

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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The Annunciation of the Lord: His Birth Foretold to Mary

Robert Reymond, one of our finest Reformed Theologians, has written that, “My generation of evangelical pastors has not done a good job at teaching Christian people that the isolated events of the Christian proclamation such as Christ’s incarnation, His death, His resurrection, and so on did not occur in isolation from the ‘metanarrative’ of Holy Scripture (by this I simply mean the ‘big-picture story’ that provides the redemptive-historical significance of all the ‘lesser stories’ of Scripture). When one fails to place the gospel events within the context of the Scripture’s metanarrative, he will miss nuances that he should not miss, and he will fail to appreciate the unity of scriptural teaching. Let me say this another way: Since the facts of Jesus and His life, death, and resurrection are what they are only within the framework of the biblical doctrines of creation, fall, redemption, and the consummation of history, we must place the message of the cross within the framework of Scripture as a whole if we would properly understand the significance of that message. And if we don’t do this, we will not understand the gospel in its fullness. So let me ask my question again: Why did Jesus come two thousand years ago? When the angel Gabriel announced to Mary that she was going to be the virgin mother of the long-awaited Messiah, in her Magnificat in Luke 1:54-55, she declared among other things: ‘[God] has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever.’ And when Zechariah, John the Baptist’s father, prophesied about his infant son’s future ministry as the one who would go before the Lord to prepare His way, he said this: ‘[God] has shown the mercy promised to our fathers [by remembering] his holy covenant, the oath that he swore to our father Abraham, to grant us that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all our days” (Luke 1:72-75). What have we just witnessed? We’ve seen both Mary and Zechariah place the Christ event within the context of the Abrahamic covenant and extol the covenant faithfulness of God to His people in sending His Son. In their awareness of the broader significance of the incarnation and the words of praise that that awareness evoked from them, we see biblical theology being beautifully honored and redemptive-history magnificently depicted. It is little wonder that God selected such a maiden as Mary to be the mother of the Christ and Zechariah to be the father of the Baptist. They were both ‘covenant theologians!’ So I would urge you young folk of the next generation to celebrate not only the isolated events of the Christmas miracle but also to do more than my generation has done in celebrating at Christmastime God’s covenant fidelity to us His people, for this is the ‘big-picture’ reason for the season!¹

The Apostle Paul declared of the incarnation, “Beyond all question, the mystery of godliness is great” (I Tim. 3:16). If Paul so declared it, what must our Lord’s earthly mother have thought when the angel announced that she will be the one person chosen of God to give birth to the “holy Son of God?” “We must give Mary her promised due,” wrote the Scotch Presbyterian Alexander Whyte. “We must not allow ourselves to entertain a grudge against the mother of our Lord because some enthusiasts for her have given her more than her due. There is no fear of our thinking too much either of Mary’s maidenly virtues, or of the researchers of Luke, and in superintending the composition of the Third Gospel, especially signalizes the depth of the piety and the peace of Mary’s mind.”²

I. THE ANGEL'S APPEARANCE TO MARY

"In the sixth month? – that is, the sixth month after the angel's appearance to Zechariah (comp. v. 36) – the same angel, Gabriel, is sent to the village of Nazareth "to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David." Two things should be noted: (1) Mary was a virgin who was "pledged" (the word is EMNESTEUMENEN, perfect passive participle, to be engaged, betrothed). The Jews view the engagement as binding, a promise of mutual fidelity until the actual marriage; violation of the pact was considered adultery (cf. Deut. 22:13-23ff); (2) Her future husband, Joseph, was a "descendant of David" (EX OIKOU DAUEID, lit. out of the house of David³).

