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**Mary's Visitation**

**Series: The Angels' Advent**

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**The Village Church**

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I. Introduction

- A. When you enter the angelic world, you enter the world of greatness
  - 1. At least that's the kind of reaction we mere humans often have when we encounter angels
  - 2. Recall that John, in his vision in Revelation, encountered angels on a couple of occasions, and he bowed down to worship them
    - a. He was severely reprimanded for doing so
    - b. As they told him they were creatures just like him; he should only worship God
  - 3. And when the shepherds encountered angels on the evening of Christ's birth, they were filled with great fear
    - a. That's a text we'll explore next week in our series **"The Angels' Advent"**
- B. We briefly explored the various categories of angels in scripture a couple of weeks ago as we began our series
  - 1. And noted that some angels – the seraphim of Isaiah, and the cherubim of Ezekiel for instance – were quite extraordinary creatures
    - a. And would naturally evoke the response of awe and even fear in an unexpected encounter with them
- C. We noted in that introductory message in this series that angelic appearances are actually quite rare in scripture
  - 1. But they come in clusters
    - a. And appear in time on occasions of great importance in redemptive history
    - b. Strategic moments when the kingdom of God is ready for great advancement
  - 2. In the case of Jesus, angels show up in spades in both His birth narratives as well as in the context of His resurrection
  - 3. So that in our encounters with angels in the context of Advent we should gain a sense that we are entering a world beyond the ordinary
    - a. A world of greatness
    - b. "We're not in Kansas, anymore, Toto"
- D. We've examined two angelic encounters in our series so far
  - 1. The first with Zechariah
    - a. In which the angel Gabriel brings the news of the birth of John the Baptist during their twilight years

2. And the second with Joseph
  - a. In which an angel appears to him in a dream
  - b. Explaining the significance of the pregnancy of his betrothed in bringing about the Messiah's birth
- E. This week we will examine the angelic appearance to Mary
  1. In which Gabriel brings the message of her remarkable pregnancy
    - a. A pregnancy which is divine in its performance
    - b. And which will produce the birth of the Savior
- F. In two of those encounters the adjective of greatness is used
  1. But not of the angels
  2. In one case it is used of John, the child of Zechariah and Elizabeth
    - a. **Luke 1:14–15** (ESV) — 14 ... many will rejoice at his birth, 15 for he will be great before the Lord. ...
  3. And in the other case – in the text we'll read this morning – it is said of Jesus
    - a. **Luke 1:32** (ESV) — 32 He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. ...
- G. Well, that's to be expected
  1. Greatness of the angelic world
  2. Greatness in the person of the one who will prepare the way for Messiah
  3. And certainly greatness in the Messiah Himself
- H. But in our study we will encounter another kind of greatness
  1. A hidden greatness
    - a. A greatness that can be discerned even among the ordinary
    - b. A greatness that can happen, even in Kansas
  2. It is the greatness of Mary
  3. It is the greatness of which believers in Jesus are capable
- I. You might recall the encounter Jesus had with the mother of James and John, who came to Jesus asking Him if He would grant to her two sons the status of sitting at His right and left hands in His kingdom
  1. Remember how Jesus responded?
  2. **Matthew 20:25–26** (ESV) —
    - a. 25 But Jesus called them to him and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them.
    - b. 26 It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant...
  3. This kind of greatness is rooted in servanthood
    - a. Not in status
    - b. Not in power
    - c. Not even in authority
    - d. But in servanthood
- J. That's the kind of greatness that Mary exemplifies in our text
  1. But it's just at this point that we must be careful

