

The Annunciation

Exegetical Study Luke 1:26–38

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Luke 1:26

Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent [ἀπεστάλη] from God [ἀπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ] to a city in Galilee, called Nazareth,

The phrase "in the sixth month" refers to the length of Elizabeth's pregnancy. The verb ἀπεστάλη [from ἀποστέλλω, 3rd, sing, aor, ind. pass] is important because of the passive. God is the agent of the passive. Two thoughts are evident. From the perspective of the Law, the Annunciation to Mary of the incarnation is nothing less than a proclamation of human godlessness. If man could have saved himself, he wouldn't need a Savior. From the perspective of the Gospel, the sending of Gabriel is a proclamation that God intends to do something to rectify the plight of humanity.

Nazareth of Galilee is, humanly speaking, an unlikely place for the Annunciation to take place. Shouldn't we expect the King of the Jews to come to from royal Jerusalem? The thought of Nathanael is an apt commentary: "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" (John 1:46).

Luke 1:27

to a virgin [παρθένον] engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the descendants of David; [ἐξ οἴκου Δαυίδ] and the virgin's name was Mary [τὸ ὄνομα τῆς παρθένου Μαρίας].

The virgin [παρθένος] conception and birth is, here, about to be announced (v. 31). The age-old controversy regarding the almah [אִמָּה] of Isaiah 7:14 is, here, resolved. As if to emphasize this fact, Luke uses παρθένος twice in this passage. The clear statement of Scripture is that Isaiah's almah is to be understood as a virgin. Decisive in this matter is Matthew 1:23: "Behold, the virgin [παρθένος] shall be with child, and shall bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel" which translated means, "God with us." Those who argue that Matthew is just quoting the LXX must explain why God permitted παρθένος to be inscripturated as the fulfillment of Isaiah 7:14 if the correct understanding of almah is something other than virgin.

The phrase, ἐξ οἴκου Δαυίδ, literally, "out of the house of David" stresses the child's Davidic ancestry through Joseph (on the child's Davidic ancestry, see 2 Sam. 7:12-16, Psalm 89:36, Isaiah 11:1ff., Jer. 23:5-6, Jer. 33:15-17, Matt. 1:1, and Luke 3:31).

Luke 1:28

And coming in, he said to her, "Hail [Χαῖρε], favored one [κεχαριτωμένη]! The Lord is with you."

The angel Gabriel begins with a greeting, Χαῖρε, [from χαίρω, 2nd, sing, present, imperative active]. Most English translations render the imperative as hail. I think that is a "safe" translation, for Χαῖρε, according to Lenski and Arndt, was the standard word of greeting of that day. Arthur Just, Jr. translates it as "rejoice." I incline to the latter's view. He writes,

One of the most common Hebrew greetings is שָׁלוֹם, "peace," reflected in eivrh,nh in Lk 10:5; 24:36, but the LXX never translates שָׁלוֹם, "peace," by the imperative Χαῖρε. J. McHugh, *The Mother of Jesus*, 38-39, notes, "The imperative form Χαῖρε, far from being a conventional greeting, always refers to the joy attendant on the deliverance of Israel; wherever it occurs, it is a translation of a Hebrew verb meaning 'Rejoice greatly!'" (or "shout" for joy)."¹

The perfect participle κεχαριτωμένη, [from χαριτόω, fem, 2nd; singular, perf, pass participle], viz., "favored one," or more literally, "favored woman," has a present, durative sense. Lenski is right when he says,

The perfect participle κεχαριτωμένη has the strongest connotation of the present: "having been favored and as a result still being in this blessed condition." The root in the verb is χάρις, grace, the unmerited favor bestowed by God. The passive voice makes God the agent."²

Romanists make much of this passage to assert the near-deification of Mary.

The *Textus Receptus* appends to *Nestle-Aland 27* the phrase, "blessed art thou among women." [εὐλογημένη σὺ ἐν γυναιξίν]. Even if we accept the reading of the *TR*, the point is that Mary is the object of God's favor/grace, not the dispenser of it. If Mary has particular salvific merit before God, a superabundant treasury of merit, then grace has become non-grace. Merit and grace are mutually exclusive. God's choice of Mary to be the 'Mother of God' is a choice of grace.

