

# Evergreen Presbyterian Church

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**Sermon Title:** The Annunciation: God at Work

**Sermon Text:** Luke 1:26-38

**Luke 1:26** In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth,

**Luke 1:27** to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary.

**Luke 1:28** And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!"

**Luke 1:29** But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be.

**Luke 1:30** And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.

**Luke 1:31** And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus.

**Luke 1:32** 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,

**Luke 1:33** and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

**Luke 1:34** And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?"

**Luke 1:35** 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.

**Luke 1:36** 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.

**Luke 1:37** For nothing will be impossible with God.”

**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.

**Main Point:** The annunciation reveals that the incarnation is wholly God’s work—by His grace, through His Son, by His Spirit, and in His power—for the salvation of the world.

### **Outline:**

1. Grace Comes to Mary (v. 28)
2. The Savior Comes to Mankind (v. 32, 35, 37)

### **Introduction**

Do you ever notice that Christmas movies are generally very stressful? I was thinking about this a while back: most of my favorite holiday movies really stress me out. Think about it:

*It’s a Wonderful Life:* the whole plot revolves around people losing all their money at the holidays.

*Jingle All the Way:* Arnold Schwarzenegger is desperate to get the right gift for his kid, and he’s afraid his son won’t love him if he doesn’t get it, and so proceeds to desperately mow down everyone in his path.

*Home Alone:* a classic from my childhood. But while Kevin McAllister is quite happy (until he isn’t), the entire movie from the parent’s perspective is dominated by fear of failure and abandonment, and the stress of getting back home.

*A Christmas Story:* very stressful film for me as a kid. He gets his tongue stuck to a frozen pole, he almost shoots his eye out with his red rider bb gun. His

parents are weird, and nothing seems to work out for him. The whole movie is one extended anxiety attack.

The list of stressful Christmas movies could keep growing. I could supply many more examples, and perhaps you can, too.

Now I don't want to psycho-analyze us as a nation, but what does it say about us and how we think about the holidays that when we think of quintessentially Christmas stories, it's usually about unhappy people trying to find happiness at the time of year when it seems like by now we would or should be happy?

I think it tells me, at least, that in some ways we like interesting conflict, and that we don't find stories that lack conflict to be very interesting. But I think it also reflects a very western view of life: it may be Christmas time, but if I'm going to be happy, it has to be me who makes that happen. No one else is going to take care of me; no one else is going to make me or my family happy, and so it's up to me.

And by no coincidence at all, that mindset leaves us stressed and worried and fearful. What an incredible pressure. The weight of carrying yourself on your own shoulders.

And all of this is ironic, because the whole point of Christmas is that God is at work, coming to an unhappy mankind, and bringing us a joy that we can and could never make for ourselves.

While you may find the holidays stressful and full of pressure, isn't it ironic that it's actually a time for us to remember that God is at work, and that he comes to us providing salvation, joy, and good cheer? He comes to us with that. We don't make it for ourselves.

And so I hope today's message will be an opportunity for all of us to recalibrate. It's still early in the month. There's still time for us to rejoice in God's work instead of putting heavy burdens on our own shoulders and thinking, "It's up to me." No; God is at work. He is in the business of lifting burdens, not making them.

In the annunciation, Luke is showing us God at work: This morning in the time we have I want us to meditate on two restful truths for us: first that Grace Comes to Mary, then second that The Savior Comes to Mankind.

None of this message is about us, except as recipients. The active agent in salvation from the very beginning is God. Everything here is God for us, God to us, God on behalf of us, bringing peace and blessing us with something that does not come natural to fallen humanity: joy, peace, and happiness – if we will believe the gospel that is being inaugurated here in the Angel’s preaching to Mary.

## **1. Grace Comes to Mary (1:28)**

First today, God’s grace comes to Mary.

Think about the greeting that Mary hears in verse 28: “[Gabriel] came to her and said, ‘Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!’”

Now, you might see Mary get called “favored one” and think there must be something in Mary that causes her to be more favored than anyone else. Maybe she’s more special than the other women of mankind. But in reality, she’s just another one of us. Another child of Adam and Eve. Later, during Mary’s song (which we call the ‘Magnificat’), Mary says, “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior” (1:46-47). You see, Mary is like us. Mary needs a Savior just like we do.

While the Bible clearly tells us that Jesus is sinless, Scripture never even implies that about Mary. In fact, we can see a few hints that Mary is a sinner like all of us:

- Later in chapter 2 Mary offers a purification offering in the temple.
- In John chapter 2 Mary is corrected by Jesus.
- There are other passages in the Gospel where Mary seems to doubt Jesus’ mission, and misunderstands his work.

