

Mary the Mother of Christ: Luke 1:26-38

OUTLINE

Mary's miracle

Mary's grace

Mary's Son

INTRODUCTION

We have begun our look at the Incarnation by looking at Mary's worship in response to these wonderful events. Mary herself though can be a help or a hindrance to our contemplation of Christ. There are churches that are committed to the Lady, or the Mother. She is viewed as a Co-redemptrix; she is prayed to and worshipped, and seen as more approachable than God in prayer. For this reason many Protestants avoid her, except to mention that she is not to be prayed to. However, any true investigation of Mary yields a tremendous amount of food for thought and draws us towards the wonder of Christ. So we continue with our look into Mary looking at Luke 1:26-38, at what is traditionally called the Annunciation.

Mary's miracle

First up we want to ponder the miracle of the virgin conception. At this time of year you will hear about all sorts of so called miraculous births as part of mythology. Some have claimed that Christianity borrowed the idea of a virgin birth from the Greeks or other dominant figures who had myths surrounding their births. That the birth accounts are made up after Jesus had died to try and get people to think that He was more than He was. For example, in Greek Mythology, Dionysos, is fathered by Zeus with Persephone, who disguised himself as a serpent to impregnate her. This view accuses the early Christians of making Jesus a type of demi-god. Or others have tried to show that the story of the Buddha is a parallel, who as a pre-existent being enters the womb of his mother, who is already a married woman. The world would like nothing better than to cast doubt on the virgin birth.

As we approach our text you will notice how Mary is introduced. Now ordinarily when you introduce someone you first give their name and then perhaps some other details about them. But notice how the text introduces Mary. V26 tells us that 6 months into Elizabeth's pregnancy God sends Gabriel to Nazareth, which is about 70 miles NE of Jerusalem. The first detail that is mentioned is in v27, that she is a virgin, secondly, that this virgin is betrothed to Joseph, and the detail is added that he is from the house of David, and then finally we have her name, she is Mary. Incidentally Mary means excellence. Luke is being very deliberate in how he is delivering the detail, putting the points of importance upfront. Firstly, that she is a virgin and secondly, that she is legally bound to the house of David. But why are these facts so important and arranged in such a way?

The notion of a virgin birth was not a new idea with no OT preparation. It is not a borrowed myth but something carefully crafted from the beginning. As with the doctrine of the Trinity, the deity of Christ, the new heavens and earth, the deity of the Holy Spirit, the nature of the atonement, etc. God was already preparing us by dropping hints and patterns which would show that the virgin birth is His handiwork and bears His fingerprints. The first reference to the virgin birth is Gen 3:15, where it talks about the Seed of the woman crushing the head of the serpent. There is no mention of virginity, nor of Christ's deity. But that the saviour will be born of a woman is a vital detail given from the very beginning, at the very first mention of the Gospel. As we progress through redemptive history and note all the important turning points in the plot as it moves towards the birth of Christ, we see God using miraculous births over and over again. There are many barren women who conceive, Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, Hannah, Samson's mother. All of whom give birth to someone who advances the lineage and story line in Israel towards the arrival of Christ. All these 'saviour-sons' be they Joseph, Samson, or Samuel are preparation for God's greatest work in Christ. The marvel is that He does not take a married woman who is barren but He takes a woman who has never even known a man. Throughout the OT we see the serpent attacking the male children of promise in the hope of destroying the one who was prophesied would crush him. Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, David, all attacked, all foreshadows of Christ. Then when David becomes king he is given a promise that one of his sons will sit on his throne forever, 2 Sam. 7:12-13, 'When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. 13 He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.' This adds the detail that He will be of David's line.

The idea becomes clearer with Isaiah. He prophesies of a child who will be God, and Immanuel (God with us) being born of a virgin. Isaiah 7:14 (ESV) "Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel." Isaiah 9:6 (ESV) "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."

So then returning to the detail of the text why is the fact that Mary a virgin and legally bound to the house of David more important than her name? Because the text is helping us to see that God is fulfilling these wonderful promises of the OT. Can you see how examining the text about Mary more closely helps us to see more of our Saviour?

Some have tried to imply that Mary did not conceive miraculously, but this comes from their prejudice that miracles cannot happen, as we take the two accounts of the virgin conception, it is very clear that this was indeed a miraculous birth. The evidence in the text leaves us in no doubt to the fact that Mary was a virgin, Matthew 1:18 (ESV), 'Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit.' Matthew 1:20 (ESV), 'But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.' Matthew 1:23 (ESV), "Behold, the

virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel" (which means, God with us). Matthew 1:25 (ESV), "but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus."