- A. **The Angel's Salutation.** "Greetings" – CHAIRE; it may be better to translate this SHALOM, since the Hebrew use of CHAIRE is often used in this fashion.⁴ "Peace to you" – in either case the angel introduces his message in a way that would relieve the fears that would accompany such a visit. "You are highly favored" (KECHARITOMEME, perfect passive participle of CHARITOO, literally to favor, in the passive it means to be visited with favor, or to be highly favored⁵). "The angel, having designated Mary by this expression as the special object of divine favors, justifies this address by the words which follow: "The Lord with thee." Supply IS and not BE; it is not a wish. The heavenly visitant speaks as one knowing how matters stood. The words "Blessed art thou among women" are not genuine; they are taken from v. 42, where they are not wanting in any document."⁶
- B. **Mary's Initial Response: Perplexity.** "Mary was greatly troubled" (DIETARACHTHE, aorist passive of DIATARASSO, lit. to confuse, perplex. The preposition compound DIA intensifies the verb TARASSO. Thus, "she was completely and thoroughly confused"). This is an even stronger word than that used of Zechariah in v. 12. This is the only occurrence in the N.T. She greatly "wondered (DIELOGIZETO, to reason, debate, consider strongly. The word means to consider or reckon up a whole series of reasons) what kind of greeting this might be." Why should an angel appear to me of all people? "She is agitated by the words of the angel because she feels that such a greeting is not suited to her. However, she shows no hysterical excitement on account of the angel's word, for, as Luke declares, she considered it in her mind."⁷

II THE ANGEL'S MESSAGE

The first thing the angel Gabriel does is to reassure Mary, "Cease being afraid" (comp. notes on v. 13), "You have found favor with God" (EURES, the expression "Erueka!" is derived from this word; CHARIN, grace, favor, in its usual N.T. sense of undeserved, unmerited favor; PARA TO THO, beside or alongside of God, in the sense of favor in His presence). The angel gives her five reasons or proofs for his assertions: (1) She will have a son; (2) His name, a sign of blessing; (3) His greatness and dignity is stated; (4) His divine title is given, "Son of the Most High," this corresponds with His Person; (5) His eternal sovereignty.⁸

- A. **Mary's Response: Request for Explanation.** Unlike Zechariah (v. 180, Mary's question does not betray a heart of disbelief. She does not request a sign or further proof before accepting Gabriel's message. Rather, she desires to know HOW or by what mode this will be accomplished. "She spoke INQUIRINGLY, not HOPELESSLY, whereas the meaning of the question of Zecharias, v. 18, is the converse."⁹
- B. **The Angel's Reply.** "In the reply of the angel we notice the parallelism which among the Hebrews always indicated the expression of sublime sentiments and poetical style."¹⁰ Mary's conception will be the result of divine activity. "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you." Leon Morris rightly declares that "this delicate expression rules out the crude ideas of 'mating' of the holy Spirit with Mary."¹¹ The child IS, not will be or shall become, the "Son of God." "He was the Son of God when He was purely and simply a Divine Person; Son of God when He became a man; Son of God when risen from the dead and gone out of this world to heaven."¹²

NOTE: The supernatural virgin birth of Jesus is seen in three distinct considerations: (1) **SUPERNATURAL BEGETTING** – the natural process of conceiving through the agency of a man and a woman by spermal fertilization was NOT the process. The humanity of the Lord Jesus was begotten in the womb of the virgin Mary by the Holy Spirit. Mary did conceive, “and to say simply, ‘conceived by the Holy Ghost,’ obscures the all-important truth that the function of Mary was to conceive and in this respect to participate in the event of Jesus’ incarnation.”¹³ (2) **SUPERNATURAL PERSON** – the child begotten and conceived was the eternal Son of God. “The most stupendous fact of all is that this was the begetting, conception, embryonic development, and birth of a supernatural person.”¹⁴ (3) **SUPERNATURAL PRESERVATION** – by this is meant that Jesus was in no way affected by sin in His perfect humanity, “that which is born of flesh is flesh” (Jn. 3:6). Jesus was not “conceived in sin” (Ps. 51:5). The virgin birth guaranteed His perfect, sinless humanity, which redemption required and the incarnation demanded. “Christ was not holy simply because He was virgin born; rather, He was virgin born because He was holy in His eternal person and because He had been set apart for this messianic task.”¹⁵

The angel now gives Mary a sign. She had not asked for one, but to confirm her in the promise made to her, Gabriel declares the miracle God performed with Zechariah and Elizabeth. Mary did not know that Elizabeth was pregnant (Elizabeth conceived and hid for five months, v. 24), which will mean that the duration would extend about six months, thus as Mary receives the angel’s message, Elizabeth is just coming out of seclusion.

