

Bible Study Guide: Week of 12-14-2020

1. Read through the passage below
2. Read my notes and commentary
3. Read the questions at the end and ponder or discuss with others

Pastor Andrew

Luke 1:26-38

²⁶In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, ²⁷to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." ²⁹But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. ³²He 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 ancestor David. ³³He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." ³⁴Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" ³⁵The angel said to 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 holy; he will be called Son of God. ³⁶And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. ³⁷For nothing will be impossible with God." ³⁸Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

²⁶In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, ²⁷to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary.

The sixth month here refers to the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy with John the Baptist which Luke narrates just before this passage. Elizabeth, Mary's relative, was "very old" and "barren," yet conceived a child. This, of course, calls to mind the story of Abraham and Sarah's promised child, Isaac, from the Old Testament. Elizabeth, Luke tells us, went into seclusion for five months after conceiving John the Baptist. In the sixth month of her pregnancy, Mary got news that she, too, would conceive. She then went to visit Elizabeth, breaking the time of seclusion for her older relative. The angel Gabriel has already been mentioned by Luke. It was Gabriel who brought news about Elizabeth's conception of John to Elizabeth's husband Zechariah. Curiously, Zechariah, who was on course to become a main character early in the Gospel, was struck mute for his doubts about Gabriel's message. Likewise, Joseph has no lines at all in this Gospel story. So the men, who would have been expected to be main characters here, fade into the background. The women (Elizabeth and Mary) are the first ones to discuss the promises of God with one another. Likewise, it will be the women at the tomb (see Luke 24) who become the first ones to proclaim the good news of the resurrection of Jesus. Already in Luke's gospel we see the Kingdom of God turning human expectations upside down.

²⁸And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." ²⁹But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be.

Mary's reaction here is not just "perplexed," she is "highly agitated" or "acutely distressed." This reaction may stem simply from the sudden shock of an angelic appearance. But it may also point to the possibility that Mary was familiar with Tobit chapter 3, a folk tale that is part of the Apocrypha, which tells the story of a woman named Sarah who was married seven times, but each time a demonic spirit named Asmodeus came and killed her husbands before the marriage could be consummated. Mary, as an engaged woman, may have feared that Gabriel's presence was a similar threat to her.

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Though these words seem familiar to our ears because we have likely heard them before, put yourself in Mary's shoes. How could anyone absorb such lofty words and plans after being surprised by the presence of an angel?

³⁴Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I am a virgin?”

Mary’s question to the angel is literally, “In what way will this be, since I have not known a man?” The key to understanding her question hinges on the English word, “*will*.” “Can” is a poor translation. The verb here is future tense. Translating it as “can” makes it sound as though Mary is questioning whether what Gabriel said is possible. She is not asking, “can this come to be?” Rather, she is asking, “*How* will this come to be?”

³⁵The angel said to 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 holy; he will be called Son of God.

The angel answers her question quite directly—God will make this happen.

³⁶And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. ³⁷For nothing will be impossible with God.”

The angel then tells Mary the secret news about Elizabeth’s own miraculous pregnancy and, with it, makes a statement that foreshadows the whole Gospel story: “For nothing will be impossible with God.”

³⁸Then Mary said, “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.” Then the angel departed from her.

Unlike pretty much every other servant of God, Mary does not have any excuse to try to get out of this tremendous calling God has offered her. Unlike Isaiah who claims to be too unclean to be a prophet; unlike Jeremiah who claims to be too young to be a prophet; unlike Abraham and Sarah who protest that they are too old to have a child; unlike Moses who claims to be too slow of speech to lead God’s people—here, Mary says, “Yes, Lord. I will do this.” She demonstrates the most remarkable faith of anyone in scripture.

Discussion/Reflection Questions:

- 1. What other call stories can you think of in Scripture? How does Mary’s response compare or contrast with those other stories of God calling God’s people?**
- 2. What role does Joseph seem to play in this story? Why do you think Luke mentions Joseph, but doesn’t make him a main character in this chapter?**
- 3. How does Mary’s faith challenge or inspire you in your own life of faith?**