Sidebar: One wonders what sort of theological "stretching" our ELCA brethren (and sistren, sic) will have to do with regard to the theology of Mary. Once the article of justification by grace alone is dispensed with, fairy tales are to be expected.

Luke 1:29

But she was greatly troubled at this statement, and kept pondering [διελογίζετο] what kind of salutation this might be.

Mary was greatly impacted by Gabriel's appearance and greeting. Surely, this was a natural response to a sudden and miraculous event. The Greek text is acceptably conveyed in the English translation above. One thing, however, is worthy of note. The imperfect διελογίζετο [διαλογίζομαι], "I ponder," is certainly iterative or, perhaps, even continuous. The translation, "kept pondering," adequately conveys Luke's sense.

Luke 1:30

And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid [Μὴ Φοβοῦ], Mary; for [γὰρ] you have found favor [χάρις] with God.

The translation, "do not be afraid," is the most common translation of Μὴ Φοβοῦ [from φοβέομαι, 2nd, sing., present, imperative, pass.] in modern English translations (e.g., NASB, NIV, RSV, and NKJV). Most grammars, however, note that μή + the present tense imperative "is used to prohibit an action already engaged in."³ A better translation, then, is "stop fearing," or "stop being afraid." Yes, the appearance by the holy angel caused her to be afraid instantly. Her fear was caused by (1) the holiness of Gabriel over against her sinfulness, and (2) the natural response of any person in the face of a supernatural event. The command, "Stop being afraid," surely alleviated that fear somewhat—if not altogether.

The Gospel is always good news. Here, the good news is that Mary need not be frightened, for [γὰρ, causal in this case] she has found favor [χάρις] with God [παρὰ τῷ θεῷ]. We note that the good news has content, i.e., a message. The message is that she is the object of God's favor/grace. Her heart is, thus, calmed.

Just makes an insightful observation. He writes:

The Lord is with Mary . . . in two senses. He will come upon her and overshadow her, and the presence of the Lord will be in her womb. The new era of salvation begins with the conception of Jesus in Mary. . . . The new era of salvation comes through the baby to be conceived by the gracious action of God upon Mary, who finds favor with

God—not due to any superiority over other women or any merit in God's estimation, but simply because of God's good pleasure (cf. 10:21).

Is this not the same with all persons who are incorporated into the kingdom by the pure grace of God, and therefore, is this not the same with the church, which is where faith is born by the pure grace of God? As Eve contained in her womb all humanity that was doomed to sin, now Mary contains in her womb the new Adam who will father a new humanity by his grace (Rom 5:12-21). Thus, the angel says, "rejoice" for Israel—humanity—is now to be reborn through the Son in Mary's womb. The Lord is with Mary - he is with his church.⁴

Luke 1:31

"And behold, you will conceive [συλλήμψῃ] in your womb, and bear [τέξῃ] a son, and you shall name Him Jesus.

Καί ἰδοὺ calls attention to the miraculous nature of the conception. Luke has already told us that she is a virgin. The conception συλλήμψῃ [from συλλαμβάνω, 2nd, sing., future, ind., mid.] is still a future event from Mary's perspective. Yet, she will not only conceive, but also bear, τέξῃ, [τέξῃ φρομ τίκτω, 2nd, sing., future, indicative, middle, dep.] a child. But the gender of the child is also specified, namely, a son. Compare Isaiah 7:14, Isaiah 9:6.

An observation: In Scripture, there are three prominent supernatural births: Isaac, John the Baptist, and Jesus. Ninety-year-old Sarah knew that, humanly speaking, her child-bearing years were over. And although Elizabeth was probably not as old as Sarah, she too was barren.⁵ Likewise, everything was against Jesus being born of Mary. She had never known a man. So here we have three women, three of the most impossible candidates for motherhood imaginable. Two are old; one is young. Two are barren; one is a virgin. Yet, they all conceive—the two by their husbands, the one by the Holy Ghost. Each brings forth a miracle child—the first, a progenitor of the Savior; the second, the forerunner of the Savior; and the third, the Savior himself. We, surely, learn from these examples that, "with God, nothing shall be impossible." And, perhaps, we learn as well, that our salvation, from beginning to end; from progenitor to Savior, is entirely the work of God. These "impossible mothers," were by grace, not by merit, the human vehicles through whom God worked in order to bring about our salvation.