- K. Over the history of the church, a different kind of greatness has been ascribed to Mary
1. A kind of greatness that goes beyond this kind of servanthood greatness
  2. And ascribes to Mary a status and role that have no basis in scripture
    - a. But has emerged from time to time in the history of church tradition rather than from biblical truth
  3. At various points in church history, aspects of Mary's status and role have been inflated beyond any biblical framework
- L. One is the perpetual virginity of Mary
1. We addressed the issue of the virgin birth of Jesus last week
    - a. And we'll again echo that teaching in our text this week
    - b. The virgin birth of Jesus is the biblical witness
  2. But this idea is that Mary remained a virgin for her entire life
    - a. That is contradicted by the teaching of scripture
  3. **Matthew 13:55–56** (ESV) —
    - a. 55 Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary? And are not his brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Judas?
    - b. 56 And are not all his sisters with us? ...
  4. So Mary did have relations with Joseph after giving birth to Jesus
    - a. And sired other children
- M. Another is that Mary was without sin – the immaculate conception
1. Now, not the immaculate *reception*
    - a. That's when Franco Harris of the Pittsburgh Steelers caught a walk-off touchdown pass when an errant throw bounced off the helmet of an Oakland Raiders safety with just seconds left in a playoff game
  2. No, this is the immaculate conception
    - a. That Mary, from her own conception, was without original sin
  3. That's, once again, contradicted by scripture
    - a. Indeed, by Mary herself
    - b. When she exclaims in her song, the Magnificat, that she has a Savior
    - c. If she was without sin, she would have no need of a Savior
- N. Mary is sometimes called a co-redemptrix with Christ, the implication being that she shared in Christ's work of redemption
1. And in that role, is an appropriate object of our prayers
    - a. That we can – and to some, should – pray to Mary, who will intercede for us
    - b. **Acts 4:12** (ESV) — 12 “And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”
  2. The idea that we need to pray to Mary – or any other saint for that matter – when we have access to the Father through the Son, demeans the work of Christ on our behalf

- a. The death of Christ tore the temple curtain, granting us direct access to the Father
  - 3. We pray directly to God
    - a. Whether to the Father, or the Son, or the Holy Spirit
    - b. To pray to any saint instead of the Triune God is an insult to the person and work of our Savior Jesus Christ
  - 4. As great as Mary was, she was no co-redemptrix
- O. Now the problem we Protestants have is that we react to those biblical errors so strongly that we minimize the true greatness of Mary
  - 1. And she becomes a kind of afterthought, like an extra in a Hollywood movie
    - a. A minor player with no significant role in the plotline of the story
  - 2. A biblical appendage, not worthy of much consideration
- P. But the greatness of Mary is one that we should not only recognize
  - 1. We should see in Mary the kind of greatness to which we ourselves should aspire
  - 2. The greatness of servanthood
- Q. Let's see how this plays out in this episode of The Angels' Advent

## II. **The Angel**

- A. **Luke 1:26–27** (ESV) —
  - 1. 26 In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth,
  - 2. 27 to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary.
- B. This, of course, is the same Gabriel who appeared to Zechariah some months earlier
  - 1. Announcing that his wife Elizabeth would give birth in her old age to one whom they would name John
    - a. Who would prepare the way for the coming of Messiah
- C. And this Gabriel has a history
  - 1. He was the angel would appeared to Daniel
    - a. Explaining to Daniel a vision of the end times
- D. We saw in the Zechariah encounter that this Gabriel was one of the angels who stands "in the presence of God"
  - 1. According to Revelation 8 there are seven angels who are said to "stand in the presence of God"
  - 2. So in terms of ranks of angels – Gabriel is right at the top!
- E. It is no small matter that, in the matter of communicating the message of the birth of the incarnate Son of God, that God would send, not just any angel, but He would send one of His chief angels
  - 1. Perhaps even an archangel, like Michael
- F. And this great angel, Gabriel, would come to a humble teenage girl, in an even more humble, even backwater town, like Nazareth
  - 1. A Nazareth whose reputation was essentially inconsequential

2. Or as Nathanael said, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” (John 1.46)
- G. The only thing that might credit this place and these people is that Mary and her betrothed Joseph had connections with the house of David
  1. But in that day, the expectation of their having some key role in the royal line of kingly succession was not on anyone’s radar
- H. But here was Gabriel – a great angel
  1. Coming to a humble place
    - a. To a humble person

