

Introductory

This material – The Annunciation - is exclusive to Luke. Matthew and John have birth narratives, but they contain different information, and Mark leaves out The Nativity entirely. Neither this text nor the Matthew text is appointed to be read in the TLH one-year lectionary. This text is appointed for Advent 4B in the LW three-year series.

Luke mentions that Mary was a virgin – twice, and he quotes the angel Gabriel as saying that she would be the mother of the Christ, the Son of God, and The Savior. Whereas the focus on the last two Sundays has been on the work that John did preparatory to the coming of the Christ, the focus today is on the Christ and His origins.

The point of comparison between the conception of Jesus and the conception of John (and Isaac to Sara) is not that one birth is more miraculous than the other, but that the father of John was the very human Zacharias, of Isaac Abraham, while the father of Jesus was the very divine Father. The latter is surely to be seen as a bigger than the former.

We noted last week that John the Apostles' juxtaposed his words about Jesus with his words about John, putting a great deal of emphasis on the divine origins of Jesus. I have mentioned before how I was well into my teen years before I realized that people like John, and Abraham, and David, et al were sinners, and that's not a good thing.

Probably that was because in Sunday School these men were held up to me as examples to be emulated. It was not until later that I discovered fun facts like that David has twenty-something wives and Abraham lied and had sexual relations with Hagar, to whom he was not married. In fact, they were all sinners, the whole lot of them.

What the writers of the Bible do, and what we ought to be doing, is presenting Jesus as the only perfect person who has ever lived, and we should be talking about everybody else as sinners. Like us, John is both sinner and saint, although it must be said that the writers don't delve nearly as much into John the sinner as they do into John the saint.

Jesus thought highly of him. He who leaped for joy in the womb of his mother at his first meeting with Mary, pregnant with Jesus, and who consistently understood and expressed his relationship to Jesus, would have been off put by our elevating him to anything like Christ status, which many were willing to do. It was a constant struggle for John B.

It may be a good idea to briefly review the manner of John's conception. It's a good story, and one that people have heard before, and they will remember it when you tell it. Maybe add some new information for them in that review and in the telling of this week's story, so that they learn something new in church, and maybe try to capture the drama.

One of the basic rules of preaching is to avoid taking interesting material and making it boring, and this material is particularly fascinating. Go ahead and talk about this incident by the name that the Church has always given it; the Annunciation; the announcement by the Gabriel to Mary that she has been chosen as the vessel to bear the Christ.

I don't know if it's one of those terms that we avoid because it "sounds catholic," or if we are just lazy about Church vocabulary. Maybe it's just that, until LW, neither this text nor the Matthew account of the conception was included in our lectionary, and it would not have been read in church except in the few places where the Feast was observed.

Textual Notes

26. Luke relates the miraculous conception of John, and then fast forwards about half a year, "Ἐν δὲ τῷ μηνὶ τῷ ἕκτῳ ἀπεστάλη ὁ ἄγγελος Γαβριὴλ ἀπὸ τοῦ Θεοῦ – in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God." Luke has related that Elizabeth conceived (24), and the meaning of the six months is that she was that far into the pregnancy.

We have talked before about the exact meaning of "ἄγγελος – angel" or "messenger" in the translations. In the art, the image used here is of a heavenly being with wings. Or it may have been a person. Angels are not always named, but Gabriel is named as the angel coming to Elizabeth. He had come to Zacharia (19) several months previous.

Gabriel appears several times in the OT, in the NT, and is also found in the intertestamental literature. Rome gives him a feast day, but the Lutherans do not. We do commemorate Zacharias and Elizabeth on September 5, and Gabriel is very much a part of that story. Presumably, he is included in "all angels" of St. Michael and All Angels. Gabriel is sent by God, the verb (ἀποστέλλω) is the same used in the sending of others, most notably the Apostles (the cognate noun of the verb), and when God sends, He does not just boot you out the door and tell you to play until dark; He gives you a destination, "εἰς πόλιν τῆς Γαλιλαίας ἣ ὄνομα Ναζαρεθ – into a city of Galilee called Nazareth."

