

Surrender!

Luke 1:26-56

Manuscript and Discussion Guide for December 13, 2020

Stephen Davey

Summary: After his dramatic encounter with Zechariah the priest, the angel Gabriel has another important message to deliver, to a young, virgin woman named Mary. Gabriel's news will dramatically change this young girl's life forever. Today, Stephen explores the moment when Mary learns that she will be the mother to the Messiah. Hers is a story of submission that we can learn from today.

If you could write one word as a caption over the opening section in the Gospel by Luke — the first 25 verses we explored in our last study together — you could write the word “certainty”.

Luke tells his good friend and disciple, Theophilus, that he is writing him this detailed account so that he will have certainty about the validity and reality of Jesus Christ the Messiah, totally God and totally man.

Luke delivers the account of an elderly priest who is visited by the angel Gabriel and informed that he and his wife — both of them well beyond their childbearing years — have been chosen by God to have a rather unexpected baby boy. They will name him John, and he will become the forerunner of the Messiah, known in biblical history as the prophet, John the Baptizer.

Luke is informing Theophilus, even before the birth of Christ, that the gospel account is mingled with the miraculous.

The hand and voice of God — unseen and unheard for 400 years — is now shattering the silence with this incredibly good news that leads to incredibly great joy.

Mark it down, Theophilus: this gospel comes from God.

Certainty!

Still in chapter 1, the next 25 verses or so can easily be captioned with another one word summary — the word is “surrender”.

We're about to be introduced to the remarkable testimony of a young teenage girl named Mary.

Mary's Status

Beginning in **verse 26**:

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary.

Luke 1:26-27

She's from the village of Nazareth. Archeological evidence suggests that for centuries, no more than 200 or so Jewish farmers and ranchers lived in this remote village. But as the Roman Empire expanded and tightened their grip on Israel, they transformed Nazareth into a garrison with as many as 24,000 soldiers stationed there.

A town grew out of this garrison, complete with a Roman bathhouse. An economy grew, both good economy and evil economy. Eventually, Nazareth gained a reputation for immorality that became legendary.

Charles Swindoll, [Insights on Luke](#) (Zondervan, 2012), p. 43

In fact, 30 years or so later, when Nathaniel heard that Jesus grew up in Nazareth, he curled his lip and sarcastically muttered, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth" (John 1:46).

The word for good can be translated, "admirable, upright, of a good nature."

Nazareth was on the wrong side of the tracks. It was not the godliest place to grow up.

Luke highlights, as if on purpose, the virginity of Mary — he tells us twice here, in case you missed it the first time: she was a virgin.

She will fulfill the prophecy of Isaiah that **a virgin will conceive and bear a son (Isaiah 7:14)**.

It's as if Luke knows, by the time he's writing this account, all about the salacious rumors about Mary and the conception of Jesus.

The stories that would persist in denying anything miraculous about the birth of Jesus.

In fact, by the second century, the Talmud — the collected writings of Jewish commentary and traditions and laws — actually includes the record that Mary had been the partner of a Roman soldier named Panthera when she conceived Jesus; He was anything but the Messiah. He was the result of the immorality that Nazareth had become known for.

Which is exactly what the leaders threw in Jesus' face, by the way, during his earthly ministry when they said to him, "We were not born of sexual immorality" (John 8:41).

Luke effectively says here, "Theophilus, let me set the record straight — this is how it really happened."

And by the way, we have every reason to believe that Luke had plenty of opportunity to personally interview Mary, getting details that only Luke includes about this encounter with Gabriel.

Luke also records that Mary is engaged to Joseph, a direct descendant of the royal line of David. This will provide Jesus with the legal right, as Joseph's adopted son, to sit on David's throne.

But Joseph does not look anything like royalty. He and Mary will eke out an existence from his building skills with wood and stone. Early sources, dating from the third century, indicate that neither Joseph's family nor Mary's had any wealth or standing. Joseph was said to be a handyman who made plows and tools for the farmers and herdsman living around Nazareth.



