

Joyful, Joyful We Adore Thee – The Christmas Message of Hope

Luke 1:26-38

“Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And having come in, the angel said to her, "Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!" But when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and considered what manner of greeting this was. Then 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 bring forth a Son, and shall call His name JESUS. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give 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." Then Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I do not know a man?" And the angel answered and said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God. Now indeed, Elizabeth your relative has also conceived a son in her old age; and this is now the sixth month for her who was called barren. For with God nothing will be impossible." Then Mary said, "Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.” (Luke 1:26-38 NKJV)

Introduction: This passage is called the annunciation which means “announcement.”

In this passage God makes His plans known to mankind through a heavenly messenger or as we call him, an angel. The interesting aspect of this announcement to me is who and where this announcement comes to. Being the sovereign Creator

His stage or platform could have been the grandest most prominent in the world but it isn't. Lets look at this together.

“Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth,” (Luke 1:26 NKJV)

Listen to what commentator Kent Hughes says about the place of this announcement;

“The setting for the Annunciation drew amazement from first-century Jewish readers because **Gabriel ignored Judea, the heartland of God’s work through the centuries, and came to Galilee, a land that was the subject of abiding Jewish contempt because of its mongrelized population. Even more, the angel not only bypassed Judea for Galilee, but the city of Jerusalem for the village of Nazareth. Nazareth was a “non-place.”** It was not even mentioned in the Old Testament or in Josephus’ writings or in the rabbinical writings (either Talmudic or midrashic). It wasn’t until 1962 that a pre-Christian mention of Nazareth was found at Caesarea Maritima. The later prominence of the town is a result of the Christian gospel. Nazareth, a shoddy, corrupt halfway stop between the port cities of Tyre and Sidon, was overrun by Gentiles and Roman soldiers. When guileless, straight-talking Nathaniel mentioned Nazareth, he said, *“Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?”* (John 1:46), implying that it was miserably corrupt. **By consensus, Nazareth was not much.**

Of course, in skipping Judea and Jerusalem, **Gabriel also ignored the temple, the most holy place in Israel, and entered the lowly home of Mary, which certainly was not much.**¹”

¹ Hughes, R. K. (1998). *Luke: that you may know the truth* (pp. 28–30). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books.

Next we read about the person that God Almighty chose to receive the message, a young poor teenage virgin named Mary. Again from Mr. Hughes;

“In the world’s eyes Mary herself was not of much account either. She was too young to know much of the world or to have accomplished anything. **According to the Apocryphal Gospel of the Birth of Mary, she was only fourteen; and the History of Joseph the Carpenter states that she was only twelve.** No less a scholar than Raymond Brown, author of the massive and definitive *The Birth of the Messiah*, argues for the younger age. She was at most a young teenager. As with all poor peasant girls, she was illiterate, her knowledge of the Scriptures being limited to what she had memorized at home and heard in the synagogue.

From all indicators, her life would not be extraordinary. She would marry humbly, give birth to numerous poor children, never travel farther than a few miles from home, and one day die like thousands of others before her—a nobody in a nothing town in the middle of nowhere.

As we probe this beautiful text of the Annunciation we cannot miss an inescapable fact: ***the greatest news ever proclaimed in Israel came to the humblest of its people!*** Mary said exactly that in her *Magnificat* when she sang, ***“My soul praises the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant”*** (Luke 1:46–48a).²

² Hughes, R. K. (1998). *Luke: that you may know the truth* (p. 30). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books.

So as we consider the text of scripture this morning in the context of our lives today in Whiting NJ as people whose lives have been rocked by life dominating sin what are we to take away?

As we study the Annunciation, we must accept the essential spiritual fact of the Incarnation and the gospel: the Lord comes to *needy* people—those who realize that without him they cannot make it—those who acknowledge their weakness and spiritual lack. The Incarnation, salvation, resurrection, *Christmas* are not for the proud and self-sufficient.

As we follow the course of the Annunciation, we will catch the pulse of the virgin's heart because *Mary is a model for those who experience the birth of the Savior in their lives.*³

Well then what is it about Mary that makes her God's chosen representative for this special act of grace?

