

HOPE FOR THE HUMBLE

SERIES: GOOD NEWS, GREAT JOY



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Luke 1:26-38

Second Message

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Unwrapping the Good News

One morning earlier this week, we had a fun experience in our house. The night before, my wife Linzy and I had wrapped all of the children's Christmas presents and put them under the tree in our living room. The next morning, when our kids got up, they saw the presents, and they lit up. They ran over to the tree, and Peyton, our five-year-old, started reading off all of the name tags on the gifts. "This one is for Asher from Mommy and Daddy. This one is for Rhett. This one is for me!" For the next ten minutes, they just sat and looked at all of the presents with pure joy. At one point, Peyton shouted out, "Daddy, this one is for you!" Sure enough, there was not just one, but three presents with my name on them that I didn't know were there. For just a moment, I felt like I was five again as I looked forward to finding out what was inside.

The funny thing about all of this is that wrapped Christmas presents are not very exciting in and of themselves. There is nothing special about a wrapped gift if all that you get to do is sit and look at it. What makes a Christmas tree full of wrapped gifts underneath it exciting is that you know that one day soon, you will get to open some of those gifts and find something special that someone bought for you. The wrapped gift is not special in and of itself. The wrapped gift is special because it tells you something special is coming — the present inside.

This morning is our second week in our advent series called "Good News, Great Joy." In this series, we are looking at five different angelic announcements, one about the birth of John the Baptist (which we looked at last week) and four about the birth of Jesus. These announcements are something like those wrapped gifts under the tree at my house. The announcements are nothing to celebrate in and of themselves, but the announcements point to something else that is coming—they point to someone else that is coming—and that someone is Jesus Christ. The message that Jesus is coming—and for us, the message that Jesus has come

—is the good news. That's the announcement, and that news is definitely reason for us to have an incredible amount of great joy.

As we look at each of these announcements, we are slowly going to unpack the content of this good news. Why exactly is the coming of Jesus good news? What is it about his birth that should bring us joy? These are important questions for us to ask, and we will be exploring these together during this series.

This morning, we will look at the announcement—the good news—that is given to Mary in Luke 1:26-38. I want us to think of this news as a wrapped gift under the tree. There are three specific questions about this news that we are going to answer together as we look at this passage. First, who is the good news for? Who's name is on the gift? Second, what is the content of the good news? What is the gift inside the package? And third, how should we respond to the good news? What is our reaction supposed to be when we open up the gift?

I want us to be aware of a couple of dangers as we look at this passage. For those of us who have been around church for a while, there is a temptation to tune out a bit when we come to a story as familiar as the birth of Jesus. "I've heard this before. I know what this is about." Don't do that. I believe that God wants to speak to you from this text today if you are willing to listen. So I want to ask you to listen to the Lord through his Word and his Spirit this morning.

For those of you who are new to church or less familiar with the story of Jesus' birth, there is another danger that I want you to be aware of. Here is a spoiler alert: we are about to hear an angel tell a young virgin girl that she will get pregnant, not by a man but by the Holy Spirit—by God. The danger for you is the temptation to just write this off as fiction, make-believe, or at the very least a little bit of truth mixed with a little bit of exaggeration. Here at PBC, we believe that the Bible is inspired by the Spirit of God and is true in all that it affirms. We also believe that these words are living and active and that through them, God has the power to change lives. I hope that you will listen with an open mind as we open God's Word together.

Whose name is on the package?

We are in Luke 1, and we will be looking at verses 26-38 this morning.

Luke 1: 26-30:

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.

This announcement comes just after the announcement to Zechariah that we looked at last week. Chronologically, the announcement to Mary comes six months after the announcement to Zechariah. That is the reference to "six months" in verse 26. It is the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy with John the Baptist. As we go through the announcement to Mary, we will see parallels between these two announcements. In fact, they are supposed to be read together. Where they are different is meant to stand out to us.

