

"THE ANNUNCIATION"

I. Introduction

- A. The virgin birth of Jesus Christ is a fundamental Christian doctrine.
1. This is evident by the fact that it is affirmed in all of the major Christian creeds.
 2. One of the reasons why it is so important is that it clarifies what Christians mean when we say that Jesus is our Lord and Savior.
 3. Some people think that Christianity is basically about trying to follow Jesus' example of self-giving love.
 4. While that certainly is one of the fruits that is produced by saving faith in Christ, it is not the essence of the Christian religion.
 5. If it were, then the virgin birth could be set aside as a matter of indifference.
- B. But if calling Jesus Lord and Savior means what we believe it means — if it means trusting in Jesus alone as the only source of the cleansing and righteousness that we need in order to stand before God — if that is what Christianity is fundamentally about, then the virgin birth really is essential to our faith.
1. It assures us that we have a supernatural Savior, a divine Savior, a Savior who is able to deliver us from the judgment that our sins deserve.
 2. In the words of J. Gresham Machen, "What the knowledge of the virgin birth does is to fix with inescapable clearness the supernaturalism of the life of Jesus from the very beginning... The precious narrative of the virgin birth... represents our Lord clearly as no product of sinful humanity but as one who came into the world by a mighty creative act of God. And that representation is

at the very center and core of the Christian faith." [*What Is Christianity?*, 86, 87]

II. God's Gracious Favor (26-30)

- A. Our text in Luke has traditionally been referred to as "The Annunciation", which simply means 'the announcement.'
1. Luke is the only Gospel writer to record the appearance of the angel Gabriel to announce the birth of Jesus to Mary.
 2. The setting of the Annunciation was a city in the region of Galilee named Nazareth.
 3. Nazareth was a small village about seventy miles north of Jerusalem.
 4. We are familiar with Nazareth because it was Jesus' hometown, but back in the first century it was largely unknown.
 5. In fact, it was so small and insignificant that there was no evidence outside the New Testament of its existence until an archaeological discovery in the 1960's.
 6. Nazareth was not the place where you would expect God to announce the most important birth in the history of the world.
- B. The recipient of the announcement was equally unexpected.
1. Luke tells us that Gabriel appeared to a virgin named Mary, who was betrothed to a man named Joseph.
 2. In first century Israel, betrothal was a much more formal and binding arrangement than engagements in our culture.
 3. Jewish girls were typically betrothed between the ages of 12 and 14, and after a betrothal period of about a year they would be given in marriage to their husband.

4. This means that, in all likelihood, Mary was the age of a middle-schooler when Gabriel appeared to her.
 5. She was just a girl, a girl living in an unimportant little town, a girl who probably had very little education.
 6. Yet the Lord granted her an unparalleled blessing: the blessing of being the mother of our Lord.
- C. Gabriel greeted Mary by saying, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!"
1. Back in the fourth century, the Latin Vulgate mistranslated this greeting by having Gabriel refer to Mary as "full of grace", which led to the misunderstanding that Mary is a bestower of grace.
 2. By the twelfth century, the medieval church had introduced a prayer to Mary that begins with the words, "Hail Mary, full of grace", the prayer that is known as the 'Ave, Maria' in Latin.
 3. Not only is there no support anywhere in Scripture for praying to another human being, there is also nothing in this text to support the idea that we should look to Mary as a source of grace.
 4. The angel's greeting tells us that Mary was the undeserved recipient of grace, not that she should be appealed to as a bestower of grace.
 5. The phrase "favored one" tells us that God graciously chose Mary to be the mother of his Son.
- D. Mary was puzzled by the angel's greeting.
1. Remember, she was just an ordinary young teenager, perhaps even a pre-teen.
 2. She wondered what the angel could mean in telling her that she is the recipient of God's grace and that God is with her.

3. She wondered what in the world was happening to her.

III. God's Overshadowing Presence (31-37)

- A. After assuring Mary that she had nothing to fear, Gabriel then made the announcement that he had been sent to deliver.
 1. He said, "you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. 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, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."
 2. There are three main components to this announcement.
 3. First, Gabriel declares that Mary's child will be given the name "Jesus", which is the Greek translation of the Hebrew 'Joshua.'
 4. This name means 'Yahweh is salvation' or 'Yahweh saves.'
 5. Thus we see that even the Messiah's name contains a promise of salvation.
- B. The second part of the announcement is the assertion that Jesus "will be great."
 1. This recalls what Gabriel said about John the Baptist in the previous passage, though there is an important difference.
 2. While John will be great "before the Lord" and will "go before" the Lord, Jesus will be great in a way that surpasses everything else.
 3. He will be called "the Son of the Most High."
 4. He will be the very Son of God.
- C. The third part of the announcement is that Jesus will be given the throne of his father David.