Nazareth is called a "πόλις – city," not a "village," but it must not have been a very big "city." Hebron, where Zacharia and Elizabeth lived, would have been a big deal. Nazareth would not have. I and the Bible Scholars I read are unable to find it named in the Bible or in any other literature before here mostly because there was no reason to.

You determine the population of old settlements like this by the size of the town found by digging in the ground. Bible Scholars have tried to determine the population of Nazareth at the time of Jesus, and they come up with a low number of around 400 and a high number of about 2,000, and most of them think in the hundreds rather than the thousands.

Today, Nazareth is a city with a population listed at 77,000, mostly Arab, Muslim outnumbering Christian 2 to 1, and a new "Upper Nazareth" has been built for the Jews. A quick perusal of the Internet reveals that the economy is centered on the city being the hometown of Jesus. TripAdvisor lists the Church of the Annunciation the #1 attraction.

Matthew (2:23) tells us that Jesus being from Nazareth is “that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled, ‘He shall be called a Nazarete,’” but we search seemingly in vain for that OT verse. My Harper Study Bible correctly lists Isaiah 11:1, where the Prophet talks about a “branch.” Jeremiah (23:5) speaks of a “righteous branch.”

The Hebrew word for “branch” or “shoot” is “נָזַר– nazar,” hence “Nazareth,” and several other OT passages speak of the coming Messiah using that kind of language. The idea that the House of David would be cut down, but a new house come out of it is actually a very predominant theme in the OT. David’s house has been cut down, now a new one.

27. The woman to whom Gabriel speaks is not identified by her given name until after she is identified in several other, presumably more important ways. She is called a virgin, she is said to be betrothed to a man named Joseph, who is identified as being from the house of David. Only after those identifiers is she called by her name “Mary.”

Luke tells us that Gabriel came to “παρθένον ἐμνηστευμένην ἀνδρὶ ᾧ ὄνομα Ἰωσήφ – a virgin who was betrothed to a man named Joseph.” Mary is called “παρθένον – a virgin.” Every translation I’m looking at correctly translates it “virgin,” except for the Good News version that uses “young woman.” The LCMS used to really like that Bible.

Often the translations get it right. Isaiah had prophesied in 7:14 that “a virgin will conceive and bear a son, and you will call his name Immanuel...,” and now Gabriel is announcing that the prophecy is about to come to pass. The man to whom the woman is engaged is called Joseph, who is noted to be of the “οἴκου – house” of David.

The OT reading for today talks extensively about the House of David, and maybe I’ll bring that text into preaching on Sunday. I won’t preach on the OT because whether or not God had a permanent home 3,000 years ago was not important to God, so why should it be important to me? Noting body language, I see that my hearers could not care less.

And then, in case you didn’t hear it the first time, “καὶ τὸ ὄνομα τῆς παρθένου Μαρίας – and the name of the virgin was Mary.”

You are no doubt aware that there are, and always have been, and always will be people who do not believe that Jesus was conceived in this manner. It begins with those in the eighth chapter of John’s Gospel who tell Jesus that “we were not born of fornication,” and it continues along those lines in attacks on Christians theology in Early Church times.

These days, western “Christian” pastors are leading the charge, telling their flocks, in essence, that “we are not born of fornication,” but Jesus was. We need to address the issue, but we probably don’t need to spend a whole lot of time on it. I have been talking about it to my hearers for over eight years, and by now they know what we believe.

As a general rule, when we are talking about other people and their heretical beliefs, we should keep it short and sweet. Then turn the focus back to the wonderful gospel truths, like the one here. It may also be a good idea to explain *why* the Virgin Birth is such a big deal, so it doesn't look like the pastor is just being contentious for no good reason.

If Jesus is not God, then He is simply a man like the rest of us, and that gives to us a very different Jesus from the Jesus of orthodox Christianity. Eve and Adam could have saved self, but they failed miserably. The history of the OT is an account of the inability of man to save self. Even the "good" men in the OT were crass sinners.

