

## “Glorious Provision”

Luke 1:26-38

December 4, 2022

Last week we saw the amazing story of Zacharias and Elizabeth, an elderly priestly couple who were told by an angel that after decades of barrenness, they would be given a son in their old age. And their Son, John the Baptist, would have a ministry of preparing people’s hearts to receive the coming Messiah.

Last week was really part one of a larger story that Luke is telling of the beginning of the life and ministry of Jesus. There are so many parallels between the foretelling of John’s and Jesus’ births, that it is obvious we are to see some meaning behind their similarities and contrasts with one another. Let me just give you a quick sample of how similar these accounts are. In both accounts:

- The Angel Gabriel delivers an unexpected message from God.
- He reassures them to not be afraid.
- Gabriel’s message is a prophetic announcement of the birth of a son through supernatural means (one to a barren, old woman, and the other to a virgin)
- God Himself would name the sons.
- The sons will be great—distinctly set apart for divine purposes to advance God’s plan of redemption.
- Zacharias and Mary both respond with a question
- Both are given a sign to confirm God’s word
- Both accounts display that with God nothing is impossible

By setting the accounts of John the Baptist and Jesus next to each other in such parallel fashion, Luke intends for us to see that their ministries are not only connected but that Jesus is far superior to John in significance. Furthermore, we will see from Mary’s response to this the incredible news that she will supernaturally conceive and give birth to the awaited Messiah, how we too should respond to God’s word and work in our lives.

In today’s passage we are going to see that **God works through the faith and obedience of those who humbly surrender to His sovereign will and control, trusting His power to fulfill His promises.**<sup>1</sup>

Luke begins by setting the stage:

### Setting the Stage (Luke 1:26-27)

**[vs. 26-27]** Immediately we see how these accounts are tied together by the time marker, “in the sixth month.” From the context we know that Luke is referring to the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy. We had just been told in vs. 24 that she has been in seclusion for the first five months of pregnancy, and the angel will go on to clarify in **[vs. 36]** that Elizabeth is now in her sixth month.

We see a further connection between these accounts in that again it is the angel Gabriel, sent from God to deliver a message. But this time the setting is not in the temple in Jerusalem to a respected priest, but rather an obscure city in Galilee, called Nazareth. And the message is for a young girl betrothed to a man called Joseph. So we have gone from the holy place in the temple in the holy city to an insignificant place in the hill country; from a man of priestly honor to young girl of no status in an obscure and insignificant place. We might suspect that this message to Mary will be of less significance, but spoiler alert! The greater child will come into the more humble of circumstances, born in a stable to a poor couple, sleeping in feeding trough, first honored by earthy, unclean shepherds. Why? Because as we will see, **The greatest would come for the least!** This is an amazing part of the gospel story. *There is no cutoff for those who qualify for grace because their status is too low.*

One final detail to set the stage is that Mary is engaged to a man named Joseph who was a descendent of David. He is among those in the line of David through whom the OT promised Messiah would come. This engagement is technically a betrothal which means that the couple is legally married, but had not yet consummated the marriage (there was typically about a year’s time between the legal-binding engagement and the

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<sup>1</sup> David Garland, “Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the NT: Luke, pg. 86.

“honeymoon” to demonstrate that the bride was pure—without child. That’s the setting for this story.

### Surprising Favor (Luke 1:28-30)

**[vs. 28-30]** Why is Mary perplexed? Because this came totally out of the blue. She’s just going about her normal, unassuming life in an insignificant small town; doing her daily chores, wondering what married life will be like. As a young Jewish girl from Nazareth, she has no aspirations of greatness other than having children and hoping that Joseph can earn a good enough living to keep them out of the lowest dregs of poverty.

And out of the blue, she finds herself in the presence of an angel who says, “Greetings,  *favored one!* *The Lord is with you* (28). Can you imagine her thinking, “*what!?* God has put His favor on *me?* Why? Who am I?” Aware of her bewildered response, the angel encourages her to not be afraid just as he had earlier instructed Zacharias (13). Why? “For you have found favor with God” (30). The root for the word *favor* comes from the word *grace*. That is, God has set upon you the favor of His grace.

This is beautiful. Mary who has no status whatsoever in the world, is given a particular *identity* as *God’s favored one*, the benefactor of God’s grace. Who doesn’t want to have favor in the eyes of God? Who doesn’t want to be under His grace? And yet, consider that such language in the OT of God’s favor or the promise of God’s presence was associated with God’s choice of someone to carry out a God-given mission—one that would require not only God’s grace but also one’s faith.