Do you believe God can use you in miraculous ways, no matter what position or status you have in life? Describe a time God used you, even when you felt inadequate at the time.

One author wrote that Mary's life would be anything but unusual. She would marry humbly, give birth to numerous poor children, never travel farther than a few miles from her home and one day die like thousands of others before her in Nazareth — a nobody in a nothing town in the middle of nowhere.

But isn't that the gospel — it seems to wing its way past the well connected, the pomp and circumstance, the movers and shakers of the world and find its way into the hearts of people who know they're needy — who quickly recognize they are unworthy.

Now with that, the angel Gabriel knocks on her door, **verse 28**:

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

Luke 1:28-30

This encounter has created all kinds of confusion and even theological error. And it's led to two extreme viewpoints regarding Mary — and neither of them are correct.

One view is to exalt Mary and the other is to overlook Mary.

The view of exaltation took root in the Roman Catholic Church and over time doctrines developed that venerated and exalted her until, finally, she was declared to be sinless.

The Pope declared in 1854, and I quote, "Mary from the moment of her conception was without sin."

She ultimately became the dispenser of grace, the one to receive the prayers of people all around the world at the same time. She became viewed as the influencer of God.

And tragically, in more recent years, Pope John Paul II, declared in 1977 that she was the co-mediator with Christ, and I quote, “In union with Christ . . . [Mary] collaborated in obtaining the grace of salvation for all humanity.”

John Paul II, *L'Osservatore Romano* (English ed.; April 16, 1977), p. 7, quoted in Swindoll, p. 42

The Bible says, “There is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Timothy 2:5b).

Gabriel doesn't show up here to tell Mary that she was full of grace — the verb here is actually a perfect passive verb — he tells her that she is the recipient of grace. She doesn't dispense grace; she needed grace.

In fact, grace is a favorite word of Dr. Luke — Matthew and Mark never use the word, but Luke uses it often; grace (*charis*); this is the undeserved favor given from God.

Darrell L. Bock, *Luke: Volume 1* (Baker Academic, 1994), p. 111

Which is why a little later on in **verse 47** Mary will refer to God as her Savior. She needed saving. She needed to receive the grace of God.

Gabriel isn't showing up here to explain to Mary why she's been able to live a sinless life — he's showing up to tell her that even though she's a sinner like everybody else, God is going to bestow

grace upon her and use her — a forgiven sinner — to bear the coming Messiah.

Now the other extreme now is to ignore Mary; to downplay her role; to ignore her amazing and courageous surrender to the will of God, as we'll see here.

Mary's Surprise

Now Gabriel gives her the surprising news — **verse 31:**

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

Gabriel just sort of backs up the prophetic truck and unloads. And in this text, which includes the Davidic Covenant, Gabriel delivers eight predictions or prophesies:

1. You will conceive in your womb
2. You will bear a son
3. You will name him Jesus
4. He will be great
5. He will be the Son of the Most High

6. He will sit on his forefather David's throne
7. He will reign over Israel
8. His kingdom will never end

Now get this: the first five prophecies will come true with the birth of Christ; the last three have not yet come to pass.



Why do these prophecies matter? Do they affirm your belief that the Bible is true? Why or why not?

All eight of them are literal. There isn't any reason a covenant theologian can say, "Well, the first five can be taken literally, but there's no need to believe a literal throne will be in Israel and there's literal Israel to reign over in the future." You can't do that.

These all have — or will — come to pass, literally.

And if you think about it, these 8 prophecies take us from the moment her pregnancy begins all the way to the eternal state of the glory of Christ in Heaven.

Gabriel just unloads the wagon with this incredible sweep of prophecy, now 2,000 years and going.