If Jesus is not God, then He can't save us, and we remain lost in our sins. If Jesus is not God, then He will be a sinner like the rest of us, and if He were to sin, He would damn even His own self, let alone save us. But He is God, and He was perfect, and because He is God, that perfection is counted to us by faith, and we stand before God righteous.

28. Gabriel, "εἰσελθὼν πρὸς αὐτὴν εἶπεν – having come towards her, speaks" to her. The phrase is an aorist participle, then a preposition, then a pronoun in the accusative case. The aorist participle can indicate a first then next time frame when followed by another verb. In this case it means he moved towards her as part of his speaking to her.

That preposition followed by the noun in the accusative case indicates movement towards. What that all means is that Gabriel moved towards Mary as he spoke to her. The unexpected appearance would have been startling in and of itself, and that appearing would have been made even more startling when Gabriel moved towards her.

The greeting of the angel to Mary is "Χαῖρε, κεχαριτωμένη, ὁ Κύριος μετὰ σοῦ – rejoice favored one, the Lord is with you." All of the translations I'm looking at have the first word of Gabriel to Mary as "greetings," and that doesn't even come close to capturing the moment. Gabriel did not say something like "hey, Mary, what's up," or some such thing.

The word means "rejoice," and you can look at the other seventy-three NT occurrences to see what it means. Together with the next word, these words put an entirely different spin on this "greeting." The second word is a perfect participle of a compound word with "χαριτόω – grace" as its root. It occurs twice in the NT, and only here in this form.

The other occurrence is in Ephesians (1:6), where the word is used to refer to Christians. A perusal of MM and BAG leaves one with the impression that the word refers to one who is chosen by one in a higher position for elevation or for a great honor, sort of like Mary was, and sort of like we Christians have been. That's what Paul says in Ephesians.

Why Mary? There is certainly nothing about Mary that makes her intrinsically more fit to bear the Christ than any other woman. Out of all the billions of people in the world He could have chosen and does choose, God has chosen the individuals that He has chosen. Out of all the women that He could have chosen, God chose her for this great task.

There is no evidence that she was immaculately conceived. That doctrine was made up by the Roman Church and adopted in 1854. That heresy declared that Mary was born without original sin. Trent had long ago decided she had no actual sin. What's more, we have no need for a perfect Mary. Her Son, born of God, is perfect, and that works.

Gabriel then said to Mary, “ὁ Κύριος μετὰ σοῦ – The Lord with you.” You may recognize that as the Salutation. LSB says it comes from 2 Tim 4:22. In Ruth (2:4), it is the greeting from Boaz to the reapers. Benson calls it “Hebrew idiom” and says that it means “thou art the happiest of all the women that ever lived,” and that sounds sketchy.

Maybe I'm making too much out of this. I'll stop now.

29. As for Mary, “ἡ δὲ ἐπὶ τῷ λόγῳ διεταράχθη – in the hearing of that word she was troubled.” The word “διεταράχθη” is in the aorist passive form, and the word is a hapax in the NT. We turn, therefore, to MM and BAG for assistance, and they disappoint greatly, but there's still the Internet, which says it means “to shake or to agitate.”

It was not the appearance of Gabriel – what she saw – that caused Mary to be shaken. What caused her to react like that was the words Gabriel said to her, and we ask exactly which part of what Gabriel's “word - λόγῳ” was it that caused Mary to be “troubled – διεταράχθη?” Well, just wow many other annunciations like this have there ever been?

Luke then says that Mary “διελογίζετο ποταπὸς εἴη ὁ ἀσπασμὸς οὗτος – was thinking about what this greeting meant.” The verb is an imperfect indicative form of διαλογίζομαι, a word that indicated that she was engaging in Logic, the science of correct thinking. Luke uses it (12:17) for the man who has more grain than he has storage.

Like that man, and like people of all times and all places, Mary was reasoning, she was thinking, she was trying to sort out “ποταπὸς εἴη ὁ ἀσπασμὸς οὗτος – the kind of greeting this might be.” The adjective “ποταπός – what kind” is a word used when people are distinguishing between one kind of thing (country, race, tribe, for example) and another.