The stories start with a similarity: the angel Gabriel makes the announcement. But that is about where the similarities end in these first few verses. The setting could not be more different. We have moved from the temple in Jerusalem—the most significant place in the most significant city in Israel—to Nazareth, a small town approximately 50 miles north of Jerusalem. Luke probably tells us that Nazareth was in Galilee because it was so small and insignificant that many of his first-century readers may never have heard of it or at least not known where it was located. If an angel were going to appear somewhere, we would expect it to be in Jerusalem, in the temple. But an angel in Nazareth? That's a bit odd.

The contrast between Zechariah and Mary is equally (if not more) striking. Zechariah was a priest— one of Israel's most highly esteemed positions. And he was serving in the temple, which was one of the highly esteemed roles of a priest. Then we have Mary. We are not given her name at first. She is introduced as "a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph." Then we are told that her name was Mary. At the time, she was probably thirteen to fifteen years old—the typical age for

a female to get married in that day. Still, she is just a girl. She wasn't anyone significant. She was a nobody from nowhere. She was small. Insignificant. Unremarkable.

Do you ever feel like that? It's easy to feel that way around here, to feel small and insignificant. They call it the "imposter syndrome." You look around the room—the Zoom room for many of you still—at your coworkers, colleagues, and classmates, and you think, "How did I get here? That person is so much smarter, wealthier, more competent. And here I am, just squeaking by. Little old me. Better not let them see my weaknesses. Better look like I have it all together. Better not let them get to know the real me." Oof, that's dangerous.

I am not sure if Mary felt that way in Nazareth, but maybe she did. Either way, it looks to us that she was nobody of any significance. But we will soon find out that that is not the case. When Gabriel speaks to Mary, he tells her as much. His first words to her are, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you."

Again, if Gabriel says these words to Zechariah in the temple, sure! No problem. But the virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph? In Nazareth? Really?

Yes, Mary is favored. Literally, "graced." She is a recipient of God's grace. And God is *with* her.

Mary is a bit confused when she hears this greeting. She is trying to figure out precisely what the angel means by this. So the angel reaffirms his statement: "Don't be afraid, Mary. You have found favor with God."

She was a nobody from nowhere. Small. Insignificant. Unremarkable. And yet, she was favored by God. She was about to receive one of the greatest gifts of grace imaginable—to become the mother of God's own Son. It wasn't because she deserved it. It wasn't because she had done anything to earn it. No. God just chose her, and he poured out his grace on her.

In this, we learn who the good news is for—whose name is on the package. The good news is not for the rich and the famous. It's not for the successful and the noteworthy. No. The Good News is for the humble. It's for the lowly, the poor, the broken. The marginalized, the neglected, the unskilled, the outcast and the other. It's for those who find themselves in difficult situations. For those who are down on their luck. For those who are humble enough before God and themselves to recognize their true need for a Savior. To be honest about the low places in which they find themselves.

Over the past month or so, there have been three student deaths at Santa Clara University. Two of those deaths were by suicide. As the Santa Clara community and the loved ones of those who passed mourn and grieve, it makes me remember the many people—both inside and outside of our community—who have struggled with mental health challenges, especially over the past two years. What an incredibly low place to be.

Others of you have experienced physical illnesses that have brought you to a low place. Others are in painful relationships that have brought you low. And the truth is that all of us, no matter how much it looks like we have it all together, have been brought low because of the sin in our lives.

We don't have to have it all together to come to God. We don't have to be a Zechariah to receive God's grace. Being a Mary is just fine because the good news is for the humble, the lowly, and the broken.

What low place have you found yourself in? Know that the good news is for you in that place.

What's inside the gift?

We have read the name on the package, and the good news is for humble. But what is inside the gift? What is the content of the good news? What is the actual announcement that Gabriel makes to Mary?

Luke 1: 31-37:

“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.”

