Intro:

Let’s turn together in our bibles today to Luke’s gospel!


We are turning this morning to a familiar account of the Christmas narrative and today we are going to begin with the passage that is traditionally known as the “Annunciation.”

As we begin this morning, most of you are on the edge of your seats and saying, “Let me hear that Christmas story again!” For a few of the visitors or seekers, you might be saying, “I don’t know pastor, I must admit to a little queasiness in my heart about believing in angels and a virgin birth and all that.”

Let me just say a few words to alleviate those feelings!

We have an inspired bible in our hands today! Luke was writing our Christmas account with certainty. He was, in all likelihood, commissioned by one called Theophilus, a wealthy Greek who was the intended recipient of Luke’s writings.

Luke wanted all who would read to understand very clearly that he had taken the time to, and in addition to many others, “...write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.” (Luke 1:3-4)

And think about this, Luke staked his reputation and his career on the certainty and truth of what he was writing. Writing of a virgin birth would be the last thing that you would want to do if you were commissioned by a wealthy Greek to write an accurate history and if you were trying to get the attention of a Jewish and highly intellectual Greek audience.

The fingerprints of God are all over this part of the story. Everything about it is divine!

I. The Divine Messenger

It is now the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy and I trust that you remember last week’s message and now God is sending Gabriel, God’s chosen and important messenger, to a very "unimportant" Jewish girl.

The messenger is an angel by the name of Gabriel. For those interested in prophecy, you would be right in asking the question, “Is this not the same Gabriel who came to the prophet Daniel to explain the Seventieth Week, the week of the Great Tribulation?” Yes, this would be correct.

Gabriel has come to Nazareth of Galilee, which is an interesting choice of God, given that the Galilee was largely a Gentile population. It is as if there is a little foreshadowing of the future church of Jew and Gentile together taking place here.
II. The recipient of the Divine Message

Next we meet the well-known recipient of the divine message. Few of us would need any introduction to her, her name was Mary, and Mary was of the house and lineage of David, as was her betrothed or fiancée.

She was betrothed to a man named Joseph. You very competent bible scholars understand what “betrothed” actually means. Mary, who may have been as young as twelve or thirteen, has promised herself to Joseph and given that promise has been made, must keep herself pure for Joseph alone.

She is called by Luke, a virgin, and Luke is very careful to use the Greek word “Parthenos” meaning a girl who had never had sexual relations with any man. There was another word choice option for him that would have described a young maiden who was not necessarily a pure one, but he chose precisely the word that would convey what he was trying to communicate to us. I will have more to say about this in just a few minutes.

III. The Divine Message

Next, let’s have a look at the divine greeting. “O favored one, the Lord is with you!” (Luke 1:28)

We need to stop and make something of a theological stand here because it is important to us. Theology is like the game of golf you know, turn your hands slightly as you swing and the ball goes a long way off in the wrong direction!

In the Latin Vulgate, the translators wrongly translated this as, “Hail Mary full of grace” and for all of you who come from a Catholic background, you would recognize these words as being part of an errant prayer.

The reality is that the greeting from Gabriel describes for Mary that she is going to be the recipient of God’s grace, not filled with it. The problem, theologically, is that when people believe Mary is filled with God’s grace, they perhaps think she can dispense it as Jesus can.

So let’s pause now and reflect upon how Mary might be doing with all of this. An ordinary day in the kitchen, visited by an angel, just finding out that she is about to be graced!

“She was greatly troubled and discerning what is taking place.” Remember the quote from Wangerin that I read to you last week? (See Wangerin 58-59)

And now the message continues:

And the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus.” (Luke 1:30-31)

There are a great number of words here and a whole lot of theology being communicated here.
1. **It was a message of peace and favor**

“Do not be afraid…” Too late, she already is and we have already covered the “favored” part!

2. **It was a message about a divine child**

“You will conceive in your womb and bear a son...” And this at first hearing shouldn’t be an issue as she is betrothed, after all. A prophetic word about the sex wouldn’t be novel, either, for God-fearing folks.

3. **It was a message about a name**

“...you shall call his name Jesus!” This would be a very good name for a Jewish boy, “Jehovah saves!” The God of the Old Testament was a saving God and everyone knew it!

