua was in the OT (and even today). But while most kids, in those days, were named Jesus/Joshua to commemorate God’s saving acts on behalf of Israel in the distant past, this Jesus has a name that points forward to what God will accomplish through him to save us all from our sins.

- ❖ **Second, notice how this child is of royal heritage. He is a Davidic King.** Earlier, Luke mentions how Joseph, his adoptive father, is “*of the house of David.*” By virtue of his adopted status, Jesus is a legitimate heir and has a legitimate claim to the Davidic throne.
 - And that’s what Gabriel promises. The Lord God will give to Jesus the throne of his father David (as in his ancestor, David). And he will reign over the kingdom of God as the rightful heir to the promises made to David and his kin (2 Sam 7:12-14). David was promised that through his line comes a son who will be the Messiah. Which is Hebrew for “*the Anointed One*”. In Greek, it’s the word Christ. That’s why he’s called Jesus Christ. Not because Christ is his last name but because it’s his royal title.

- ❖ **Third, notice how this child will not just be a special king. He won’t just be a saving hero among men. He will be divine in nature, being the very Son of God.** He will be called the Son of the Most High. That’s a synonym for God. This child is unique in this way. John the Baptist “*will be called the prophet of the Most High*” (1:76) But only Jesus is the Son of the Most High. Here we get a hint of the dual nature of Jesus, being both God and man. Which will be emphasized even more in our next point.

- ❖ But before we move on, let’s stop and consider how gracious this greeting is. **It’s a birth announcement saturated with grace.** It’s a proclamation of good news – of comfort and joy. Especially for those who are greatly troubled by their sin and by their sense of unworthiness to be in the presence of God.
 - **Friends, if you’re feeling greatly troubled by the thought of your sins – if you're discomfited by the thought of being in the Lord’s presence – then I hope you can hear and perceive the goodness and grace of this announcement Gabriel is making.** You're probably doing all you can right now to assuage your own sense of guilt and shame. Trying to improve yourself. Trying to be a kinder, gentler person. Trying to sin less and love more.
 - But the reality is that you will never do enough to earn God's favor. You'll never be enough to deserve to be in his presence. **The only way to find favor with God is to be found in a saving relationship with his Son.** This very child being promised to Mary.

The Impossibility of this Promise

- ❖ That leads to the third element of this story that I'd like to draw your attention to. **Consider the impossibility of this promise that Gabriel makes – that a virgin would give birth.** That's what perplexes Mary in v34. Look there with me, “*And Mary said to the angel, “How will this be, since I am a virgin?”*”
 - **Now unlike Zechariah's response to Gabriel's birth announcement, there doesn't appear to be any disbelief in Mary's response.** She doesn't doubt that it's going to happen, but just wonders how this is going to happen. She knows enough biology to know where babies come from. But she has never known a man in that way.

- ❖ Listen to Gabriel's answer in v35, “*35And 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.”*”
 - So how is this going to work? How can a virgin conceive a child? Gabriel says that God will make it happen. **Now there is no reason to crassly interpret that to imply that God impregnated Mary.** As if they had sexual relations. If that were the case then that wouldn't have been viewed as an impossibility back in the first-century. There were plenty of myths out there of Greek gods impregnating human women who gave birth to demigods. But what's being described here is different. There's no sex involved. So it would've been viewed by everyone as an impossibility.

- ❖ **Gabriel is talking about a divine act of creation by the sovereign, creative power of the Holy Spirit.** He tells Mary that the power of the Most High will overshadow you. That verb appears in Exodus 40:35 (LXX) when the glory cloud is described as overshadowing the tabernacle – signaling the presence of God descending on that holy space. And it also shows up later in Luke, in the Transfiguration, when a cloud overshadows the mountain (Lk 9:34).
 - **In each instance, it's the very presence of God that showed up.** Overshadowing the tabernacle. Overshadowing the Mount of Transfiguration. And overshadowing the virgin womb of Mary.
 - You can think of it this way: **Mary's womb was going to serve as a temporary tabernacle for the next nine months.** And just as all the objects in the tabernacle were holy once the glory cloud ascended and overshadowed it – in the same way, the child in her womb is holy. Set apart. Different. One of a kind. He's the only Begotten Son of God.

