

What Child is This?

Luke 1:26-38

Introduction:

Different Person: Where I grew up it seemed that all the kids played some form of rec sports. Some kids were better than others but we were all in the same general atmosphere. I didn't realize there was a whole 'nother type of person until halfway through high school. A kid came to my high school who would later be a first-round MLB draft pick and go on to play in the World Series. He was another level of athlete from what I'd seen (jump over a person to dunk a basketball, etc.). This guy was different!

Question: All our children are special in their own way. We tell them they can be anything they want to be (e.g., lawyers, doctors, astronauts, president, etc... who would want to be president?). In some ways, Jesus' birth is like any other birth, but in some pretty dramatic ways, he's entirely different.

What Child is This?: Another 19th-century hymn asks this question.

- What Child is this who, laid to rest, on Mary's lap is sleeping? Whom Angels greet with anthems sweet, while shepherds watch are keeping? This, this is Christ the King, whom shepherds guard and angels sing; haste, haste, to bring Him laud, the Babe, the Son of Mary.
- Why lies He in such mean estate, where ox and *sheep* are feeding? Good Christians, fear, for sinners here the silent Word is pleading. Nails, spear shall pierce Him through, the cross be borne for me, for you. Hail, hail the Word made flesh, the Babe, the Son of Mary.
- So bring Him incense, gold, and myrrh, come, peasant, king to own Him; the King of kings salvation brings, let loving hearts enthrone Him. Raise, raise a song on high, the Virgin sings her lullaby. Joy, joy for Christ is born, the Babe, the Son of Mary.

There is something different about this baby. We can't just settle for the quaint and nostalgic 8lb 6oz baby Jesus in his golden fleece diapers (I like the baby Jesus best!).

- He's more than a normal baby. He's God become flesh, he's the savior of the world. His coming has been prophesied and his conception is supernatural.

Duel Focus: The passage we're looking at tonight illuminates the identity of Jesus but also gives us a glimpse into how we respond to that identity. It tells us **who** Jesus is and to **whom** he is sent.

(1) Gospel Announcement: This passage is called **the Annunciation** (it celebrates the announcement of Gabriel to Mary). ²⁶ In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, ²⁷ to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. The gospel "good news" to be proclaimed. It is an announcement of what God has done and is doing (*that's why it's not a burden to share*).

- This messenger (ἄγγελος) is sent (ἀποστέλλω) from God to tell about this good news (*we are messengers sent by God to tell of his good news*).
- This announcement takes place in the midst of the story of John the Baptist's conception (e.g., Elizabeth and Zechariah), hence she's 6 months pregnant when this happens.
 - John is the forerunner to the Messiah. He has an improbable birth and is described as a pious and astonishing prophet. But here we see that Jesus' birth is not just improbably but, humanly speaking, *impossible*. He is not just a great prophet but the Word of God in the flesh. He is God himself come to save. (In one episode of the Simpsons, Homer finished reading through the Bible and said, "Everyone in this book is a mess...except this one guy").¹
- This announcement really does explain the gospel to us.

(2) Humble Servant: In the middle of all this theological and prophetic excitement is this teenage girl, Mary. What she lacks in understanding, she makes up for in humble obedience.

- While the message shows us the identity of Jesus, Mary, as the recipient of that message, shows us how we receive and respond to it.

²⁶ In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, ²⁷ to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸ And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" ²⁹ But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰ And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹ And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. ³² 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, ³³ and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." ³⁴ And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?" ³⁵ And the angel answered 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. ³⁶ And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. ³⁷ For nothing will be impossible with God." ³⁸ And Mary said, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.

1. An Announcement of God's Grace (v. 28-30)

²⁸ And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" ²⁹ But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰ And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.

¹ Mary is a virgin engaged to Joseph (Davidic lineage seems important). Mary seems to have Levitical lineage (since she is related to Elizabeth of Aaron) though some argue she has Davidic lineage. It's possible she has both, one from her father and the other from her mother. The point of the connection seems to be that Jesus is a priest from the line of Aaron and a king from the line of David (though David is a sort-of priest-king in his own right).