My point here is not to bring Mary down, but simply to remind us: Mary has no special qualification except (as far as we know) for the fact that she is one of us, and that she is a virgin, and God has chosen to make her the instrument of bringing his Son into the world. This is a young girl, she has never known a man. And this means that not only is the birth of her firstborn son miraculous, but that – along with the Spirit’s work – it ensured that Christ was born without sin.

We were just talking about original sin a few weeks ago. And we said that because Adam was our federal head, all of mankind are born with the guilt of Adam's original sin. And as a judgment of that guilt, we are also born with corruption. That is what we mean when we speak of original sin.

And yet Jesus is sinless. How is Jesus sinless if he is made from the substance of Mary and is born from her? She is a child of Adam, too. She bears the guilt and corruption of original sin as well. And at least the beginning of the answer is the virgin conception and birth of Jesus. And so, when you think of the virgin birth, just know that the virgin birth was God's means of ensuring that Christ's incarnation was truly human and entirely without sin.

The Church fathers and Reformers taught that Christ's virgin birth was an important aspect of his sinlessness.

- Calvin wrote that Christ “was not made man by ordinary generation, but by a miraculous conception in the womb of the virgin, that He might be exempt from the common corruption of mankind” (*Institutes* 2.13.4).
- Luther said, “Christ is free from all sin, original and actual, and the reason is that He was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of a pure, holy virgin” (*WA* 7:540).
- The Second Helvetic Confession says that Christ's flesh “was holy and pure, because it was miraculously formed by the Holy Spirit” (ch. 11).

But her virginity is not unique in Israel. There could have been any number of young women in Israel who would have fit this bill. So there is not something in Mary herself that is unique in herself that causes her to receive God's notice. What is it that causes her to stand out? It's nothing other than God deciding to come to her and make her the *theotokos*, (the God-bearer). God decided to do that. You see, the incarnation is not about Mary's greatness or worthiness, but about God's gracious action to save. It's what God is doing, not about what we deserve.

Look at what happens: verse 28, the angel greets her and calls her favored. Who favors her? God does. It is God's favor that makes her favored.

In verse 32 Gabriel tells her that the child will be great. Everything so far is about God stepping out, God working.

The first time we see Mary really do anything or play a role here is in verse 38 where she says, “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.” But even that reply is one that can really only come from a heart that is surrendered to God. And even that surrender of hers only comes by God’s grace. So even in Mary’s answer we’re being given more reasons to praise God.

We have an opportunity here for us to give a biblical appreciation of Mary without drifting into idolatry.

[Marian Sidebar] As Protestants, we sometimes hesitate to talk about Mary really at all except maybe to criticize the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches, and that’s because through the centuries there have been real dangers of exaggerating her role, and those exaggerations have gone far beyond what Scripture teaches.

But in fact, the New Testament honors Mary as blessed among women, chosen by grace, and as a model of faith. The early church fathers like Irenaeus spoke of her as the “second Eve,” whose obedience stands in contrast to Eve’s disobedience. Even when they spoke this way, the point was to highlight Christ, not to draw attention away from Him and towards Mary.

Now, later on, during the church’s great debates about who Jesus is, the Council of Ephesus in 431 declared that Mary was truly *Theotokos*, the “God-bearer” or “Mother of God.” Now, the point of calling her by that term was not to elevate Mary above her place, but to safeguard the truth that the baby she bore really was (and is) God in the flesh.

Now, here’s what happened: over time—and especially through the Middle Ages, devotion to Mary grew into practices that went far beyond Scripture—treating her as an intercessor between us and Christ, even calling her “Queen of Heaven.” These are the kinds of errors were rightly rejected by the Reformers. But they did not reject honoring Mary as the mother of Jesus. And we shouldn’t either. She was and always will be the mother of the God-Man.

- Luther himself said, “Mary is the highest woman, and the noblest gem in Christianity after Christ.”
- Calvin wrote that to call her blessed “is to be grateful for the inestimable grace of God in her.”

So what we need is both warnings and encouragement here when it comes to Mary. We shouldn't dishonor Christ's mother by downplaying her, nor should we dishonor her by exalting her *above* what God's Word says, or by inventing things about her that aren't true. We honor Mary best when we see her as the Bible presents her: as a humble servant of the Lord, blessed by God's sovereign grace, who points us to her Son and says, “Do whatever He tells you.” (John 2:5)

Let's thank God for being gracious to Mary. Let's be thankful that God used a girl from the hill country of Judea to bring our Lord into this world. This is about God and what he is doing. It's not fundamentally about Mary and who she is.

And you know, just like it is for Mary here, maybe you need this reminder that Christmas comes to us; we don't come to it. This is about God and his initiative, and his saving hand: not about us and what we can do or what we have done.

## **2. The Savior Comes to Mankind (v. 32, 35, 37)**

Second today, we see that the Savior Comes to Mankind.