Luke 1:26-27 (ESV) In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, [27] to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. Luke 1:34-35 (ESV), 'And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?" [35] And 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."

The text is clear, Mary conceived miraculously, without the usual means of intercourse. The language used when the Holy Spirit was upon her/overshadowed her is the same language used in the creation account. Except the Holy Spirit is not creating *ex nihilo*, but *ex Maria*. One must not think that the angel Gabriel had intercourse with her, or that the Holy Spirit used intercourse. The texts are very deliberate in avoiding all talk that has to do with intercourse giving us the impression that God is doing a miracle, 'For nothing is impossible with God' (Lk 1:37). Mary's bewilderment in Luke 1:34, 'How will this be since I am a virgin', her confusion over the mechanics of how it is possible highlight the lack of ordinary means, and the use of miracle. And that is exactly what it is, a miracle.

What is the importance of the virgin birth? Does it really matter whether Jesus was born of a virgin? Desmond Tutu and Rob Bell don't think it too important. But we do. The virgin birth, like the resurrection brackets the life of Christ as being unique. He alone was conceived and died like He did. These events are important signs that point to His identity and work. After all Is 7:14 does speak of Immanuel as a 'sign'. It indicates the unique saving work God is doing in Christ. Secondly, the importance of the miraculous element of the virgin birth cannot be overstated, it is a watershed dividing those who feel that this is possible and all the other supernatural elements of the Bible are accepted or rejected. It is often the starting block, or the stumbling block for the other miracles in the Bible. Thirdly, the fact of the virgin birth pronounces a judgement upon the stillborn ability of our own fallen human nature to produce a saviour. We cannot save ourselves, no one from fallen humanity can save us God, God has to come from outside of us to do what we could not do for ourselves. We cannot be the perfect offerer or the perfect offering to atone for sin.

But what about the significance for Christ Himself is it important that He was born of a virgin? Why can't we say that God inhabited and made holy the fertilised egg of a regular marriage? Adoptionism is the view that says that Jesus inhabited/took over/possessed an already existing person. That is the trajectory for the above condition where we asked about why He couldn't just have come in the normal way. He would have had to become a body snatcher. As we understand the humanity of Christ, it was not one that was stolen from another, but it came into existence as already the flesh of God. Jesus humanity had never not been His. Another possible reason for why this is not the way He could have come is because of the problem of double paternity. Christ came speaking and teaching about His Father, who is God not Joseph. He had no Father but God. True, Joseph adopted Jesus, this is apparent in him naming Him. But all Christ's talk of being one with His Father,

would be empty if He was 'biologically' fathered by another. The arguments about His own identity, authority, and work are based on who His Father is. Thirdly, that which is born of flesh is flesh and impotent to save. Christ is not born of the flesh, but the Spirit. Fourthly, it was necessary for Christ to be a second Adam, that just as the first Adam was born without parents, Christ too miraculously be created. The only difference being that God made Adam from dirt, where He made Christ from the 'dirt' of Mary's DNA. Christ necessarily had to be sinless and outside the headship of the first Adam, yet have his humanity derived from the same fallen race. This double necessity is fulfilled in His receiving His human nature from His mother, but His being conceived miraculously, like the first Adam, in order to stand as a representative. His virgin birth contributes to His independence of the imputed sin of Adam.

Mary's grace

We want to consider next verses 28-31 when the angel Gabriel greets Mary. There have been many misunderstandings of these words. The feast of Annunciation in the RCC and the Orthodox Church; as well as the prayer, the Ave Maria, are based on misunderstandings of this text. The feast of Annunciation assumes that the announcement results in the conception at that moment when the text gives us no detail as to exactly when Jesus was conceived in her womb. And the Ave Maria wrongly reads the references to grace in the text.

Gabriel, the same angel who had appeared to Zechariah in the temple, appear to Mary, v28, 'And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!"' These are the opening lines of the famous prayer, the Ave Maria. In English this prayer reads:

'Hail Mary, full of grace.

The Lord is with thee,

blessed art thou among women.

And blessed is the fruit of thy womb.

Holy Mary, mother of God,

Pray for us now and at the time of our death.

Amen.'