God's Choice: God chooses Mary as the one to receive his grace and bear his son. She is described as favored. There are others in the Bible described this way (e.g., Noah, Gideon, Hannah, and David).

- Some people see this language of “found favor” and think that something about Mary made her a worthy vessel. She certainly is an example we should follow, but the favor (χάρις) or grace she discovers is not something she has earned or conjured up herself, it is a gift from God.
 - “The moment I’ve developed any sense of entitlement in ministry is the moment I’ve departed from the way of Jesus. To be a believer at all is a gift. To be in ministry at all is an occasion for gratitude” (Barber).
- It is God’s good and gracious pleasure to choose us, to act in our lives, to do what he wants to do. Mary is a picture of those of us who receive God’s grace on the basis of his kindness.
 - In one sense Mary is special and not special at the same time. She is special because of how God worked in her life and what he chose her to do.
- This is grace! She is the “favored one” (κεχαριτωμένη) because of God’s choice. She is not loved because she is lovely, she is lovely because she is loved.
 - It is this free and unencumbered choice that makes God’s love true and perfect. If it our goodness, what we’ll do for him, something of our beauty or worth, then we are, in some way, garnering that love. And, if it is your beauty that earns his love, then you can lose it when you no longer possess such beauty. But his unearned, undeserved love *makes* you valuable and worthy and, is something you can never lose.
- In a real sense regarding both creation and new creation, it is God’s love that gives us life and brings us into being in the first place. **God’s grace!**

Mary’s Fear: This announcement is perplexing and doubt-producing for Mary. She is afraid. Is this real? How will this work? Is she able to carry out this task?

- God’s call produces fear because it is bigger than we can imagine and more than we can understand **but** his presence calms those same fears.

God With Us: The Lord is with you!” The witness of God is the thing we long for and the very thing God does in the incarnation.

- At the heart of God’s self-commitment is the promise of Immanuel, “God with us.” The name appears a handful of times in Isaiah and the refrain “I will be with you” runs throughout the Bible. God is *with* Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and Joshua. God promises Israel, he will “make his dwelling among them.” His presence takes “architectural shape” in the tabernacle and temples. When Israel is scattered into exile, he pledges to be with them as they pass through water and fire, so they will not be drowned, scorched, or burned. Then, when Jesus arrives, and we see the promises of God come fully and permanently into focus. And (Jesus) the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth (Jn 1:14). To old Simeon (last week), Jesus was salvation made visible.

- So, for Mary (and for us) the promise and presence of God is an opportunity to experience the grace of God in our hearts and souls.
 - Now is a chance to experience God's grace, to humble ourselves, to rely on him. Our weakness is an opportunity for his grace to carry us (i.e., grace is sufficient, power made perfect in weakness).

2. An Announcement of God's Reign (vv. 31-33)

³¹ And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. ³² 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, ³³ and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

Spectacular Promise: She's promised a son (though not pregnant), her son's name is given to her (a name that Matthew's Gospel makes a big deal about). But the focus is specifically on the identity of this **Son as King**.

Prophets Fulfilled: "It's almost as if he is writing the story of Mary and the angel, or Zechariah, or the shepherds with Samuel and Isaiah by his side. The allusions, fulfillments, and language all point to the clear fact that all of the 'hopes and fears,' worries and anxieties, meet their end in one person, they are all summed up and completed in Jesus. Jesus is the promised son who will save us from our sins. God made a promise to make all the wrong right, to undo all the terrible lies that sin tempts us to believe. And in Jesus, it happens. God keeps his promise!" And so many promises of Samuel and Isaiah are **promises of a king**.

Second Samuel: Samuel (explain why we have 1-2 Samuel and how it's prophecy). The focus of Samuel is on the selection of a King for Israel (how God should be King, how they pick the wrong king based on outward appearance, etc). At the heart of the promises of Samuel is the Davidic covenant: "When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever" (2 Sam 7:12-13).