### III. The Woman

- A. The woman’s name, of course, was Mary
  1. And she’s said – twice – to be a virgin
- B. As we mentioned last week in our study of the Joseph encounter, this is a fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah 7.14
  1. Which was one of the signs God provided for an unbelieving King Ahaz
    - a. Along with some other clearly miraculous and evident events that would reveal Ahaz’ own rebellion
  2. But this sign would demonstrate God’s salvation for His people in the person of Messiah
- C. We saw last week, as well, that objections to the virginity of Mary dissolve when examined in their context
  1. So the fulfillment of the centuries-old prophecy would come through a miraculous birth
  2. A birth to a woman who has not known a man
- D. And once again – as we saw last week – a woman betrothed
  1. A term signifying far more than our own tradition of engagement
  2. To be betrothed in 1<sup>st</sup> Century Judaism was a legally binding arrangement
    - a. And even though the couple had not consummated the marriage, and were not living in the same household
    - b. It required a legal divorce to dissolve the union
- E. So the commitment to this carpenter named Joseph was secure
  1. But she had not come together with him in any way that would have produced an offspring
- F. This, of course, would, as we demonstrated last week, produced a whole set of complicated social complications
  1. Complications that made the ensuing months awkward, to say the least

### IV. The Greeting

- A. Luke 1:28 (ESV) —
  1. 28 And he came to her and said, “Greetings, O favored one,
  2. the Lord is with you!”
- B. Well, what a wonderful greeting is this!
  1. If I’m going to be addressed by an angel
    - a. Especially an angel is marvelous as Gabriel

2. I'd want to have him speak like this to me!
- C. Mary is called by Gabriel – “O favored one”
  1. Even this greeting, by the way, is an indication that Mary was an ordinary person who is the object of the grace of God
    - a. And who is certainly not without sin
  2. **Favored = charitoo (Gk) – unmerited favor**
  3. Root is charis (Gk) – the word for grace
  4. Mary is the recipient of the unmerited favor of God
    - a. Again – another indication that Mary was, like every one of us, a sinner in need of grace
- D. But then she is encouraged by these words: **“the Lord is with you!”**
  1. These words echo the words of scripture anytime God wants His people to know that He’s on their side
  2. It appears to start with Moses who tells God...
    - a. **Exodus 33:15** (ESV) — 15 ... “If your presence will not go with me, do not bring us up from here.”
  3. We find the same encouragement expressed numerous times in the life of Joseph
    - a. Who, in spite of many difficult circumstances, the scripture tells us that...
    - b. **“The Lord was with Joseph”**
  4. Certainly, these and other similar assurances would have echoed in Mary’s mind as the angel greeted her

## V. **The Disturbance**

- A. At the same time, Mary’s not sure what to make of it all
- B. **Luke 1:29** (ESV) —
  1. 29 But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be.
- C. I’m inclined to identify with Mary’s reaction
  1. You know, when someone comes up and says to me, “Boy, have I got a deal for you!”
  2. My inclination is that, “Hold on now – I’m about to be played”
    - a. What’s he up to with a greeting like that!
- D. Of course, you’ve got to realize that Mary’s likely spooked a bit by the encounter to begin with
  1. This is, after all, an angel
    - a. And not just any angel
    - b. This is Gabriel
  2. And whatever Gabriel looked like, he looked obviously like an angelic being
    - a. Not like an ordinary human which can sometimes occur
- E. So Mary is disturbed by the greeting
  1. Let’s see how the angel addresses this humble, spooked, disturbed, yet favored, teenage Hebrew girl

## VI. The Message

### A. The Reassurance

1. **Luke 1:30** (ESV) —
  - a. 30 And the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.
2. Gabriel reassures her
  - a. He indicates that she has found favor with God
  - b. Favor – there’s that word again: **charis (Gk)**
  - c. It means grace – unmerited favor with God
3. And the statement is in the passive voice
  - a. Mary has not done anything to earn God’s favor
  - b. She has “found favor”
  - c. One doesn’t “earn grace”
4. This is especially reassuring
  - a. That this humble child would find a loving encounter with the God who alone is love
5. It’s the kind of assurance we all should treasure
  - a. As we – like Mary – are ordinary sinners in need of God’s grace