*Those who find favor with God are often asked to do hard things.* People like Noah, Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Gideon, Ruth, Samuel, David, Esther, and Daniel. God’s favor does not suggest that a trouble-free road, but rather that God has provided the grace and empowerment needed for every seeming impossible hurdle. And by the way, the same is true for every believer today who has God’s favor through Christ. You are empowered by grace to live a God-pleasing life. So what calling would Mary need God’s gracious favor for?  
→ vs. 31, 35

### Supernatural Conception (Luke 1:31, 34-35)

**[vs. 31, 34-35]** Mary’s calling under God’s favor and grace was to bear a particular child for God’s purposes. Notice in vs. 31, that God chooses the name for this child just as he did for John back in vs. 13. According to Jewish custom, it was normally the father who would name the child. But with John and Jesus, the fact that God chooses the name signifies that these sons are under *God’s* authority to fulfill *God’s* purposes for their lives. Looking back from our Christians perspective it’s hard not to see God fulfilling His Fatherly role in naming His son Jesus, whose name means *savior*. In a technical sense, this will not be *Joseph’s* son but *God’s* Son as we will see in vs. 35.

Again Mary is perplexed and asks how this will come about since she is a virgin (34). How can she possibly conceive when she has not yet had intimate relations with Joseph or any other man? The angel’s explanation in vs. 35 makes it clear that this child will be the result, not of Joseph’s doing, but of God’s supernatural intervention: “The Holy Spirit will come upon you.” That is, “the power of the Most High will overshadow you.” In other words, God will use His creative power through the Holy Spirit to cause this child to conceive in her womb.

Don’t miss the clues that shout to us of this child’s significance in light of what we saw last week. When Zacharias asked the angel “how he could know for certain” that his aged and barren wife would bear a child, it was out of momentary unbelief because, humanly speaking, it was such an impossibility. Yet Mary asks, not for a *sign*, but for *understanding* as to *how* her pregnancy would come about, for a miracle of much greater degree.

We should be amazed that God would open the womb of an aged, barren women, but at least there was a natural means through which we could expect God to work—through the natural means of a husband. No doubt Elizabeth’s pregnancy was a clear indicator that God’s hand of providence was at work. He had done for Zacharias and Elizabeth what He had done for Abraham and Sarah in giving them Isaac in their old age, and what He had done for Elkanah and Hannah in giving them Samuel, and or how He had opened Rachel’s womb to bear Joseph, and overturned the barrenness of Manoah’s wife to give birth to Samson. All of these showcase the

miraculous hand of God, but there was no precedent anywhere in history for God to open the womb of a virgin to conceive supernaturally apart from a human father.

The greater miracle of a virgin birth points to the singular and supreme uniqueness of Jesus. God is bringing Him into the world through not only *miraculous*, but *unprecedented* means. He is in a category all His own! As we would learn later in the NT, the Holy Spirit's creative work in Mary's womb was not creating a *life*, for that life had already existed from eternity past as the living Word, the second member of the Trinity. Rather the Spirit created a humanity that God would be clothed in to become the God-man, God incarnate. The one whom we call Jesus is in a category all His own. Flesh as we are flesh, but God as the Father and the Spirit are God.

For this reason, vs. 35 tells us, the *holy* Child shall be called the Son of God. He is holy because his life descends not from Joseph and Mary, but from God Himself. One without sin who alone could bear the sins of man through His eventual death and resurrection as the true Savior of all who believe!

#### **Supreme Status** (Luke 1:32-33)

Vs. 32 speaks of His supreme status as the God-sent Savior and Messiah of God's people. This child promised to Mary is the One promised to Israel as their everlasting King. **[32-33]** This promise was given to David in 2 Samuel 7 where 3 times David is told that the heir God will raise up to sit on David's throne will have an "*eternal*" reign (2 Sam 7:13-16). How can we not think of Isaiah 9:6: "For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called *Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace*. There will be *no end to the increase of His government* or of peace, On the throne of David and over his kingdom, To establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness From then on and *forevermore*."

Again, don't miss how the clues shout Jesus' superiority when we compare vss. 32-33 to what was said earlier about John in vss. 15-17. The angel told Zacharias that John would be great in the sight of the Lord, but Jesus will be great as the Lord Himself. John would be a prophet of God, but Jesus would

be the Son of God. John would be the forerunner of the Messiah-King, but Jesus would Himself be the king promised from David.

What the angel did not tell Mary is that this kingdom would be more vast than a mere military conquest or revolution. This king would reclaim God's rightful rule over *all* the earth at the deepest level by making a way for sinners to be reconciled to God. Perhaps we could summarize the earthly life of Jesus in 3 phrases:

*Born to Die*

*Died to Redeem*

*Risen to Reign*

This was the mission of His first coming, and now that the gospel is going out, being proclaimed to all the world that there is salvation in Jesus, we await His second coming when He will establish His kingly reign on earth.

#### **Sign of Confirmation** (Luke 1:36-37)

Unlike Zacharias, Mary did not ask for a sign out of unbelief (18, 20). We know later from vs. 45 that Mary believed the word of the Lord. Nevertheless, she was given a sign of confirmation. The angel tells her in vs. 36-37, "Behold, even your relative Elizabeth has also conceived a son in her old age; and she who was called barren is now in her sixth month. For nothing will be impossible with God."