- C. **Mary’s Response: Submission.** She calls herself “the Lord’s servant” (DOULE), an expression of complete self surrender and obedience. “May it be to me as you have said.” This was not an easy thing for Mary to do – she was not yet married – the engagement period extended from one to two years, and pregnancy is hard to hide after a while, but Mary was willing to suffer the disgrace and misunderstanding; she recognized the will of God and that was enough. Just as Abraham responded to God, “Behold here am I” (Gen. 22), so Mary places herself and all the consequences in God’s hands.

CONCLUSION: The Gospels have no hesitancy in applying to Jesus the things that the Old Testament ascribes exclusively to God. Note the language that is used in our text. Machen noted this, “The annunciation is partly in Old Testament terms. Mary’s son is to sit on the throne of David; and when it is said that of His kingdom there is to be no end, that also does not go beyond what the Old Testament had promised about the Messiah. But then a great mystery is revealed. The promised child is not to have a human father by ordinary generation, but is to be conceived by the Holy Ghost in the womb of a virgin mother. Even that—at least the part of it that sets forth the fact that the mother is to be a virgin—is found in Old Testament prophecy (in Isa. 7:14)—but that prophecy had not been understood among the Jews. Now, just before the fulfillment, the prophecy is repeated in fuller and more glorious terms. The conception of this child in the womb of the virgin Mary is to be a miracle wrought by the immediate power of the Spirit of God. That miracle is one of the things that will show the child to be rightly called “holy” and ‘Son of God.’ Evidently the term ‘Son of God’ is here used in some very lofty sense. It does not designate the promised child merely as the Messiah, though sometimes the Messiah was called ‘Son of God.’ Evidently the term is used here in some unique and stupendous sense.”¹⁶

ENDNOTES

¹ <http://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/big-picture/>

² Alexander Whyte, *Bible Characters: Joseph and Mary to James* (Revell, n.d.), p. 7.

³ Because Elizabeth is said to be Mary’s relative, some have tried to argue that Mary was of the tribe of Levi, but this does not follow (comp. vv. 32, 69). One of Mary’s relatives could have married one of Elizabeth’s. Christ had to have been physically of the House of David and that through Mary.

⁴ Alfred Edersheim favors the Heb. “Peace” for the meaning of the Gk. Word, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* (Longmans, 1899), p. 150.

⁵ “The Vulgate translates this by AVA, GRATIA PLENA. Roman Catholic expositors take this to mean that Mary is full of gifts of grace and accordingly appears between God and man as mediator to dispense gifts. It is, however, clear from the context that Mary is

merely the recipient of the favors of God in that He had chosen her to become the mother of Jesus, N. Geldenhuys, The Gospel of Luke (Eerdmans, 1951), p. 79.

⁶ F. Godet, The Gospel of John (rpt. Zondervan, 1954), p. 89. Bruce Metzger states that the words "blessed art thou among women" are included by the Textus Receptus, but that "it is probably that copyists inserted them here from v. 42, where they are firmly attested." A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament, 3rd ed. (United Bible Societies, 1971), p. 129.

⁷ Geldenhuys, op., cit., p. 75.

⁸ "The throne of David should not be taken here as the emblem of the throne of God, nor the house of Jacob as a figurative designation of the church. These expressions in the mouth of an angel keep their natural and literal sense." Godet, op. cit., p. 911. No doubt Mary understood them that way.

⁹ H. A. W. Meyer, Critical and Exegetical Hand Book to the Gospels of Mark and Luke (Funk & Wagnalls, 1884), p. 24.

¹⁰ Geldenhuys, op. cit. p. 76.

¹¹ L. Morris, The Gospel of Luke (Eerdmans, 1963), p. 73. Note also that "Holy Spirit" PNEUMA HAGION does not have an article. This indicates "that here there is a reference to the Holy Ghost according to His creative operation or power." Geldenhuys, op. cit., p. 77.

¹² Wm. Kelly, Exposition of the Gospel of Luke (rpt. Chicago: Believers Bookshelf, 1971), p. 26.

¹³ John Murray, Collected writings, II (Banner of Truth, 1977), p. 134.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ R. C. Gromacki, The Virgin Birth: Doctrine of Deity (Thomas Nelson, 1974), p. 73.

¹⁶ J. G. Machen, The Christian Faith In The Modern World (rpt. Eerdmans, 1947) p. 152.