### B. The Child

1. **Luke 1:31** (ESV) —
  - a. 31 And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son...
2. Here is the same announcement that Joseph received
  - a. Most likely this happened before the encounter with Joseph
3. But again – the woman, a virgin – never having been with a man
  - a. Will give birth
  - b. And the sex of the child is identified
  - c. She will bear a son

### C. His Name

1. **Luke 1:31** (ESV) — 31 ... and you shall call his name Jesus.
2. The same name as the angel told Joseph to use for the son
  - a. Only you’ll recall that the angel told Joseph even more than he told Mary
  - b. He told Joseph that the reason why they would call Him Jesus was that He would save His people from their sins
3. Remember, Jesus is the Greek transliteration of the Hebrew Jehoshua
  - a. Which means “Jehovah saves”
4. Mary is given the same message
5. There is no contradiction, by the way, between the angel telling Joseph that he would name the child
  - a. And Gabriel telling Mary that she would name the child
6. I think many of you married folks can identify with this
  - a. Imagine having personally come to a conclusion about a decision you have to make as a couple

- b. And one of you says, with some apprehension, “You know, I think we should do \_\_\_\_\_.”
  - c. And your husband or wife says, “That’s amazing – you know, that’s exactly what I was thinking!”
7. So consider that conversation between Joseph and Mary
- a. As they consider the names for the child Mary was carrying, they didn’t consult the current Hebrew book of names like so many parents do these days
  - b. And they didn’t list the possibilities of names from their ancestral tree
  - c. One of them says, with a certain degree of fear that they might disagree on the first major decision of their life together, “We need to name the child Jesus”
  - d. And amazingly, the other says, “Why yes! Of course. That’s what my angel told me I should name him.”
  - e. And the spouse says, “My angel told me the same thing!”
  - f. Even though there is no “Jesus” in their family history
8. And I’m sure that Joseph would have related to Mary that basis for that name
- a. That this child would save – not just anyone, but God’s people – from their sins
  - b. Not from the oppression of the Romans
  - c. But from their greatest enemy – their own selves; their sin

D. **His Greatness**

1. **Luke 1:32** (ESV) — 32 He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. ...
2. And vested in that name will be the essence of the greatness of this child
3. He would be no ordinary son
  - a. He would be the Son of the Most High
4. The Most High God is a rather unusual name among the Jewish people of their day
  - a. The Most High God signifies that this God would not be just the God of a particular ethnic people
  - b. But He is the God of all kinds of people
  - c. Jew and Gentile are included in the those who are God’s people
5. We see that expressed all the way back in Genesis 14
  - a. When Abraham has his encounter with Melchizedek
  - b. Melchizedek is priest of “God Most High”
  - c. And every indication is that this term transcends any particular ethnic people
  - d. And extends to all who would ever believe in this Christ – from every ethnic background
6. And that extends His greatness!
7. His greatness is that He will be the incarnate Son of the God of the whole universe!

- a. That's a greatness that you and I cannot imagine
  - b. And truthfully, could never aspire to
  - 8. And it's a greatness that not even John the Baptist – as great as Gabriel said he would be – could ever attain
  - 9. This Jesus would be unique, unparalleled in His greatness
- E. **His Reign**
- 1. **Luke 1:32–33** (ESV) —
    - a. 32 He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High.
    - b. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David,
    - c. 33 and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.”
  - 2. So the greatness of this child is further extended
    - a. Not only will he be the incarnate Son of God
    - b. He will have the throne of David
  - 3. That forgotten throne, as these Jews are under the oppression of Rome
    - a. Only a fanciful dream among Jewish dreamers would be this idea of the reestablishment of the long-lost throne of David
  - 4. Yet Mary and Joseph both belong to the house of David
    - a. They, of all people, would have an interest in such a glorious story of redemption
  - 5. And the throne of David would be unlike all the previous thrones of David
    - a. This would be a forever throne
    - b. A throne over the house of Jacob
    - c. A house that would include, not just Jews but Gentiles (remember, He would be the son of the Most High God)
  - 6. And a throne that would last forever
    - a. Not temporarily, until the next king died or strayed morally
  - 7. This would be a forever reign, a forever throne
    - a. And Mary would be more than a bit player in this drama of redemption
    - b. Even as a humble, teenage girl

