

Limited Resources, Limitless God

Session 3

December 21, 2025

When Your Understanding Falls Short

The Point: God can do great things through you.

Session Passage: Luke 1:26-38

Luke 1:26-30

Connection to the Point: An angel informed Mary of God's presence and grace.

The Setting. Luke's description of the angel Gabriel's announcement to Mary immediately followed the angel's announcement to Zechariah (1:5-25). While the angel encountered Zechariah in the temple at the center of Jewish culture, he came to Mary in an obscure Galilean village far to the north of Jerusalem. Luke intended to tie the two narratives together to demonstrate the significance of John's ministry as the forerunner of the Messiah (1:17; 3:16). Furthermore, his description of the remarkable story of John's conception would be surpassed by an even greater miracle through the creative power of Holy Spirit in Jesus's conception.

In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent by God (v. 26). The Lord commissioned Gabriel to deliver a second and even more shocking announcement. The timing connected this visit by the angel with his startling message from God to Zechariah and Elizabeth. Word about Elizabeth's pregnancy had only been out for about a month because she had kept herself in seclusion for five months (1:24).

To a town in Galilee called Nazareth (v. 26). The people of Judah looked down upon the Jews in Galilee, claiming that their contacts with the Gentiles in the nearby areas made them second-class citizens. Nevertheless, God chose a young girl from Nazareth as the mother of the promised Messiah.

To a virgin engaged to a man named Joseph, of the house of David (v. 27). Although Joseph played no role in the angel's announcement, Luke connected him to the house of David. He did so to show how Jesus came through David's lineage as his legal father (3:23; Matt. 1:16).

The virgin's name was Mary (v. 27). Her name means "exalted one." While later Elizabeth would call Mary "the mother of my Lord" (1:43), Luke never suggested that she deserved additional magnification because of her role as the mother of the Messiah.

The angel came to her and said, "Greetings, favored woman! The Lord is with you." (v. 28). Unlike when he appeared to Zechariah, Gabriel did not reveal his identity or status to Mary (v. 19). He greeted her and called her a woman of God's favor because she would receive a measure of His grace. His declaration concerning the Lord's presence in her life expressed more than a wish. It included the Lord's promise of His involvement with Mary in what Gabriel would explain next.

But she was deeply troubled by this statement (v. 29). While terror and fear overwhelmed Zechariah at Gabriel's appearance (v. 12), the angel's initial words confused and troubled her. Mary could not understand how God could possibly choose her for such favor.

Wondering what kind of greeting this could be (v. 29). Her response amounted to a wordless question and revealed her humility because she never expected to see an angel or hear that God favored her. God's intervention into her life came as something unexpected, confusing, and disturbing. Gabriel would clarify what his greeting meant, but he did not disclose all the details of what would happen. In fact, she experienced most of what Luke detailed in his infancy narrative in a state of amazement without the aid of any angelic interpreter (2:19,51).

Then the angel told her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God." (v. 30). The angel acknowledged Mary's anxiety and troubling curiosity through the use of the present imperative, meaning to stop being afraid. For a second time, Gabriel comforted Mary with this Semitic expression. The preposition "for" signaled the reason for her to remain calm and not be afraid. Previously, Gabriel told Zechariah not to fear because his prayer had been heard (v. 13). Unlike others in the Old Testament who found favor with God by requesting it (for example, Hannah in 1 Sam. 1), Mary enjoyed God's favor without any hint of a request. She had found God's favor, and He entrusted her with something great to do and to bear. Mary had found favor with God but not because of any special virtue on her part. In other words, she was not sinless, nor could she have grace to pass to others. God had chosen Mary to bless her as the mother of Jesus.

Luke 1:31-34

Connection to the Point: Mary wondered how the birth of Jesus would be accomplished.

Now listen: You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus (v. 31). As a consequence of God's favor, the angel made sure that he had Mary's full attention as he listed several predictions that unfolded the identity of the God-conceived baby that she would carry. Gabriel began by announcing that Mary would conceive and give birth to a son. Her head likely spun with even more confusion upon hearing the impossible words about conceiving a son in her virgin womb.

He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High (v. 32). One can only imagine what Mary must have thought about the angel's proclamation about her son. Did Luke have Isaiah 9:6-7 in mind as he wrote? The title of greatness encompassed more than a name, rather it indicated the true essence of this child to be born to her. His being great meant that He would distinguish Himself from every other man in power, wisdom, and dominion on earth and in heaven. Recall that Gabriel told Zechariah that John "will be great in the sight of the Lord" (v. 15), but Jesus would be unsurpassed in His greatness. God the Father is regularly identified as "the Most High" in Luke–Acts (1:76; 6:35; 8:28; Acts 7:48; 16:17). Therefore, this reference to the Son of the Most High meant that the angel essentially called Jesus the Son of God, which would be further clarified in verse 35. Gabriel further defined this child's greatness in the descriptions that follow.

The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David (v. 32). This promise reverberated throughout the pages of the Old Testament (2 Sam. 7:12-16; Ps. 2:7-8; 89:29; Isa. 9:6-7; 55:3-5; Ezek. 37:21-24; Dan. 7:14) which showed the correlation of kingship and sonship. Clearly this birth announcement emphasizes the regal imagery and Jesus's authority rather than focusing upon His suffering, which would necessarily come later.