4. **I was a message about His greatness**

“He will be great!” That word “great” shouldn’t have been that problematic, either. We call a lot of things great, and every mother would want to hear a prophetic word that her future children would be great. But this “great” is something different than the great that would describe, “Great job, effort,”...no, it rather meant, “Extraordinary, splendid, magnificent, noble, distinguished, powerful, eminent” and I think you are getting the picture here, this is more “god language” like.

5. **It was a message about a Messiah and of a messianic kingdom**

Now the revelation continues and for us, we are clearly hearing the language of the Messiah’s coming.

“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.” (Luke 1:32-33)

And you folks understand this part very clearly as you have learned of the great promise for David and all of his offspring and you have also learned about the great Millennial Kingdom that is to come. “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. 13 He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. 14 I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men…” (2 Samuel 7:12-14)

6. **It was a message that required some clarification**

And the next verse is really crucial to our understanding of the text. It is as if, she skipped over all of the theology parts for where it gets very practical for her. She has come to the realization that the angel is talking about a now conception and not a later one.

She asks, “How will this be, since I am a virgin?” (Luke 1:34)
One of the most important aspects or confessions of our faith is the reality of the virgin birth. The virgin birth is the place of attack and one of the battlefields for those both attempting to undermine and for those wanting to defend the Christian faith.

C.S. Lewis recounts for us a day just before Christmas as he worked alongside a colleague and fellow skeptic at a British university. They were in a shared office with the window partially open and the sounds of the Christmas carolers wafting heavenward and many will recognize the great hymn written by John Wesley that they were singing:

**Christ by highest heav’n adored, Christ the everlasting Lord!**
*Late in time behold Him come, Offspring of a Virgin’s womb.*
*Veiled in flesh the Godhead see, Hail the incarnate Deity,*
*Pleased as man with men to dwell, Jesus, our Emmanuel*
*Hark! The herald angels sing, "Glory to the newborn King!"*

Lewis’ skeptic friend said to him, “Aren’t you glad we are better than that?”

Lewis replied, “Whatever do you mean?”

The friend explained, “We are not ignorant like these foolish people singing this song or like those who crafted the original stories of the Bible, we know that babies don’t come from virgins!”

C.S. Lewis answered his friend with a question, “Don’t you think that they knew that, too?”

We all know that babies don’t come from virgins!

As modern readers of the bible, we find our two narratives in Matthew’s and Luke’s gospels. We must remember that Matthew was a tax collector and would have been “no dummy” as an entrepreneur franchisee enlisted by Roman authority. Luke, the writer of the two-volume set of Luke-Acts, was a physician, a historian and I argue a Pentecostal theologian of the highest caliber.

If Luke were alive today and could be interviewed by us, I think he would humorously make the point, “I was after all a doctor; I delivered many babies. I, too, know that babies don’t come from a virgin’s womb.”

And now let’s get back to the narrative itself.

**Conclusion:**

The angel now provides the explanation of how this will all happen.

**“The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you...”**
*(Luke 1:35)*

All of this was so that the child would be born holy. All other children born of a man and woman have been born in sin, described as a spiritual death. And, in the case that Mary might still be doubting a little, the angel points to the miracle that Zacharias and Elizabeth, her barren cousin, had conceived John.
Then we read the words we have all cherished over the years, “For nothing will be impossible with God.” (Luke 1:37)

It seems as though things are all in Mary’s court now and nothing will be forced upon her if she is unwilling. She is clearly God’s choice to bear His Son and she is now aware of that and has a decision to make.

We all know how this ends, we all understand that she is willing and says to Gabriel, “Behold I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.” (Luke 1:38)

I always find it very awkward to attempt to apply anything from this glorious narrative. It stands alone to glorify the Father, Son and Holy Spirit; however, there are a couple of things that we might consider for our own lives.

We may never be as significant as Mary was in human history; let’s face it, we won’t! But having said that, we belong to Him and He has a purpose for our lives and has ordained our days here on earth. I have come to the realization as your pastor that not everyone has surrendered the possibility of everything in their lives being surrendered to Him.

To do God’s will and like Mary, we must empty ourselves of all that is our own will and pray, “Thy will be done.”

“Thy will be done” praying and God’s answers to prayer can often result in our needing to adjust. Mary will be adjusting in the days ahead and facing shame, ridicule and scorn, even from those closest to her. People will simply not understand.

In a sense this was Mary’s near death or death experience. She gave up her life for God’s service and God’s best.

And as for us, we need to follow her example and do likewise!