Remember, Mary was somewhere between the ages of twelve and fourteen. She was unread and inexperienced. She was not cosmopolitan. She did not own a TV. She did not have a computer. Knowing this, how do you suppose she felt? I think Mary felt like fainting! Probably she thought, "This can't be real! I have to sit down." We can be sure that Gabriel's buoyant greeting—"Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you"—was most necessary⁴

But at the same time, the Virgin Mary is in fact the most blessed of women, and therefore "the Blessed Virgin Mary" is a fitting designation for her. The title springs naturally from Mary's own self-bestowed beatitude in her *Magnificat*, "From now on all generations will call me blessed" (Luke 1:48). **Mary was the only woman of the billions who have inhabited our planet who was chosen to carry and nurse God's Son. For that we must call her "blessed."** "Hers ... was

³ Hughes, R. K. (1998). *Luke: that you may know the truth* (p. 30). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books.

⁴ Hughes, R. K. (1998). *Luke: that you may know the truth* (p. 31). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books.

the face that unto Christ had most resemblance.” The Savior bore some of her human features—Jesus’ face could be seen in hers. Think of it. **She is blessed indeed. Just because others have thought *too much* of her, we must not imagine that our Lord is pleased when we think *too little* of her.** We, as part of the subsequent Christian generations, are to call her “blessed.”⁵

Gabriel’s salutation, **“*Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you,*”** was a dual declaration. **First, Mary was the recipient of special divine favor.** She was specially graced. **Her humble estate and matching humility of soul made her the ideal receptor of God’s greatest favor.** As such, Luther praised her: “O Mary, you are blessed. You have a gracious God. No woman has ever lived on earth to whom God has shown such grace. You are the crown of them all.” God bypassed Judea, Jerusalem, and the temple and came to a despised country, a despised town, and a humble woman.

The second part of her being divinely favored is Gabriel’s declaration, **“*The Lord is with you.*”** This unconventional phrase declares the dynamic power of God’s presence, which runs like a golden thread in the lives of great saints in Old Testament history. And in Mary it reaches its glorious culmination. **The Lord was with her.**⁶

Mary’s response to Gabriel’s greeting reveals another of her blessed heart’s qualities: **“*Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be*” (v. 29).** The literal sense is that she *kept* pondering the meaning of the greeting. Whatever Gabriel’s glorious form was like, Mary was able to get past it to his greeting, upon which she meditated as she sought understanding.

This is a truly remarkable picture. Young and inexperienced as she was, Mary was not a flighty, shallow “young thing.” **She was reflective and meditative. It is said that contemplation is not a psychological trick but a theological grace. Mary had this grace. She stood on the ascent of the mount of grace and meditated**

⁵ Hughes, R. K. (1998). *Luke: that you may know the truth* (p. 32). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books.

⁶ Hughes, R. K. (1998). *Luke: that you may know the truth* (p. 32). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books.

upon what the angel’s message meant *for her* and what it would require *from her*.⁷

She understood the gist of the angel’s announcement: “You are going to become *pregnant*; you are going to call your son’s name *Salvation*, he is going to be the *Son of God*; and he will be *the Messiah*.” What an earful! What an incredible heartfelt!

Humble, reflective Mary thought about it—and understood. Then she asked the logical question: “How will this be since I am a virgin?” (v. 34)—literally, “How can this be since I have not known a man sexually?” **Mary was not disbelieving—she was simply asking for enlightenment. The question was biological: “God, how are you going to do this?”**

Again, she is a spiritual model for all who experience the birth of the Savior in their lives because this is a believing question. It is the question that all those who know Jesus have asked: “God, how is it possible?” Do you have this blessed inquisitiveness? Have you asked, **“God, how can I experience the life of Jesus within me?”**

This is a life-giving question because it requires an examination of the significance of Christ’s atoning work on the cross and how its cleansing benefits come to us by faith. **The mysteries of the new birth must also be contemplated—the work of the Holy Spirit, what it means to be “in Christ” and a “new creation,” and much more.** Such “how can this be?” contemplations often serve as a prelude to knowing Christ.⁸

Those of us who have experienced the birth of Christ within us have also experienced the presence of God and the miraculous life-giving work of the Holy Spirit as he has come upon us, bestowing life within. *Jesus said, “That which is born of the Spirit is spirit” (John 3:6, NASB).* Paul likewise said, “*For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body” (1 Corinthians 12:13).* And if

⁷ Hughes, R. K. (1998). *Luke: that you may know the truth* (pp. 32–33). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books.