- ❖ This is why it's so vital that we preserve and defend the doctrine of the virgin birth. Because our belief in the virgin birth **directly informs our belief in the dual nature of Jesus as both Son of God and Son of Man – fully God, fully man.** That's the historic, biblical position on the singular personhood and dual nature of Jesus Christ. It's a doctrine strengthened and secured by a virgin birth.
 - Think about it. If Jesus had not been born of a human mother, we might have questioned his full humanity. But if he were conceived like everyone else – through the conjugal union of a father and mother, then we would question his full divinity. **But a virgin conception strengthens and secures our conviction that Jesus is both fully God and fully man.**

- ❖ And that's what makes Jesus unique above all saviors. He stands apart as the perfect mediator, the only mediator, between God and man (1 Tim 2:5). **The gospel says that there's a great divide between God and mankind, a deep hostility due to the offense of our sin against the purity of his holiness.** And there's nothing we can do to reconcile ourselves to God. We desperately need a mediator.

- ❖ Now think about the job of a mediator. A mediator brings two disputing parties together to achieve reconciliation. **And the best kind of mediator is the kind that can fully represent both parties, who perfectly understands both sides.**
 - That's already difficult to achieve in most disputes. And now if we're dealing with hostility between God and man, then it's downright impossible to find a mediator that fully represents both. Unless. Unless he's a God-man. Conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of a virgin, fully God and fully man.
 - Jesus is the best of all mediators. So look no further. Conclude your search. **He's the only one who can reconcile you to God because he's the only Savior who is God incarnate.** God made man.

- ❖ This is why the virgin birth is not some minor doctrine that we can just agree to disagree on. **Without the virgin birth, you're dealing with a completely different savior who won't be able to save you in the end.** I know it's hard to believe. It sounds impossible. As it should.
 - Because that's how we know this is God's doing. That's Gabriel's logic in vv36-37. Look there. **He references her relative Elizabeth's miraculous pregnancy to affirm that God can do what we consider to be impossible.** *“³⁶And 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. ³⁷For nothing will be impossible with God.”*

- ❖ Let that sink in. Nothing is impossible with God. The one Mediator between God and man was born under impossible conditions. Making him uniquely qualified to do the impossible.
 - **So take comfort in knowing that no one has gone so far down the road of rebellion to make it impossible to reconcile them back to God.** You might be thinking of a friend or family member whose heart is so hardened towards God that they seem impossible to change. Or you yourself might feel so sinful that you've come to the conclusion that you're impossible to save. But the good news is that nothing – absolutely nothing – is impossible with God.

The Beauty of this Response

- ❖ Do you believe that? Do you truly believe it? Mary did. And it was evident in her response. This is the fourth element for us to consider in this story. **Consider the beauty of Mary's response in v38.** *“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.”*
 - Now that's quite impressive. She submits. *Let it be to me.* That takes courage. She's about to be an unwed mother. A teen mom. People will talk. Joseph will likely reject her and end the betrothal. She'll never find a husband. **Everything appears to be falling apart. And yet she submits to the Lord.** *“I'm your servant. Let it be to me.”*

- ❖ That sounds a lot like Isaiah's *“Here I am. Send me.”* (Isa 6:8) Or Esther's *“If I perish, I perish.”* (Esth 4:16) Or Job's *“Though he slay me, I will hope in him.”* (Job 13:15) Or Jesus's *“Not my will but yours be done.”* (Lk 22:42) **Those are all statements of faith.** *Let it be to me according to your word.* That is a beautiful response of faith.

- ❖ This is not blind faith. Mary is not just closing her eyes and leaping into the dark. No, she's a smart girl who knows how to count the costs. **She can predict what's coming. She can foresee all the personal costs.** All the misunderstanding. All the rejection. All the shaming. All the loneliness. **And yet she was willing to obey because she trusted God's word.**
 - Because she believed his ways are higher than hers. That his will is a good will even if she can't fully make sense of it at the moment. She doesn't ask for any further sign or confirmation. The Lord has spoken. Let it be to me according to his Word.

- ❖ **I wonder, what has the Lord been calling you to do lately? Could it be something you're hesitant to do because the personal costs are so high?** Standing up for what is right even if it might cost you opportunities in school or the workplace. Sharing your faith even if it might draw criticism or ridicule. Repenting of destructive behaviors that have been harming your health or ruining your relationships. **Or maybe the hardest thing God has been calling you to do is to deny yourself, to pick up your cross daily, and follow him (Lk 9:23).**
 - Yes, the costs are high. And you're not sure you can do it. Which is true. You can't do it. **For you, it's not possible. But remember, nothing is impossible with God.** Trust in the Lord. Put your faith in God. If you're not sure what that means or what that looks like, then consider Mary. Consider this beautiful response of faith. And use her words to tell the Lord, *"I am your servant. Let it be to me according to your Word."*