We can see that the first part of the Ave Maria is loosely based on this text. The last part, where Mary is called the mother of God and asked to pray for us was not originally a part of the prayer but was added at the time of the Reformation when the Reformers challenged the RCC because this is a salutation not a prayer for there is no request in the text. So a request was officially added to make it a prayer.

However, even the part of the Ave Maria that appears to be based on the text is in fact in error. You will notice in our translation that the text says, 'Greetings, O favoured one.' It does not say, 'Hail Mary, full of grace.' In the Greek the word for favoured is based on the word grace. It could read, 'O graced one,' as in the receiver of grace not the giver of grace. And the phrase, 'Blessed among women' is removed because it is not considered to be in the best manuscripts, but a later addition based on 1:42. Mary like any other sinner is a grace receiver not a grace giver. She is someone who needs to be saved by grace and not a saviour. God has come to her in grace to grant her favour not to reward her. Gabriel tells

her that the Lord is with her. This is not to be conceived of as an ecstatic experience but a way of saying that the Lord is with you, to bless you.

Mary's reaction to this announcement strengthens the notion of God coming in blessing to an unworthy sinner not in reward for a righteous virgin who was not conceived in sin. V29, 'But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be.' Why should she be favoured, why should God be with her, for what purpose? These would have been the questions in her mind. The angel tells her not to fear, as when as an angel suddenly appears you would no doubt be quite overcome, and repeats the fact of God's favour, v30, 'And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.' Once again we stress that this is the grace she receives and not gives. We can see in the worship she offers later that she is amazed that God should favour her, for she sees herself as nothing and in need of a Saviour.

Mary's Son

God's grace extends to her in that she will have the privilege of being the mother of the saviour of the human race. V31, 'And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus.' Now remember back to that time when you were pregnant and you excitedly thought about all the names you would call your child. Well Mary does not have that choice. She is told that she will be a mother, that the child will be a son, and that the child must be called Jesus. The mystery of the child's gender, and the joy of choosing out a name is taken away because this name Jesus is so significant.

The name Jesus is a Greek name, which comes from the Hebrew name, Joshua, or Jehoshua, which means Jehovah is salvation, or Jehovah is our saviour. So what do you think the message is from Jesus' name? Jehovah is our saviour and salvation! This was a very important message needed in Jesus day, and it is a very important message needed in every age. God is our saviour, the God of the OT, not Allah, or Buddha, or any other deity but the God of the Bible. Jesus was born to inform the world that salvation should not be sought for in the religions of the world, but in the God of the Bible.

But not only does God provide what other gods cannot, but what we as humans cannot as well. The five letter word Jesus should remind us of another five letter word, 'grace'. Jesus name reminds us that we are not able to save ourselves, Jehovah saves us; and that we who don't deserve to be saved, and yet he is gracious enough to do so. Jesus by name and person embodies all that we cannot do, yet God does, and all that we don't deserve, yet God gives.

Man has always turned away from God to become self-sufficient, whether we build a shrine to our independence like the Tower of Babel, or whether we disguise it with self-righteous religion, we veer towards being our own saviours. We forget our inability, deceive ourselves regarding our goodness, and the result is false religion that puts our own good deeds, or religious efforts at the centre of our salvation. Roman Catholicism is a grand monument to religion that thinks we can do something to save ourselves. RC has seven sacraments that work like magic, of their own accord to grant salvation to those who receive them. Priests

have an ability granted by the Pope to disperse the very forgiveness of God. Man's teaching has been put on a par with God's word. And if you want forgiveness of sins, then you can do penance for that forgiveness. It all lies within the hands of man to save whether it be a priest's or yours. This goes against what lies at the heart of the name Jesus. God is our hope of salvation not we ourselves. Jesus was born because there is no other human born who can save us. He was conceived of a virgin, miraculously that he would not share in our fallen human nature. He was born pure, and lived a pure life, so that he could offer it as a pure sacrifice for us, to remove our sins.

There is more that we have to draw from this text but we will rest here. Mary need not be a hindrance but can be a great help to us as we look into the Lord's dealings with her. Today we have been reminded that Mary's miracle, the virgin birth is the means by which God keeps all His promises; that Mary's grace is a grace received and not given, and it is the grace that all of us must receive to be saved, and Mary's Son, whose name is Jesus is our only hope of salvation and the gift of God's grace to save us. Let's allow Mary to point us deeper into the wonder of God's saving work through His Son.