The fact that Elizabeth had been in seclusion for the first 5 months of her pregnancy, means that Mary would not have yet know of Elizabeth's miracle. A miracle that can be confirmed when she goes to visit Elizabeth (as we will see next week). And the purpose of this sign is to confirm an essential theological truth that will be fully unveiled in the life and ministry of Mary's child—"Nothing will be impossible with God."

Reflecting on this grand truth, Darrell Bock said, "*The laws of nature are not chains which the Divine Legislator has laid upon Himself; they are threads which He holds in His hand, and which he shortens or lengthens at will.*"<sup>2</sup> In

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<sup>2</sup> Darrell Bock, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the NT: Luke, pg. 126.

other words, the laws of nature are not chains that restrict what God can do. They are rather a means which He can alter as He chooses.

Not only would the virgin birth of Jesus be a paramount miracle, but He Himself would be the Miracle Worker, healing the lame, giving sight to the blind, even raising the dead. Yet the most significant reversal of the humanly impossible, would not be healing the sick, but reconciling sinful man to a holy God through His death in place of undeserving sinners. Certainly, *the greatest has come to save the least*.

### **Surrendered Faith and Obedience** (Luke 1:38)

Finally, in vs. 38 we see Mary's response to this incredible calling on her life. **[vs. 38]** Mary's response is one of humble, surrendered obedience and faith. This is the model of how all God's people should respond to God's word and calling on their lives.

The term "bondslave of the Lord" is not degrading. Rather it carries a sense of exalted status as one who is close to the Lord in privileged yet humble service to God.<sup>3</sup>

Without skepticism or objections, Mary simply yields to God's will for her life when she says, "*may it be done to me according to your word.*" Mary is accepting God's sovereign right to direct her life even though it may require some personal sacrifice. Certainly, there could be potential problems with Joseph and her reputation in the Nazareth.<sup>4</sup> Yet Mary embraces God's will and whatever it entails for her life.

When vs. 38 ends by saying, "the angel departed from her," it indicates that her access to divine explanations is past. From here on out, it will be a journey of faith. In a similar way, God has given us His written word, and on that foundation we live our lives as a journey of faith.

Joel Green commented that, "Mary, who seemed to measure low in any ranking—age, family, heritage, gender, and so on—turns out to be one favored by God, the one who finds her status and identity in her obedience to God and [participating] in His [saving] will."<sup>5</sup> Mary's testimony is that **God works through the faith and obedience of those who humbly surrender to His sovereign will and control, trusting His power to fulfill His promises.**<sup>6</sup>

The good news is that God has done the impossible, sending His eternal Son to take on human flesh through a virgin birth so that He could live an earthly life without sin and therefore, His death in our place on the cross could be an acceptable sacrifice to God to pay the death penalty for our sin. And having sufficiently served our sentence, God raised Him from the dead so that all who are joined to Him in faith could have everlasting life under His reign as King.

As we come to the Lord's table this morning, that is what we celebrate. God has done the humanly impossible to free us from the guilt, shame, and condemnation of our sin. The question is, are we willing to relinquish our hold on that sin? Are you willing, like Mary, to come to Jesus in surrendered faith and obedience? Are you willing to embrace the road of discipleship that God has called you to under His favor and grace?

As we pass out the bread, I encourage you to not only confess any known sin to the Lord, but to also relinquish control to Him. True faith is born out of a spirit of surrender to God.

Pray: "*Lord, my sin makes it clear that I need to be reconciled to you. So I lay down my independence and rebellion against You to receive Jesus by faith, as My redeeming Savior and reigning Lord.*"

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<sup>3</sup> Garland, 83.

<sup>4</sup> Bock, 127.

<sup>5</sup> Joel Green, NICNT: Luke, pg. 92.

<sup>6</sup> David Garland, "Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the NT: Luke, pg. 86.

**Communion:**

- **Bread: Luke 22:17-20** – “And when He had taken a cup *and* given thanks, He said, "Take this and share it among yourselves; for I say to you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine from now on until the kingdom of God comes." And when He had taken *some* bread *and* given thanks, He broke *it*, and gave *it* to them, saying, "This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me." And in the same way *He took* the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood.

“*This is my body...*” The body for which God did the impossible; created in the womb of Mary so that that very body could be broken and sacrificed for you.

*Born to Die*

*Died to Redeem*

*Risen to Reign*

- **Cup: Isa. 9:6** – “For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.
- The one who shed His blood for our redemption is our *Wonderful Counselor*, calling us back into the way of wisdom under the Fear of God and the mercies of Christ.
- He is our *Mighty God*, the One who is *able* to overcome the stronghold of our sin.
- He is one with our *Eternal Father*, who never leaves us or forsakes us, even when we need the rod of discipline.
- He is our *Prince of Peace* who alone can reconcile and restore us to God.

*To Him may we abandon all control with surrendered faith and obedience.*

**Benediction:** “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him” (Rom 15:13).