⁸ Hughes, R. K. (1998). *Luke: that you may know the truth* (p. 34). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books.

the Spirit has come upon us and has given us new life, we *know* it! ***“The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children” (Romans 8:16).***

This is one of the wonders Christ offers each one of us—new life from above—something we cannot do for ourselves—something palpable and living and growing—something we can know for sure!⁹

Mary instinctively knew her story would be questioned. Indeed, Joseph himself first doubted it (Matthew 1:19). She knew that the death penalty was prescribed for adultery (though it was no longer carried out). New Testament history records that Jesus’ enemies on more than one occasion implied that he was illegitimate. In light of these daunting realities, consider Mary’s eternally worthy response: “I am the Lord’s servant,” Mary answered. “May it be to me as you have said, then the angel left her” (v. 38). She could have said, “Gabriel, thanks but no thanks. Count this girl out.” But not Mary, for **she made a habit of submitting to God in everything.**

For Luke the theologian, Mary is a fine example of belief and discipleship. She is a model Christian. Her obedience made her at the same time the *mother* and a *disciple* of Christ (cf. 8:19–21; 11:27, 28). She would wait in prayer with the faithful disciples after Jesus’ ascension for the giving of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:14). **As a model for those who experience the birth of Christ in their lives, she has one word for them: *submission*. We cannot experience Christ and his ongoing power without totally surrendering ourselves to him.**¹⁰

Closing Reflections

The Annunciation story is ours because of the wonderful heart of the Virgin Mary.

She was humble and poor in spirit. She was not self-sufficient. This posture of her heart made her open to the grace of God, so that Gabriel could say, “Rejoice, favored one! The Lord is with you.” For this she was and is called blessed.

⁹ Hughes, R. K. (1998). *Luke: that you may know the truth* (p. 35). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books.

¹⁰ Hughes, R. K. (1998). *Luke: that you may know the truth* (pp. 35–37). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books.

Mary's reflective, meditative nature made her open to the Word and work of God. She was not superficial. Because of this she was and is called blessed.

Mary was believing regarding God's power. She wondered about the mechanics of God's grace but knew he could do as promised. Because of this she was and is called blessed.

Finally, she gave herself in profound submission to God: 'I am the Lord's servant,' Mary answered. 'May it be to me as you have said' " (v. 38a). For this she was and is called blessed.

If Christ is in us, so that we are God's children, then Mary's heart is our model for discipleship.

1. We must cultivate a **humble heart**, an ongoing poverty of spirit that is not only open to God's grace, but desperately longs for it (cf. Matthew 5:3-6).

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, For they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, For they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, For they shall be filled. (Matthew 5:3-6 NKJV)

2. We must also intentionally nurture a **reflective heart** that meditates on God's Word (cf. Psalm 1).

"Blessed is the man Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, Nor stands in the path of sinners, Nor sits in the seat of the scornful; But his delight is in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night. He shall be like a tree Planted by the rivers of water, That brings forth its fruit in its season, Whose leaf also shall not wither; And whatever he does shall prosper. (Psalms 1:1-3 NKJV)

3. Next, we must have **believing hearts** modeled on that dynamic certainty of Mary's heart, a *future* certitude ("Now faith is being sure of what we hope for") and a *visual* certitude ("and certain of what we do not see," Hebrews 11:1).

"Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." (Hebrews 11:1 NKJV)

4. Finally, we must have submissive hearts: *'I am the Lord's servant.... May it be to me as you have said' (v. 38a).*¹¹

In Conclusion I want this message to be a message of HOPE. During my devotional time this week I have been meditating on Psalm 96 particular verses 9-13

Psalms 96:9-13 NKJV

- (9) Oh, worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness! Tremble before Him, all the earth.*
- (10) Say among the nations, "The LORD reigns; The world also is firmly established, It shall not be moved; He shall judge the peoples righteously."*
- (11) Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad; Let the sea roar, and all its fullness;*
- (12) Let the field be joyful, and all that is in it. Then all the trees of the woods will rejoice before the LORD.*
- (13) For He is coming, for He is coming to judge the earth. He shall judge the world with righteousness, And the peoples with His truth.*

Share journal thoughts on these verses from Monday and Tuesday December 22 and 23rd.

¹¹ Hughes, R. K. (1998). *Luke: that you may know the truth* (p. 37). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books.