He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and his kingdom will have no end (v. 33). Given that God would give His Son David's throne, Gabriel added these two parallel promises and connected all the expectations related to Jesus's mission declaring that He would reign over Israel forever. The prophet Samuel delivered a covenant promise to David that envisioned a Davidic dynasty (2 Sam. 7:12-16), but generations of rebellion and unrighteousness led to the fall of Judah. David understood this promise referred to not only his son, Solomon, who would build the temple, but also to the future Son who would rule forever (v. 19). Only the Son born to Mary would ascend to this promised throne, and He alone will rule in an everlasting kingdom.

Mary asked the angel, "How can this be, since I have not had sexual relations with a man?" (v. 34). Unlike Zechariah, who asked Gabriel to show how he could know that Elizabeth would bear him a son (v. 18), Mary's question displayed her faith. Zechariah doubted Gabriel by asking incredulously, as in "Can God really do this?" But Mary showed spiritual sensitivity, believing what the angel said would come to pass. She must have understood Gabriel to mean that a miracle would occur so that a child would be born while she was still a virgin. Naturally she wondered how the birth of Jesus could possibly occur.

Luke used the Greek word, meaning to know, to indicate sexual intimacy. Mary had not been intimate with a man and therefore, asked a quite natural question. With no precedent for such a miracle, she wanted to know how Gabriel could make such a promise since she had not been physically intimate with a man.

Other birth annunciations in Scripture come to those already married (Gen. 18:9-15; 1 Sam. 1:15-18; Luke 1:13-17). While Mary and Joseph had begun the formal steps towards marriage, Mary did not assume that the angel spoke of the conception in the future tense. She believed that the conception would occur soon and while she is still a virgin. Luke did not stress Mary's virginity in order to exalt her, making her a holy vessel worthy to give birth to Messiah. Actually, her virginity presented an obstacle to conception that only the miraculous and creative power of God could overcome.

Luke 1:35-38

Connection to the Point: The angel informed Mary that God would accomplish this miracle through her because nothing is impossible with Him.

The angel replied to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you" (v. 35). In answer to Mary's important question, Gabriel clearly stated that conception would come about without human agency. He explained how the conception would occur and that Mary would remain a virgin. The Holy Spirit served as the agent to bring about this miracle. The angel depicted the presence of the Holy Spirit descending on Mary, thus explaining the holy nature of her baby.

The power of the Most High will overshadow you (v. 35). Gabriel's words emphasized that the Holy Spirit would have an active, creative, life-giving role, yet also drew a veil over the actual details of the conception. The overshadowing depicted the powerful presence of God. Luke used the same word in the Transfiguration account to describe the overshadowing cloud of God's presence (9:34).

Therefore, the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God (v. 35). Therefore, by the presence of the God the Spirit and the power of God the Father, a human body was prepared for God the Son who would be brought forth by Mary. The child's incredible origin marked Him out as holy (without sin) and affirmed Him as Son of God. His sinless nature had nothing to do with His miraculous birth to a virgin but on the basis of His being God. God Himself entered the world in human form through the birth of Jesus.

Consider your relative Elizabeth—even she has conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month for her who was called childless (v. 36). Mary would have had doubts about all this, so Gabriel called her attention to her relative, Elizabeth. Through a miracle of God, Elizabeth and her husband, Zechariah, though barren and well advanced in age, anticipated the birth of their first child. While Elizabeth's conception came the natural way and Mary's came by way of the Holy Spirit, both could only happen through the word and promise of God. Having heard about Elizabeth, Mary would shortly go to visit her for encouragement and support during this time that would prove to be difficult for her. She stayed with Elizabeth for three months, likely until John's birth (v. 56). God had taken a barren woman beyond child-bearing age, Elizabeth, and had caused her to become pregnant. Although Mary had not asked for a sign, Elizabeth now in her sixth month of pregnancy gave her proof that God could do what Gabriel had announced to her.

For nothing will be impossible with God (v. 37). These final words may echo the Lord's statement to Sarah, "Is anything impossible for the LORD?" (Gen. 18:14). However, they go beyond comparing two old and barren women who gave birth in their old age. Mentioning Elizabeth's old age and her barrenness alongside Mary being a virgin highlighted the great obstacles God would overcome to accomplish His divine plan. Everything in this account revealed God's miraculous power to do the impossible.

"See, I am the Lord's servant," said Mary (v. 38). Amazingly, Mary responded with great faith and submitted as the humble servant of the Lord. She identified herself as a bondservant, an everyday word that described one who served at the behest of a superior. As a servant of the Lord, she recognized the honor and responsibility of being the mother of God's Messiah and expressed her willingness to perform humble service out of loyalty.

"May it happen to me as you have said." (v. 38). Mary embraced God's purpose for her life without reservation. She believed the angel's words and agreed to bear the child without asking for more information or for some time to consider any options. She took the risk of faith by willingly serving and obeying. Mary would face the accusations of immorality as an unwed mother, because who would have believed her story? She would have to tell Joseph, and he would have to humble himself as well. She demonstrated an exemplary response for every follower of God.

Then the angel left her (v. 38). When Mary submitted to her assignment, Gabriel did not hover over her to guide her further or to make her pathway easier to navigate. Mary received nothing else that could help her explain it to her family or even to Joseph. She could only cling to this encounter and to last words the angel said, "for nothing will be impossible with God" (v. 37).

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