- So the book of Samuel has a mother (Hannah) dedicating her son to the Lord at the temple (remember (H)Anna(h) at Jesus' dedication at the temple). Mary's song (*Magnificat*) is obviously inspired by Hannah's song in Samuel.
- Luke is, I think, cleverly and clearly showing us this truth, that the promise of God to David is fulfilled in Jesus, the greater Son of David.

Second Isaiah: The story of Israel could be told as a story of a people longing for a king and a kingdom. They have a promised land but no king. The King's they had, failed repeatedly. They get a glimpse of a great king (David) only to fall short and be left longing for more. When Isaiah and the prophets come along, the kingdom is broken, and the people wonder if there will ever be a king strong enough and wise enough, and good enough. And Isaiah tells of a **different**

kind of king who will be all those things but will suffer and serve. He'll carry the sickness, tears, and sin of the people, being pierced for their transgressions and crushed for their evils.

- For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this (Isa 9:6-7).

The shoulders of this king are strong enough to bear the weight of leadership and **Jesus alone is the eternal king**. We can learn so much about Jesus' character and identity from these names:

- **Wonderful Counselor:** He is a miracle producing, wonder-working and perfectly wise leader. He is a supernatural counselor. Rather than the cleverness of other leaders, he possesses truly divine wisdom.
- **Mighty God:** This promised "child" is the "mighty God" (take seriously the "el" in "Immanuel"). God is with us in Jesus.
- **Everlasting Father:** Like a father, this king cares for his subjects like children. But he isn't just like a father, he is an *eternal* father, he is God the father.
- **Prince of Peace:** If this world is ever gonna be fixed we need something better than ordinary judges and kings, we need the King of kings; we need God to reign and rule. In Jesus the reign and rule of God has come.
 - We can only receive the wonderful counsel, the divine power, the eternal comfort, and true peace of God if we let it indwell us and form us from within. These are gifts to be received through surrender.

Here is That King: Gabriel is showing that Jesus is that promised King, and he is superior to David or any other great king. His kingdom (like promised in Samuel and Isaiah) is an everlasting kingdom.

- He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever" (2 Sam 7:13).
- On the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore (Isa 9:7).
- ³² 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, ³³ and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."
- David's throne was the best Israel had (but it ended); we don't need a good king, or a great leader, we need a **perfect** king and a **forever** leader. Jesus is that King!

In Advent the unknown promise becomes known. Our hope is not wishful thinking about some possible future deliverance but the certain reality that Jesus is our deliverance. "Jesus is hope incarnate. When we despair, we look to Him. When we grieve, we find strength in Him. When we lose heart, we long for His coming. The center of our hope is more than a principle, a promise, or even a prophecy. Our hope is in a person, Jesus Christ" (Svigel adapted).

- **He is the king you are waiting for.**

- Remember, this is the **announcement**, these are just the facts (not *how* it will work out but *that* it will work out). This can only happen if God does it, it is something only God can do: **The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.**

3. An Announcement of the Impossible (vv. 34-38)

³⁴ And Mary said to the angel, “**How will this be**, since I am a virgin?” ³⁵ And the angel answered 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. ³⁶ And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. ³⁷ **For nothing will be impossible with God.**” ³⁸ And Mary said, “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.” And the angel departed from her.

Perplexed Mary: Mary questions how this can happen, she doesn’t understand (still doubting)

- She understands the promise of virgin birth but can’t figure out the mechanics.

By the Power of God: God will take care of it (that’s how). God will make happen what must happen.

- The virgin birth is central to Christian belief for a lot of reasons. (1) It is prophesied in the OT. (2) It demonstrates the unique origin of the Son of God. (3) It facilitates Jesus being both fully human and fully God.
- In this instance, the importance is simply this, God is doing the impossible.
 - Just as God has allowed Elizabeth, barren and beyond the age of having children, to conceive. He is going to allow Mary to conceive as a virgin, with only the power of the Spirit.
- This is a fundamental miracle. Some argue it is irrational because it is impossible. But that is the point, the only way it is possible is if God is who he says he is, can do what he says he can do, and (in fact) does just that.
 - **We want to be a part of something that can only be explained by the power of God.**

Incarnation: The virgin birth is the great reveal of God’s power and it cements Jesus’ identity as more than just a normal child and even more than just a normal king. **He is not just the Son of David (he is that), he is the Son of God.** He is not just a human son, but from the Holy Spirit. He is holy in a way that only God is.