Luke 1:32

"He will be [ἔσται] great, and will be called [κληθήσεται] the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give [δώσει] Him the throne of His father David;

Just correctly observes that vv. 31-33 comprise Mary's catechesis. The three future verbs supply the structure of this verse. Her Son will be (ἔσται)⁶ great. He will be called (κληθήσεται)⁷ the Son of the Most High (ὑψίστου).⁸ And, finally, the Lord God will give (δώσει)⁹ Him the throne of His father David.

These three ascriptions to the Son are all Messianic. The phrase, "Son of the Most High," emphasizes his deity. Indeed, Lenski notes, "The title, ὑψιστος 'Highest,' 'Most High,' (superlative), by itself or combined with θεός (Heb. 7:1; Gen. 14:18; repeatedly in the mouth of demons, Mark 5:7; Luke 8:28; Acts 16:17) designates God in his supreme exaltation and majesty."¹⁰ And it is the Lord God that will give him the throne of his Father David. Jesus is the culmination of the Messianic line. Isaiah 9:6-7 form a part of the OT backdrop for Mary's instruction:

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. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this.

Luke 1:33

and He will reign [βασιλεύσει] over the house of Jacob forever; and His kingdom will have no end [οὐκ ἔσται τέλος].

Two future verbs continue Mary's catechesis. This infant Son will reign (βασιλεύσει) over "the house of Jacob forever" (ἐπὶ τὸν οἶκον Ἰακώβ εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας). This Son will reign over his kingdom. Some take this to mean an earthly reign of Jesus during the future millennium of Revelation 20. Most premillennialists, however, note that, in this text, the Son's reign is said to last "forever." Quite obviously, a literal millennium cannot last "forever." Jesus himself said to Pilate, "My kingdom is not of this world" (ἡ βασιλεία ἣ ἐμὴ οὐκ ἔστιν ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου τούτου) John 18:36.

The house of Jacob is the Church. We recall how St. Paul vigorously stated that those who trusted in Christ alone belonged to the true Israel. A few examples:

For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly; neither is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God. (Rom. 2:28-29).

But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel; neither are they all children because they are Abraham's descendants, but: "THROUGH ISAAC YOUR DESCENDANTS WILL BE NAMED." That is, it is not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of the promise are regarded as descendants. (Rom. 9:6-8). Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham. (Gal. 3:7). And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise. (Galatians 3:29).

For we are the true circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh (Philippians 3:3).

Gabriel also said that the Messiah's kingdom will have no end. This is something the OT repeatedly stressed."¹¹

Luke 1:34

And Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin (ἐπεὶ ἄνδρα οὐ γινώσκω)?" (NASB)

Many modern translations (NIV, NASB, NRSV, NLT) choose not to translate the original Greek here. Rather, they choose to interpret the phrase, "ἐπεὶ ἄνδρα οὐ γινώσκω" (literally, "since I know not a man") with the reading, "since I am a virgin."

Query: Should translations translate, or interpret, or do both? Traditionally, translation and exegesis have been seen as two related but distinct tasks. This distinction has become increasingly blurred by the modern theories pertaining to linguistics. In traditional Lutheran catechesis, the Small Catechism asks, "What does this mean?" The reply, formulated by Luther, gives an interpretation of what the original text means. Today, the question, "What does this mean?" questions not only what the text meant in the cultural/linguistic milieu of the writer (the grammatical-historical method), but also what the text means in cultural/linguistic milieu of today (with all the predispositions of the modern reader).

This writer believes that translations should seek to translate the text as it appears in the original. The plethora of modern translations makes it more necessary for the pastor to have an acquaintance with the original text. The overabundance of modern translations (each with its own agenda) does not make the task easier, but harder.