Here we find several more parallels with the announcement to Zechariah. Most obviously, the

announcement is of a coming baby—John the Baptist for Zechariah and Jesus for Mary. In both cases, this was surprising news. It was surprising for Zechariah because he and Elizabeth had been unable to have children and were now past the age where that was even possible for them. Zechariah and Elizabeth had a problem. They had this place of pain and shame, and God spoke into that pain and into that shame and promised to bring hope and healing. Mary was also childless. But this was not a problem for Mary because she wasn't married. She wasn't supposed to have children yet. And yet, God was still speaking a promise of hope and healing into an area of brokenness.

However, the problem that God was addressing in the coming of Jesus was much bigger than the problem of childlessness with which Zechariah and Elizabeth faced. The coming of Jesus was not just meant to bring hope and healing to Mary. The coming of Jesus was meant to bring hope and healing to the whole world.

The problem that God was addressing in the birth of Jesus goes back to the Garden of Eden. Genesis 3. Adam and Eve eat the forbidden fruit, removing God from the throne of their lives and placing themselves at the center. From that time forward, every single human being has made the same mistake: we put ourselves on the throne of our lives instead of God. We do life our way instead of God's way. We set aside what God says is best in favor of what seems best to us. But God wasn't content to leave his creation this way. So he chose a nation, Israel, and started working out his plan of redemption through them. God was the king over this nation. He was on the throne. But before too long, the people were not content with this. They wanted an earthly king as well. So God gave them one—first Saul, who ended up being no good, and then David. David had his faults, to be sure, but he was also a man after God's own heart.

In 2 Samuel 7, God made a very important promise to David. God told him that he would raise up a king after him who would sit on his throne forever, and God would be his Father, and he would be God's son. As the rest of the Old Testament continues, the expectation for this coming king, the Messiah, grows. He is called the King of Kings and the Prince of Peace. He will restore the kingdom of God to earth, ruling with justice, righteousness, and love. Throughout the Old Testament, the expectations are growing, but the Messiah does not come. Then, 400 years of silence. God, where are you? Have you forgotten your people? Have you forgotten your promise? Have you given up on your plan of redemption?

But then Gabriel shows up to Mary, and what does he say? What is his announcement? What is the good news that is meant to bring great joy? The good news is that The king is coming! The Messiah is almost here.

Here again is how Luke records the announcement:

“And behold, 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” (Luke 1:31-33).

This is the moment. People have been waiting for this announcement. God is speaking a promise of hope and healing, not just to a childless couple, but to a world that is broken and hurting and cut off from the relationship with God that we were created to enjoy!

However, this news was even better than anyone could have imagined because this king was not just the messiah. He was the one and only Son of God. God himself in human form. “Very God of very God,” as early creeds says. He was the King of Kings, born as a baby, to restore God’s rule on earth.

So what is good news? What is the gift inside the wrapping paper? It is the truth that The King has come.

When we read the news, it’s hard to miss the fact that we live in a broken world. A new Covid variant. Another school shooting. An ongoing refugee crisis. It’s easy to get discouraged if that is where we let our minds rest.

But that is not the full story. The full story, written for us here in God’s Word, is that God left heaven and came to earth as a man. A baby. A king. And he brought the kingdom of God with him. Now, the kingdom of God is among us. God is here, in our midst, by his Spirit, present with us. Now, even amid the pain and the brokenness, we can also experience peace. We know that we are loved. We rejoice that God no longer holds our sin against us because he took that sin on himself through the cross and has given us his righteousness. The King has come, and he has come for us. This is a powerful message of hope.

Responding to God's gift

So what is our response? What do we do in response to this good news? Let’s take a look at what Mary did.

After the first part of the announcement, Mary asks the angel, “How will this be, since I am a virgin?” Unlike Zechariah, who asked his question from a place of doubt, Mary asks her question from a place of faith. She does not ask whether God will actually be able to do this thing; she asks by what means it will occur since she is a virgin. Then she is told that the Holy Spirit will come upon her and cause her to conceive. She is also given a sign—her relative Elizabeth, who was also not physically able to have children, has also become pregnant. This is the sign that anything is possible with God, including this baby in the womb of a virgin.