- The incarnation, the enfleshment of God, the moment that the invisible God puts on flesh, is at the center of our hope. **The great distance between us and God was crossed by God himself.**
- The creator of flesh put on flesh. Without ceasing to be truly God, in the full possession of his divinity, God came to earth and became human, not only taking on flesh, but experiencing temptation, suffering, and the full spectrum of the broken world. This is the most amazing event in all of history: the eternal, omnipotent, omnipresent, infinitely holy Son of God took on human nature and lived among humanity as one who was both God and man at the same time, in one person.

- “What we see in the incarnation is the coeternal, coequal, coessential second person of the Trinity, in the form of a servant. He eternally stands with the Father on God’s side of all authority and with us on the creaturely side” (Sanders).
- Remaining what He was (God eternal), He became what He was not (flesh and blood), that He might satisfy the debt of sinners on the cross and secure our salvation.
- Hypostatic Union: It matters that he is both God and man (i.e., 100% God, 100% man). If he’s less than man he is not an appropriate substitute or an empathetic shepherd; if he’s less than God he is not a sufficiently powerful Savior. **He is the God-man.**
 - “What He was, He laid aside; what He was not, He assumed. He takes upon Himself the poverty of my flesh so that I may receive the riches of His divinity” (Gregory of Nazianzus).
- Only God can do this. Only God can do what we need him to do. **Only God.**

What Child is This?: In tonight’s passage, we see a magnificent description of the promised savior. And here’s the amazing part, **Jesus lives up to every part of that description.** “He is all he said he would be.” “He is tenderness without weakness, strength without harshness, humility without lack of confidence, authority without self-absorption, power without insensitivity, enthusiasm without fanaticism, holiness without Pharisaism, passion without prejudice. Nothing he does falls short. In fact, he’s always surprising you and taking your breath away because he’s so incomparably better than you could image yourself” (Tim Keller).

Conclusion:

Mary’s Response: “In the middle of all of this drama stands Mary, God’s listening, humble willing servant, who comes to see that God has the power to bring his plan to pass... God can do great things for his cause and can use anyone or anything to accomplish it” (Bock). Mary is ready to be used by God. ³⁸ And Mary said, “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.”

³⁹ In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah, ⁴⁰ and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹ And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, ⁴² and she exclaimed with a loud cry, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! ⁴³ And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? ⁴⁴ For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. ⁴⁵ And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.” ⁴⁶ And Mary said, “My soul magnifies the Lord, ⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, ⁴⁸ for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed; ⁴⁹ for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name. ⁵⁰ And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. ⁵¹ He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts; ⁵² he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate; ⁵³ he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty. ⁵⁴ He has helped

his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, ⁵⁵ as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever.”

Mary's responds with submission, trust, and surrender.

- Mary's song is not the sweet and sentimental Christmas we are accustomed to. It is the beautiful praise of a humble servant who sees God breaking into the brokenness of the real world.

Mary understood what God was doing and became a willing servant (even with the possibility of great personal loss, destruction of her relationship, and damage to her reputation). “There is risk in agreeing to go God's way, but as the Lord's servant, she willingly goes” (Bock).

- Can you see what Mary sees? Can you trust who Mary trusts? Can you surrender like Mary surrenders?
 - You must see God as great and yourself as a simple, recipient of his grace.
 - You must humble yourself. Humility simplifies and clarifies and deepens your faith because it reminds you that all of this is from God and God is all you need.
- For me, in a world that prides hustle, intelligence, and productivity, I am still figuring this out. Learn (to follow God) by unlearning (following ourselves). **We learn by unlearning.** I don't master God, I am mastered by him. His ways become my ways, his thoughts become my thoughts, his Word determines my life.
- For Mary, this announcement is good news.
 - Have you seen who Jesus is? Will you respond accordingly?