

Exegetical Notes, Luke 1:26-56
“The Great Announcement”

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Luke 1:26-56

Verse 26

In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee,

- “The sixth month” may refer to the sixth month of the year or to the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy. Verse 36 connects the reference and strongly suggests that the reference is to the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy not to the month of the year.
- “Gabriel” is one of three angels mentioned in the Bible. The other two are Michael and Lucifer. The name means “mighty man of God.” Gabriel is the angel who carries the message of Christ’s birth throughout the Christmas story.
- “Nazareth in Galilee” was an obscure little village with no real significance. However, the reference to it lends reality to the story. It is now located in time and space. It happened in the sixth month at this particular place. It is, thereby, set in history.

Verse 27

to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin’s name was Mary.

- Again the historical setting is reported. This time by telling us the names of the individuals involved. This event happened at this particular time, in this particular place, to these particular people.
- “Joseph” (see Matthew 1:19-24.) We have no other information about Joseph. After the birth and childhood stories about Jesus, Joseph disappears from the record. Beyond this, and that he was descended from David (see Matthew 1:16 and Luke 3:23) other information about Joseph is based on speculation and church tradition. It is to be noted that the Matthew and Luke genealogies of Jesus list different names for Joseph’s father. Scholars

suggest that Joseph's father was known by two names, one was probably his given name and the other the name by which he was known.

- Even though some scholars believe that Luke's genealogy traces Jesus' descent through Mary, we know very little about Mary. We know that her close relative was Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist. But we do not know her family of origin, her age, etc. All such information is based on the traditions of the church, not the Scripture.
- One fact that is made clear in this passage is that Mary was a virgin. We are told so twice in this verse. The Greek word which stands behind the English word, "virgin," means a person who has had no sexual experience. The virginal conception of Jesus Christ is an essential doctrine of the church proclaimed without explanation or excuse by the Bible. If it did not occur, as some modern theologians argue, then the Biblical record is false in this and cannot be trusted as truth in any part.

Verse 28

The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you."

- Gabriel greets Mary with great respect and announces to her the good news that she is highly favored. The explanation of her favor is in the next sentence. She is highly favored because God is with her.

Verse 29

Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be.

- It seems odd that Mary would receive the good news of God's favor and be troubled by it and that she would be suspicious of the nature of the angel's greeting. Perhaps it is best to understand her reaction as being overwhelmed by what was happening to her and afraid of what she could not comprehend.
- It is also to be noted that everyone to whom the angel appears has a similar reaction. Perhaps this is the normal human response to an angelic visit.

Verse 30

But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God."

- The angel quickly reassures Mary that her fear is misplaced. She should not be afraid because she is in God's favor.

Verse 31

“You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus.”

- Mary is unmarried, only betrothed to marry Joseph. She is virgin. This news could hardly have come to Mary without causing her some concern.
- The name Jesus means “savior.”

Verse 32 - 33

“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 the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.”

- The title, “Son of the Most High,” conveys that Jesus is (1) the divine Son of God (God is called the “Most High” in both the Old and the New Testaments, and (2) the Messiah of Israel.
- This second fact is confirmed by the promised granting of David’s throne to Jesus (see 2 Samuel 7:13,16, Psalm 2:6-7, 89:26-27, Isaiah 9:6-7) and by the eternal nature of his kingdom and his reign.
- Mary is being granted the favor every Hebrew girl dreamed of. She will be the mother of the Messiah.

Verse 34

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

- Mary’s question presents the great dilemma. This plan cannot work because it is impossible. She is a virgin. This is the stumbling block that is both illogical and unscientific. God’s plan cannot work because Mary is a virgin.
- Once again the fact of Mary’s virginity is presented as historical fact.

Verse 35

The angel answered, “The Holy Spirit will come upon 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.”

- The angel gives Mary an explanation as to how all this will be accomplished. However, the explanation lacks detail. We are to know that God has it all worked out but we are still to understand that it is mystery beyond our comprehension.
- It is to happen in this way so as to affirm Jesus’ divinity. As a result of this mystery, he will be known as God’s son.