1. Jesus' connection with David was established at the beginning of our passage, where Luke told us that Joseph was of the house of David.
 2. Even though Joseph was not Jesus' biological father, his acceptance of Mary's child as his own meant that he was Jesus' father in a legal sense.
 3. This meant that he was the one through whom Jesus' lineage was traced.
 4. Gabriel is telling Mary that Jesus will be the one in whom God's great promise to David will come to fulfillment.
 5. Jesus is the son of David who will build a temple for the Lord — not a temple made of stones and wooden beams, but a temple comprised of the people whom he was given to save.
 6. And Jesus is the son of David who will receive a kingdom that will endure for all eternity.
- D. Mary somehow understood that the angel was not simply telling her that she would have a child after she got married to Joseph.
1. She knew that Gabriel was telling her that she would conceive a child before her marriage was consummated.
 2. That is why she asked, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?"
 3. Her question differs from the question that Zechariah asked of Gabriel in the previous passage.
 4. Zechariah said, "How shall I know this?", which was a request for a sign to confirm the angel's message.
 5. God chastened Zechariah for his unbelief by causing him to be mute until John was born.

6. But Mary was not questioning the angel's veracity.
 7. She simply wanted further information about how this would be brought about.
- E. Gabriel answered Mary's question by telling 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."
1. This language recalls how the Spirit of God hovered over the face of the waters at the original creation.
 2. The same Spirit will now hover over Mary in order to bring about God's new creation in Jesus Christ.
 3. Notice how we see all three members of the Godhead in this verse.
 4. This reminds us that in all of God's works, the Father is the source, the Son is the mediator, and the Spirit is the agent who effects what God purposes.
 5. Michael Horton explains the Spirit's task by saying, "To the Spirit particularly is attributed the dignity of transforming created space into covenantal place: a home for communion between Creator and creatures" [*The Christian Faith*, 552]
 6. This is what the Spirit was doing when he conceived this child in Mary's womb.
 7. Jesus is the temple of God, the covenantal place where man can enjoy communion with God.
 8. In a mystery that surpasses our understanding, the Spirit of God created in Mary's womb a child made of our own flesh and blood who is simultaneously the eternal Son of God.
- F. The virginal conception of Jesus declares that while he was a true man, he did not inherit the sinful nature of fallen man.

1. Jesus had to be fully human because he had to share the nature of those whom he came to save.
 2. As the church father Gregory of Nazianzus said, "What he did not assume he did not redeem."
 3. At the same time, Jesus also had to be without sin in order to be able to provide atonement for our sins.
 4. Because Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit instead of by a human father, he was born without the corruption of original sin.
- G. After explaining the miracle of the incarnation to Mary, the angel then told her about Elizabeth's pregnancy.
1. This served as confirmation of what Gabriel was telling her.
 2. Notice that even though Mary did not request a sign, God graciously provided one for her.
 3. The fact that Elizabeth had conceived a child in her old age demonstrated that nothing is impossible with God.
 4. It reminded Mary that the Lord is the God who made the world out of nothing.
 5. Surely such a God can create a child in the womb of a virgin.

IV. God's Willing Servant (38)

- A. This brings us to the final verse of the passage, where Luke tells us that Mary responded to all that the angel told her by saying, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word."
1. Here is a wonderful picture of faith, and it is on display in the life of this teenage girl.

2. Mary calls herself the Lord's servant, and she makes good on what she says by submitting herself to God's will.
 3. This was not an easy thing for her to do.
 4. This pregnancy was going to put her in a very difficult position.
 5. While she was betrothed, she was not yet married.
 6. She understood the harm that this pregnancy would bring to her reputation.
 7. People would assume that she had been promiscuous, even though that was not at all the case.
 8. Even Joseph thought so until an angel appeared to him in the encounter that is recorded in Matthew's Gospel.
- B. Mary's statement "let it be to me according to your word" serves as a model prayer for every one of us.
1. It is the one prayer that should undergird all of the personal requests that we make of God.
 2. The Bible certainly does tell us that God wants us to bring our petitions to him.
 3. But God also wants us to remember that what he has decreed is always what is best.
 4. As Thomas Boston once wrote, "Everyone knows what is most pleasant to him, but God alone knows what is most profitable." [*The Crook in the Lot*, 29]

V. Conclusion

- A. We sometimes hear people deride passages like this because of the supernatural elements in it.

1. People will tell us that things like angels and virginal conceptions are antiquated and unscientific, things that belong to a time when people were superstitious and gullible.
 2. Well, I don't see how you can read Luke's account of Gabriel's appearances to Zechariah and Mary and conclude that their pre-modern worldview made them any more prepared for these encounters than we would be.
 3. They were terrified and confused by this heavenly visitor.
 4. They knew that old women and virgins don't have babies.
 5. But in both instances, the word that was spoken to them came to pass.
 6. Nothing is impossible with God.
- B. If the things recorded in this passage didn't really happen, then we have no reason to be Christians.
1. What Paul said about the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15 can also be applied to the virgin birth: if Christ was not born of a virgin, then our faith is in vain.
 2. A non-supernatural Christianity is utterly useless.
 3. It is useless because it cannot save us from sin, death, and judgment.
 4. Only a heaven-sent Savior can do that.