But, getting back to the text, one may ask why Zechariah was chastened by God for asking how he could know for certain that Elizabeth would conceive (1:18), whereas Mary was not chastised though she asked a similar question. The answer is that

Mary's question is not asked due to any skepticism on her part. She believes what the angel tells her. Her only question—and a very natural one at that—is how God will bring it to pass. Zechariah's heart was skeptical; Mary's was not. (So Arndt, Lenski, and Just).¹²

Sidebar: Romanists read into Mary's question, "How. . . since I know not a man?" the doctrine of her perpetual virginity. This is grammatically untenable. Οὐ γινώσκω is a simple present tense verb. Mary is simply stating what her situation is when visited by Gabriel. To maintain a timeless virginity we would need, at the very least, the verb to be in the perfect tense.

Luke 1:35

The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High [δύναμις ὑψίστου] will overshadow you [ἐπισκιάσει σοι]. So the holy one [ἅγιον] to be born [τὸ γεννώμενον] will be called the Son of God [κληθήσεται υἱὸς θεοῦ.], NIV.

The angel gives the answer to Mary's "how shall this be?" Human reason wants more information as to the how. God supplies sufficient data to satisfy the virgin's wondering. It must be sufficient for us as well. The miracle is stated with classic biblical brevity, viz., that first, the Holy Spirit will come up her [Πνεῦμα ἅγιον ἐπελεύσεται ἐπὶ σέ] and , second, that the power of the Most High [ὑψίστου] will overshadow her. In other words, the miracle will take place by the power of the Holy Spirit. Though there are these two distinct aspects of the divine conception mentioned here by Luke, we must think of the "coming upon" and "overshadowing" as a singular operation of the Holy Spirit. That is to say, we are not to think that the "coming upon" and "overshadowing" take place at two distinct times. The distinction is logical not temporal.

Theologically, we have in this text the evidence upon which to confess with the Council of Chalcedon that Mary is the "Mother of God" (θεότοκος). We note that the child born of Mary [τὸ γεννώμενον,¹³ literally, "the one who is born"] is the Son of God. We must not allow familiarity to dull our sense of the incomprehensibility of this miracle of divine grace. The personal union of godhood and manhood took place at the moment of conception!

Luke 1:36

"And 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.

Here, Mary is informed about the miraculous conception of John the Baptist to Elizabeth and Zechariah.

- Luke 1:37 "For nothing will be impossible with God."
Enough said.
- Luke 1:38 And Mary said, "Behold, the handmaid of the Lord [Ἴδοὺ ἡ δούλη κυρίου]; be it done to me according to your word [γένοιτό¹⁴ μοι κατὰ τὸ ῥῆμά σου.]." And the angel departed from her.

Mary is content to be a δούλη, slave/servant of the Lord. Her humility is beautifully expressed in the optative, "May it be to me according to your word."

Soli Deo Gloria!

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References

1. Arthur A. Just, Jr., *Luke 1:1-9:50*, vol 1 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1996), p.61. [\[Return\]](#)
2. R.C.H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Luke's Gospel* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1946) p. 62. . [\[Return\]](#)
3. James W. Voelz, *Fundamental Greek Grammar*, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1986), p. 216. [\[Return\]](#)
4. Just, p. 68. [\[Return\]](#)
5. Luke 1:7 [\[Return\]](#)
6. From εἰμι, I am, 3rd, sing., future, ind., middle. [\[Return\]](#)
7. From καλέω, I call, 3rd, sing, future, ind., passive. [\[Return\]](#)
8. ὑψίστου from ὑψιστος, highest, superlative adjective, masc., sing., genitive. [\[Return\]](#)
9. δώσει from δίδωμι, I give, 3rd, sing., future, indic., active. [\[Return\]](#)
10. Lenski, p. 66. [\[Return\]](#)
11. For example, 2 Samuel 7:12-16:

"When your days are over and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom. 13 He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. 14 I will be his father, and he will be my son. When he does wrong, I will punish him with the rod of men, with floggings inflicted by men. 15 But my love will never be taken away from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. 16 Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever."

Also Daniel 7:13-14: 13

"In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. 14 He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.

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12. William F. Arndt, Luke, *Concordia Classic Commentary Series*, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1956, reprinted 1986), p. 51. Just, p. 69, :Lenski, p. 69. [\[Return\]](#)

13. γεννώμενον from γεννάω, (I am born) neuter, sing., nom., present passive participle. [\[Return\]](#)

14. γένοιτό, from γίνομαι, 3rd, sing., aorist, optative, middle. [\[Return\]](#)

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