Notice that while Mary is important to what is happening here—she's the one who is hearing the angel's message after all—the focus is not really on Mary, but on the child she's going to give birth to. In the annunciation Gabriel is spelling out just who this child is, and why he is so important.

There are three specific things that Gabriel tells her that are supremely important to his identity and just why it is that his birth is good news.

First, in verse 31 Mary is told that he will be Mary's son. I know that seems obvious, but what we're really seeing here is how crucial it is that the Savior of mankind be a real human with a real human mother. Her son will not be cosplaying as a man, he will be a man, and will always be a man after the

incarnation takes place. Even after he dies, he is a man. He ascends into heaven as a man. His body doesn't dissolve. God will always be a man now and forever. Jesus will always sit at the right hand of the Father. As Rabbi Duncan once said, "the dust of the earth sits on the throne of heaven." It's incredible.

Why? Because he will be the substitute for the sins of men, not angels or animals. God became a man. He became one of us. This is the miracle of Christmas, isn't it?

Second, we see in verse 32 that he is also David's son. Let me just briefly tell you why this is important. Way back around 1000 AD, God made a promise to David that the birth of Jesus is a fulfillment of. So in 2 Samuel 7:12-16, God makes a covenant with David. And it's major enough that I'm going to read the entire covenant promise here. Listen to God speaking to David:

"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. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. 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, but my steadfast love will not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.'" (2 Sam. 7:12-16)

What we have here is what is called a double fulfillment. In one sense, Solomon (David's son) is a fulfillment of this promise. He is the one who builds the physical temple. Obviously Solomon does commit iniquity and get disciplined by God. But not everything in this promise is fulfilled by Solomon. Most importantly, he does not establish David's throne forever. Only Jesus ultimately fulfills this promise to David.

You can see then why Gabriel tells Mary of this child that "the Lord 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." Jesus fulfills this covenant in a way that David's physical sons simply did not. Their kingdoms ended. Their thrones disappointed. Jesus' throne never does.

Because of this, Gabriel is telling Mary something that we should also take to heart: God's promises are trustworthy, no matter how impossible they may seem. You can trust Jesus Christ to keep each and every promise of God.

Third, we see in verse 32 that he will be God's son. Gabriel says he will be called "the son of the Most High." Yes, Jesus is the son of Mary. Jesus is a man. A true man with real DNA. He would almost certainly have resembled Mary; perhaps he had her eyes. He had a family lineage running all the way back to Adam. Yes, it's important that he is a descendant of David, because in this God is keeping the promise he made to David that he would have a son with an eternal throne. But here Gabriel is telling Mary that this child will be a man, but also a son of David. But especially he will also be the Son of God.

The divinity of Christ is really important. We saw that his humanity mattered, because he was going to be the substitute for men. But his divinity matters, too. It matters that he is God.

We needed Jesus to be both man and God in the incarnation. As true man, He could be our substitute, standing in our place under the law and dying the death we deserved. But as true God, His sacrifice has infinite worth, sufficient to atone for the sins of the whole world. Only God Himself can save, only God can conquer death, and only God can restore us to fellowship with Himself. In Christ, the eternal Son took on our humanity, so that by His death and resurrection He might truly bridge the gap between God and man, becoming the one Mediator who is able to represent us before God and to bring God's saving presence to us.

This is the miracle. This is the mystery that is at the core of all Christian preaching. It is the hope that enables us to face whatever happens. It is the reason why fallen sinners like us can sit in a place like this, hear the good news of Christ, and have a deep and resounding hope that can't be stolen by life, or by circumstances, or by the chaos of the seasons.

## **Conclusion**

I mentioned already: it's very normal for us as Americans to think, "The only way I'm going to have peace during the holidays (or ever) is if I make that peace for myself." This is part of why the holidays can be so stressful: at the time when we should be resting in Christ and trusting in him, we double down on ourselves.

But if you see anything here this morning, I hope you see this: that we are fallen people. We don't give grace, we don't create grace, we don't produce it. All of it comes from God, from the overflow of his kindness. That's what the annunciation here is: it is God preaching to mankind through his messenger that he is giving himself to us for our good, and for our peace. Mary's relationship to God is as a recipient. God does, God acts, God works... we receive.

This is what the gospel is like. The gospel is not about you and me working. In the gospel we're meant to rest in Christ and receive him. Because he chose to come and work for us.

In some ways when Mary says, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word," she's modeling the response of faith for all of us. Mary is willing to receive Christ physically. And her life is never the same after that.

If you will receive Christ and walk with him, your life will never be the same, either. This marvelous good news is for us, because the son of the Most High became the son of David and the Son of Mary. Let's treasure this truth and rest in him and his grace.

*Pray with me.*