And I love Mary's response in **verse 34**, **"How will this be, since I am a virgin?"**

She's hasn't heard a word he said after number one. Never mind the eternal reign, the coming kingdom, the Son of the Most High, He will be great. No, no, no, she says, "Let's go back and start with number one."

"You said I will conceive in my womb; just how is that going to happen since I'm a virgin?"

By the way, would you note that she doesn't say, "This won't be a problem because Joseph and I are going to be married within the year."

No, she gets it — she understands that she is going to conceive before marrying Joseph.

So how does a virgin conceive, she asks?

Gabriel has obviously been prepped for this pop quiz — he says in **verse 35**:

"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."

Luke 1:35b

The word for overshadow is the same word used to refer to the Shekinah glory cloud resting on the Old Testament Tabernacle (Exodus 40:34-35).

Bock, p. 122

Matthew Mark and Luke all used the same word to describe the cloud of God's glory and presence covering the

Mount of Transfiguration where Jesus was revealed in his brilliant, shining glory (Matthew 17:5; Mark 9:7; Luke 9:34).

That explains it, but don't kid yourself, we don't understand it.

Gabriel now tells her what happened to her cousin Elizabeth — now expecting a baby in her old age — and then he adds this comment, almost as if it's his personal testimony to the power of God.

I don't know if God ordered Gabriel to say it, or if Gabriel is adding this on his own initiative, which wouldn't have been wrong at all — here in his parting comment, it's as if he says "Listen Mary," **verse 37:**

"For nothing will be impossible with God."

Luke 1:37

Because he knows Mary must be thinking, "This is impossible!"

Nothing is impossible with God!

Gabriel isn't just quoting scripture — he's speaking as an eyewitness:

- He stands in the presence of God (remember v. 19);
- He has seen countless miracles we can't imagine;
- The holy angels were there from the beginning of time as God created billions of galaxies to that moment in the garden when God created Adam from a handful of

dirt and then fashions Eve from Adam's rib;

- They've seen God closing hungry lion's mouths; direct a stone into the forehead of the giant; and part the waters of the sea.

I think the angels are constantly repeating to each other, "Did you see what God just did? Did you see that?"

Nothing is impossible with God.

Mary's Surrender

Now notice Mary's response — **verse 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.

Luke 1:38

She didn't say:

- "Let it be done to me because I have peace about it; because I understand it; because I think I'm now ready for it";

Adapted from Swindoll, p. 52

- Or, "Let it be done to me as soon as God gives me all the details and answers all my questions and gives me plenty of reassurances."

No — "I am the Lord's servant" — *double*: "I am the Lord's bondservant, and His wish is my command."

Adapted from Bock, p. 126

Like the young lady I thought of who attended a conference for young adult believers, they were challenged to devote their lives to honor the Lord no matter what and she stood in one meeting to give her testimony and she held up blank sheet of paper and said, “This is the will of God for my life — I don’t yet know what it is, but I have already signed my name at the bottom.”

Mary signs her name and she effectively uses a permanent marker.

“Lord, you fill it in, I’m willing to follow You through it.”

Now we’re not told if Mary informed Joseph of what was going on before she left town — this would have been a 2-3-day journey — we’re only told that Mary was in a hurry.

Gabriel didn’t just drop the information about Elizabeth for no reason.

God knew that Mary would need someone she could talk to; someone else whose life had been turned upside down by Gabriel’s appearance; someone else who was experiencing a surprising pregnancy.



Have you ever experienced something where you felt like nobody else could understand what you were going through? Did you find someone who

could relate? How did that shared experience help encourage you?

Mary’s world is about to come unglued; her family will be embarrassed; her father will be shamed; her fiancé won’t believe her; the rabbi’s will be infuriated; she may very well be in danger.

John Phillips, *Exploring the Gospel of Luke* (Kregel, 2005), p. 66

Who in the world will understand her situation? Who would ever believe the idea of a miraculous baby?

Ah, I know — Zechariah and Elizabeth are expecting their own miracle baby, but they have also had a visit from an angel named Gabriel! They will understand.