VII. **The Perplexity**

- A. **Luke 1:34** (ESV) — 34 And Mary said to the angel, “How will this be, since I am a virgin?”
- B. Still, Mary is perplexed
  - 1. Now this is not the same kind of doubt that got Zechariah into trouble
    - a. His questioning of Gabriel resulted in him becoming deaf and mute until the time of John's birth
  - 2. No, this is a curiosity-driven question
    - a. “How can I have a child since I haven't been with a man?”
  - 3. This is not a question from an age of in vitro fertilization
    - a. Medical science was nowhere near that stage
    - b. And even with IVF, there's got to be a sperm donor – a man!

4. But in any event, Mary is not reprimanded or chastised by her question like Zechariah was
- C. “How will this be, since I am a virgin?”

VIII. **The Answer**

- A. **Luke 1:35** (ESV) —
  1. 35 And the angel answered her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you,
  2. and the power of the Most High will overshadow you;
  3. therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God.
- B. The Holy Spirit will execute this miraculous conception
  1. God the Holy Spirit will create new life in the womb of the woman
- C. God alone is the author of life
  1. Indeed, of all creation
  2. Remember the very creation event
- D. **Genesis 1:1–2** (ESV) —
  1. 1 In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.
  2. 2 The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep.
  3. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.
- E. There was the Spirit of God, engaged in the very act of creation
  1. And now here, in the womb of this young woman
    - a. Apart from any human man’s involvement
  2. New life is created
- F. And the Spirit of God would overshadow her
  1. Overshadow – the same word is applied to the glory cloud that enveloped the encounter on the Mount of Transfiguration
  2. Whatever limitations Mary had with respect to carrying in her womb the incarnate Son of God would be overwhelmed
    - a. Just as the glory cloud overwhelmed the disciples
- G. And as a result, the child will be holy
  1. No limitation of Mary – and she had the limitations of any normal, teenage girl – would limit the holiness of this child
  2. He would be – actually, not would be – is – the Son of God
  3. Mary would be the mother of the Son of God
    - a. Through the intervention of the Holy Spirit

IX. **The Confirmation**

- A. And just so Gabriel can assure Mary that God can, in fact, do what He promises to do...
- B. **Luke 1:36–37** (ESV) —
  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.
  2. 37 For nothing will be impossible with God.”
- C. “Mary, you should check with your cousin Elizabeth. She’s old – well past child-bearing age”

1. “And look at her now – she’s in her 6<sup>th</sup> month! She’s showing!”
- D. God can do anything!
  1. Nothing is impossible with God!

X. **The Fiat**

- A. **Luke 1:38** (ESV) —
  1. 38 And Mary said, “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.”
- B. And now comes Mary’s moment of greatness
  1. Not that she would be perpetually a virgin
    - a. Not that she would be without original sin
    - b. Not that she would be co-redemptrix, a mediator to whom we should pray
    - c. None of that!
- C. No! Simply that she would simply submit to the will of God
  1. “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.”
- D. True greatness is attainable in normal, humble people who will surrender to the will of God for their lives
  1. True greatness – as Jesus taught – is found in servanthood
    - a. “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord”
  2. Is that how you regard yourself?
    - a. Have you placed yourself in position to simply be God’s servant in the way He should direct
    - b. Whatever that way is?
  3. Mary was – and that was the essence of her greatness
- E. She says, “... let it be to me according to your word”
  1. This is known to theologians as **Mary’s Fiat**
    - a. Fiat is the present imperative form of the Latin verb “to be”
    - b. “Let it be”
  2. Mary simply exclaims, “Let it be, Lord”
    - a. Let it take place exactly as You have described
- F. That was Mary’s fiat
  1. Have you expressed your fiat to the Lord?
  2. Are you willing to “let it be” – whatever “to be” means for you
    - a. It might be a ministry
    - b. Or it might be a friendship
    - c. Or it might be a sacrifice
    - d. Or it might be a season of suffering
- G. Greatness in that form – the form that Mary exuded – is laid out before you, just as it was for Mary
  1. Have you surrendered to the will of God?
    - a. Have you offered your fiat to the Lord?