Hear how Mary responds to this.

Luke 1:38:

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.

Mary’s response here is remarkable, especially in light of what her pregnancy could mean for her. I came across an awful meme the other day that said, “Having kids is the best thing that ever happened to me. Except, of course, for all those other things that happened before I had kids.” Terrible and so wrong. But it is true that kids change everything.

Then just think about Mary. She was about thirteen years old. Engaged, but not married. To get pregnant with a child that did not belong to the man to whom she was engaged put her in a very uncertain situation. How would Joseph respond when he found out? Would he call off the engagement? What would her parents say? Would they disown her? What would her community think? Would they shame her? All of these things were possible or even probably. And yet, knowing that her future and her reputation were at stake, Mary says, “I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.”

What an incredibly humble response. Mary starts in a humble place. But here, we learn that humility was not just a position into which she was born. Humility was a robe she had put on, a character quality that she had cultivated. Humility was at her very core. And her humility led to two specific responses to this life-changing news: She believed it. And she was willing to participate in it. “I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.”

This should also be our response to the good news. We must believe and participate in the good news.

These are two separate but equally important responses. First, to believe the good news, like Mary, we must say, "I am the servant of the Lord." If Jesus is the king, then believing in him is submitting ourselves to his authority. This brings us back to the problem that started in Genesis 3, when Adam and Eve ate that fruit, removing God from the throne of their lives and placing themselves on that throne. When we believe in Jesus as our king, we are removing ourselves from the throne of our lives and placing Jesus back where he belongs.

But we can't stop there. We also have to participate in the good news. This is what Mary was saying when she said, "Let it be to me according your will." She was saying, "Yes! I'm in! I'm up for this plan. I will go along with this. God, I want to join you in your work in the world. I want to participate."

One of the most encouraging things for me as a pastor is seeing those moments when you get off the bench and start playing the game—when your faith moves from an idea in your head down into a conviction in your heart and flows out into a new way of doing life.

There are a number of ways that I have seen that at PBC. I'll share a few examples from the college and young adults ministries. First, college. Over the last year, God has been stirring up an interest in ministering to international students, specifically at Stanford University. First, John, one of our young adults, started sharing his interest in international student ministry with me. We started thinking and praying about how to work with some groups on campus who were already doing this. Then, when we hired Lexi, our college director, about nine months ago, she said that one of her passions was for international student ministry, so we continued praying about this.

Then last summer, I got a call from a woman named Tasha. Tasha was moving from Wisconsin to the Bay Area to start doing international student ministry at Stanford. Tasha connected with Lexi and John and several others from PBC, and on, Thanksgiving several people from our body opened their homes to international students (primarily non-Christian students) from Stanford and

were able to love them and share Christ's love with them. That's is participating in God's work in the world.

Let me share one more example. Just before Covid, a few people in our Young Adult Fellowship had a strong desire to be more active in participating in God's work. Specifically, they wanted to do more to share the good news with their unbelieving friends and family. A few of these people got together with others from PBC who had a similar desire, and they started hosting virtual events about various culturally-relevant topics that also created space to share the gospel. The first event was on COVID and the problem of evil. Another event was on racism. Every two weeks for several months, they held these virtual dialogues, invited their unbelieving friends and family, and shared the good news of Jesus. What a great way to participate in God's work in the world.

Earlier in the service, our host Steve mentioned our Christmas boxes. Here is another very practical and simple way to participate in the good news. Grab a box and fill it with some Christmas goodies and an invitation to our Christmas Eve services. Give it to a friend, a neighbor, a colleague— someone who doesn't know Jesus—in order to bless them and invite them to learn more about this good news.

I know it can feel a bit risky to invite someone to church or start a spiritual conversation with them. Sometimes it can feel a bit risky just to knock on a neighbor's door and introduce ourselves. It takes some humility. But that is what Jesus is looking for: humility. Following Jesus requires humility. But it is through our humility, we truly discover the hope and the love and the joy and the peace that we have in Jesus.