Their home will provide needed support for Mary during these early months of her pregnancy.

Mary’s Support

Notice verse 39:

In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah, and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb.

Luke 1:39-41a

skip down to verse 44:

“For behold, when the sound of your greeting

*came to my ears, the baby
in my womb leaped for joy.”*

Luke 1:44

Don't miss the implications here: a baby in the womb, at this moment around 9 inches long, weighing less than 2 pounds; under the direction of the Holy Spirit, surges upward with joy, emotion, feeling as if the Spirit allows him to make a prophetic affirmation that he is in the presence of the Son of God.

Adapted from Hughes, p., 40

And with that, Mary reveals a song she's been working on, perhaps during the long journey to Elizabeth's home.

It's filled with Scriptures she evidently had cherished in her mind and heart.

The Spirit of course is guiding her, because of the prophetic allusions she will make in this song.

Mary's Song

Beginning at verse 47:

- Mary praises God for her salvation (v. 47);
- Mary thanks God for choosing someone like her to serve Him (v. 48);
- Mary praises God for His unfailing mercy (v. 50);
- Mary praises God for His future vindication over enemy nations (v. 52);

- Mary praises God for His faithfulness to Israel and their national, future inheritance (v. 54).

Luke wraps up this whirlwind scene by providing a summary verse that reads:

*And Mary remained with
her about three months and
returned to her home.*

Luke 1:56

John has been born, there are people waiting for Mary back in Nazareth — there are some explanations that need to be given.

Before we leave this scene, let me draw out two observations:

Surrendering to God doesn't eliminate complications, it may very well increase them.

You might have noticed that this song Mary sings has nothing to say about her life back in Nazareth.

It doesn't resolve the conversations she's going to be forced to have when she returns to her village as an unmarried girl, now clearly showing that she's carrying a child.

There's no quick answer here, and she has no idea how her life will grow more complicated. Three times in the next three years they will have to move. Joseph will have to try and find work all over again and Mary will have to try to make ends meet in a new neighborhood with a fresh set of questions and challenges.



Do the complications of God's work ever deter you from submitting to him fully? Are you ever scared that God will ask you to do something that is too hard or too complicated for you? How do you overcome those doubts?

During their first two years after Jesus is born, they will be on the run, hiding out in Egypt from Herod's plot to find them and kill their baby.

Mary has literally chosen to abandon any kind of normal life with Joseph and the home she had been planning for ever since the betrothal ceremony.

She has accepted the complications of this assignment — and her life will be complicated until the day she dies.

Adapted from Swindoll, p. 51

Surrendering to God's word does not eliminate complications, it may very well increase them.

One more:

Surrendering to God's will doesn't require experience, it simply invites us to obedience.

Mary was young, poor, inexperienced, an unlikely candidate for this assignment.

Bruce Barton, *Life Application Bible: Luke* (Tyndale, 1997), p. 17

You would have thought that Gabriel had the wrong address; surely the woman to carry the Messiah would be the daughter of the High Priest; someone older, more connected, more prepared.

God wasn't looking for experience, but readiness, willingness, and obedience.

Mary said perhaps what you and I need to say all over again today, "Lord, I'm your servant, according to your word, I'll follow you."

Mary essentially told Gabriel here that she would surrender to the will of God, which would turn out to be inconvenient, uncomfortable, stressful, surprising, dangerous, tiring, confusing, public and demanding. This would be her life.

Join her in essentially holding up to God that piece of blank paper; "Lord, this is for you to fill out your will as it unfolds in my life. I have already signed my name at the bottom. And it's in permanent, water proof, non-erasable ink."



Are you willing to give God a blank, signed paper for your life today?

So Gabriel, wing your way back through the universe — past a billion galaxies and to the dazzling throne of God and tell Him, "I accept; I will surrender; I will cooperate with the plan and will and word of God."

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