The word is used later by Luke (7:39), when the Pharisee wonders how Jesus can be a prophet when He doesn't know “what kind” of a woman Mary M is. There are greetings, and there are greetings. Sometimes we are greeted warmly, sometimes formally, sometimes coldly. And then there was the “greeting” of Gabriel to Mary.

30. Gabriel detected Mary's consternation, because he now says to Mary, “Μὴ φοβοῦ, stop fearing.” When the negator “Μὴ” is followed by the present imperative “φοβοῦ,” it means to stop an action that is already being engaged in (FGG 219). He then tells her that “εὗρες γὰρ χάριν παρὰ τῷ Θεῷ – you have found grace (favor) with God.”

The word “χάριν – grace” means something freely given, without merit on the part of the receiver. Not surprisingly, it is the noun cognate of the verb used in verse twenty-eight.

It's another way of saying what we said two verses previous; we don't know why God chose Mary any more than we know why He chose Abraham or you or me.

The preposition “παρά - with” followed by a noun in the dative case, means “in the presence of” or “alongside.” When the preposition παρά is followed by a noun in the dative case, like here, it means “with” or “in the presence of” or “alongside” in the sense of location next to or beside, a construction indicating almost a state of immanence.

There is a school of thought that says that Gabriel is the Second Person of the Trinity, who would be the one even then standing next to, “with” Mary. The thought is plausible.

31. Gabriel now plainly states what Mary has maybe already figured out, telling her that, “συλλήμψῃ ἐν γαστρὶ καὶ τέξῃ υἱόν – you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a son.” The first verb is “ἔσσυλλήμψῃ,” the future indicative middle of συλλαμβάνω, and it tells us that conception will be in the future, and that Mary is not yet pregnant.

He adds the seemingly redundant “in your womb” to clarify that this will be a real, actual pregnancy, an event that will be happening inside of her body. Several Early Church heresies involve the idea that Jesus was not an actual human. Those heresies have been revived in our time, and we find them mostly from “Christian” clergypersons.

Gabriel says He was. Then Gabriel, who seems to have this thing about naming other peoples' children, tells her “καὶ καλέσεις τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ Ἰησοῦν – and you will call His name Jesus,” a Hebrew word that means “Savior.” First, the identity of the God/Man to be born of Mary, and then what follows logically; the God/Man will be The Savior.

32 – 33. Gabriel now quotes from the OT, applying some clearly messianic passages to Mary's son, clearly telling her that her son would be Messiah, the Christ. Your Study Bible can tell you from whence those quotes proceed, and the commentaries wax eloquently on the meaning of them. I don't spend very much time on them in a sermon.

34. Mary said to the ἄγγελον, “Πῶς ἔσται τοῦτο? – How will be this thing?” The “τούτο – this thing” is singular, not plural, and refers to the pregnancy. A teen mother-to-be these days might say “How is that going to happen?” or something like that. The difference between Mary and that teen is that Mary had nothing to cause pregnancy.

She then reveals an at least rudimentary knowledge of basic biology, pointing out that she “doesn't know a man - ἀνδρα οὐ γινώσκω.” The present indicative active indicates ongoing action, or in this case the lack of action, and close connection of the person to the action. I suppose you could say that her not knowing a man – virginity – is ongoing.

You may have heard the phrase “he (she) knew her (him) in a biblical way.” God knows about the figure of speech known as Euphemism, an act or an example of substituting a

mild, indirect, or vague term for one considered harsh, blunt, or offensive. He often uses that figure in his writing of the Bible, like we often do in our speaking and writing.

For those of you keeping score at home, the three most euphemized acts in the English language are things sexual, things that happen in the bathroom, and things about death and dying. When Judges 3:22 says of Eglon that, “the dirt came out,” the writer wasn’t talking about dirt. Mary here uses a euphemism that was probably common in her day.

Her question is valid, part of her ongoing διελογίζετο, what’s going on here? We ought to remember that The Church know the story well and have had two millennia to digest it, and we have been familiar with it for most of our lives. To Mary, it was all new, and personal, and if she had no follow-up questions, it would be cause for concern.