Verse 36

“Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month.”

- Elizabeth’s exact relation to Mary is unknown. The Greek phrase means a close relative.
- What the angel has told Mary is unbelievable. It is mystery, beyond human comprehension. A sign is required to confirm the truth to Mary. That sign is Elizabeth’s pregnancy. No one would believe that it was possible for Elizabeth to conceive and bear a child. But she was, in fact already six months pregnant.

Verse 37

“For nothing is impossible with God.”

- This is the great truth which makes the story believable. Apart from God neither Elizabeth’s pregnancy nor Mary’s would have been possible, But God makes what is impossible, possible. So, both pregnancies become believable because God is involved.

Verse 38

“I am the Lord’s servant,” Mary answered. “May it be to me as you have said.” Then the angel left her.

- Mary accepts her part in God’s plan humbly. She does not seek a more in-depth explanation nor does she try to alter God’s decision. She simply agrees to play the role chosen for her to play.
- Having accomplished his assignment, the angel departs.

Verse 39-40

At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, where she entered Zechariah’s home and greeted Elizabeth.

- Mary was an unmarried girl who had just discovered that she was pregnant. Undoubtedly there would have been the usual whisperings behind her back, finger pointing, false accusations, raised eyebrows, embarrassing questions, gossip, criticism, family pressures, and crude jokes. But for Mary, if Joseph, the man to whom she was engaged, refused to acknowledge the child as his, and it was not his, she could be stoned to death according to Jewish law for her sin. Therefore, she could not safely remain in Nazareth, her hometown. As quickly as possible she left home because of her “circumstances.”
- She went to the home of Zechariah and Elizabeth. See Luke 1:5-25. These folks were the parents of John the Baptist and close relatives of Mary.

Verse 41

When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.

- The baby that was in Elizabeth's womb was John the Baptist.
- In those days, before the Day of Pentecost (See Acts 2), the Holy Spirit did not "abide" with believers as he now does. He visited particular individuals at special times. At the moment when Mary first spoke to Elizabeth, he visited Elizabeth.

Verse 42-45

In a loud voice she exclaimed: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished!"

- When the Holy Spirit comes into a person's life, be it for a visit or a long-time stay, there is always some manifestation of his presence. Frequently, this manifestation is in speech. The Holy Spirit causes the people he comes to, to proclaim some good news. That is the case with Elizabeth. Her speech is a spiritual proclamation.
- Additionally, the Holy Spirit leads her into truth. There is no way for Elizabeth to know that Mary is even pregnant let alone carrying Israel's Messiah in her womb. Yet she instantly knows these things because the Holy Spirit reveals them to her.
- Even the baby, as yet nothing more than a fetus, is capable of being moved by the Holy Spirit for when the Holy Spirit came upon his mother at the time of Mary's first words to her, the baby leaped for joy.
- Legally two witnesses were necessary to confirm any evidence. Here there are two witnesses, Elizabeth and, the as yet unborn, John.
- Elizabeth's words become confirmation to Mary that she has indeed heard and understood God. Elizabeth calls Mary "blessed." It means happy or favored. And the reason that Mary is blessed is that she has believed God.

Verse 46-55

And Mary said, "My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me -- holy is his name. His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation. He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has

scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, even as he said to our fathers.”

- As Elizabeth spoke when she felt the stirring of the Holy Spirit (see verses 41-45), so Mary was moved to speech by the Holy Spirit. These verses are traditionally called “The Magnificat.” This is Mary’s praise song to God.
- Mary rejoices first of all because God has chosen her to play this part in his plan to save the world.
- Her second reason for rejoicing is the faithfulness of God. He will keep his promises and redeem his people just as he said.

Verse 56

Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months and then returned home.

- Mary remained with Elizabeth until sometime around John’s birth. She then returned home.

(These exegetical notes are the foundational study for the sermon entitled *The Great Announcement*. They have been prepared by the Reverend Doctor Charles H. Jensen, Senior Pastor at Cornerstone Fellowship, Coatesville Pennsylvania. All rights are reserved by Dr. Jensen and *Cornerstone Fellowship*.)