35. Gabriel tries to help her out, “καὶ ἀποκριθεὶς ὁ ἄγγελος εἶπεν αὐτῇ Πνεῦμα Ἅγιον ἐπελεύσεται ἐπὶ σέ – answering, the angel said to her, ‘the Holy Spirit will arrive upon you.’ The pronoun “σέ – you” is in the accusative case, and when the preposition ἐπὶ is followed by a noun in the accusative case, as is the case here, it means motion into.

The Holy Spirit will enter into Mary, specifically into her womb, and that’s how she will conceive. There is a school of thought that pictures the Spirit as sperm. The Urban Dictionary speaks of the acronym SOHS – “Sperm of the Holy Spirit” and a blogger talks about “The Divine Sperm.” But what are you going to do with that in a sermon anyway?

Furthermore, “δύναμις Ὑψίστου ἐπισκιάσει σοι – the power of the Most High will envelope you.” The noun “Ὑψίστου – the Most High,” who is particularly active at this particular time, is God. He will “ἐπισκιάσει – overshadow” the youngster, like the cloud would later “ἐπισκιάσει – overshadow” people on the mountain at the Transfiguration.

Gabriel now uses “διό – therefore,” but not the common word for “therefore.” This word occurs only fifty-three times in the NT, and it is used to more firmly connect what he has just said with what he is about to say in very much a cause and effect way. If Mary is trying to figure out what’s going on here, Gabriel is doing his best to help her understand.

Because of those things, “τὸ γεννώμενον ἅγιον κληθήσεται Υἱὸς Θεοῦ – the holy one born to you will be called the Son of God,” and He is. There are “sons of God,” and I am one of them, and then there is “The Son of God,” a messianic term from way back, and there is only one of them, and He is Jesus. The angel told Joseph that He is “Immanuel.”

36. And now Gabriel tells Mary about Elizabeth, to whom the reader has already been introduced, “καὶ ἰδοὺ Ἐλισάβετ ἡ συγγενὶς σου – and see Elizabeth, your relative.” We have no reason to believe that Mary had any knowledge of Elizabeth or that they had, at this point in the narrative, even met. Elizabeth is called a “συγγενὶς – relative.”

It's a generic term for a blood relative, and in a day when people generally had a lot more children than they do now, both women would have had a lot of people who would have been designated by that term. Luke (1:6) indicates that both Elizabeth and Zacharias were very religious, and there is a plethora of indications that Mary was as well.

Probably both Mary and Elizabeth would have been to Jerusalem, likely multiple times, for religious reasons, but any talk about any contact with Elizabeth is an argument from silence. Other than meetings when both of them has been in Jerusalem, Mary lived in Nazareth, and Elizabeth lived one hundred miles (197K – Google Maps) away in Hebron.

Today, Hebron is a city of 250,000 people, mostly Palestinians. In OT times, it was the City of Priests. In Joshua 21:11, the priests are told to live in Hebron when they are off duty. Hebron was a city about twenty-five miles to the south and west of Jerusalem. It was a bedroom community where priests lived and commuted to their jobs at Temple.

Besides telling her that Elizabeth is her relative, Gabriel tells Mary that “αὐτὴ συνέληφεν υἱὸν ἐν γήρει αὐτῆς – she has conceived a son in her womb.” Telling us about the womb continues to be redundant. Furthermore, “οὗτος μὲν ἕκτος ἐστὶν αὐτῇ τῇ καλουμένῃ στείρα - this is the sixth month to her who has been being called ‘barren.’”

37. By way of explanation, Gabriel continues, “ὅτι οὐκ ἀδυνατήσῃ παρὰ τοῦ Θεοῦ πᾶν ῥῆμα – because every word will not be impossible for God.” The last word is “ῥῆμα – saying,” not “thing.” I’m sorry to say that almost all of the translations, including all of the most popular, get it wrong. I have no idea why you would translate the word “thing.”

I’m happy to say that there are a few – NIV and others that you have never heard of – get it right. The immediate reference is to the words spoken by Gabriel to Zacharias, and the larger Word of God is the entire OT, now the NT. Gabriel seems to be acknowledging that some of the stuff that he’s been saying is just a little bit out there, and it is.

38. We don’t know how long this exchange took to play out, but at the end of the day, “εἶπεν δὲ Μαριάμ Ἰδοὺ ἡ δούλη Κυρίου – Mary said, ‘I am the servant of the Lord.’” The word “servant” and not the word “handmaid” is the preferred translation. People in KJV times knew what a handmaid was. It time it would have been a very familiar word.

It would have been a common word commonly used to identify a female domestic, maybe from Wales or Ireland, but not Latin America. *Webster’s* dates the word from the thirteenth century. Then we stopped using the word, then we wondered what it meant every time we heard it from KJV, and now Netflix has given a whole new meaning to it.

It’s actually a very vivid metaphor, understood correctly. The servant is there to serve the master, not self. Mary understands that this is not about her, but it is about “The Lord.” If we’ve learned anything from British literature and movies made from British literature, it’s that the Brits know about social class, and they take it very seriously.

If you wanted to compare Mary to the domestic help in a Victorian family, a lot of people would get that. If you wanted to compare her to domestic help in America, it's going to be harder. Mary continues, “γένοιτό μοι κατὰ τὸ ῥῆμά σου – let it be to me according to your words,” and mission accomplished “ἀπῆλθεν ἀπ’ αὐτῆς ὁ ἄγγελος – the angel left.”

The verb “γένοιτό - let it be,” is the optative form of “γίνομα – to come into form or being,” a form of the word that occurs seventeen times in the NT. What Gabriel says will happen to Mary, she wants to happen. We note that the word “ῥῆμα” is the same word at the end of the last verse, the one where Gabriel had talked about “every Word of God...”

It does.

Law/Gospel

God Awaited/God Here – Since Adam, mankind has been trying to save himself, and every single attempt has failed. Even in the Bible, good people still sin. Clearly, the God who created us must take the bull by the horns, and He does. The Holy Spirit enters the womb of Mary, and she conceives, and her son is God with Us. How wonderful that He still comes to us in Word and Sacrament.

Fear/No Fear – There are many things in life that cause us to fear, including the Law. In Word and Sacrament, God alleviates our fears here in time and into eternity.

Sermon Titles

Gabriel Surprises Mary

God with Us

The Annunciation

The Lord is With You

Hymns

The Angel Gabriel from Heaven Came – LSB 356 (unfamiliar tune)

Sing Advent hymns during the Advent Season.

During the days of Christmas, sing exclusively Christmas hymns.

Rev. Steven L. Anderson

Resources

ACC – Manlio Simonetti, *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture* (Mark).
Intervarsity Press, 2002

BAG – Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*. Translated by
William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, University of Chicago Press, 1979

BCLY – William Barclay, *The Gospel of Mark*.. The Westminster Press, 1975

FGG – James W. Voelz, *Fundamental Greek Grammar*. Concordia Publishing House,
1993

MGM – W.F. Moulton, A.S. Geden, H.K. Moulton, *A Concordance to the Greek
Testament*. T & T Clark LTD., 1978

MM – James Hope Moulton and George Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek
Testament*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1982

ODCC – F.L. Cross, Editor, *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*. Oxford
University Press, 1978

RNK – Fritz Rienecker, *A Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament*, Zondervan, 1976

RSV – Revised Standard Version of the Bible. Zondervan Publishing House, 1965

UBD – Merrill F. Unger, *Unger's Bible Dictionary*, Moody Press, 1977.

WP – A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, Baker, 1930

VINE – W.E.Vine, Merrill F. Unger, William White, Jr., *An Expository Dictionary of
Biblical Words*, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1984

WIK – www.wikipedia.com

BIB – www.biblos.com

GBO – www.greekbible.com

Digital Classics Library - www.perseus.tufts.edu

Internet Classics Library – www.classics.mit.edu

Christian Classics Ethereal Library - www.ccel.org

Project Wittenberg - www.iclnet.org/pub/resources/text/wittenberg/wittenberg-home.html