



The Anglican Parish of Whangaparaoa Peninsula  
3 Stanmore Bay Road,  
Whangaparaoa, Auckland, N.Z.  
[www.ststephenswgp.org.nz](http://www.ststephenswgp.org.nz)

## Sermon

### ***Lessons from the Annunciation***

**Luke 1:26-38; 2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16**

20<sup>th</sup> December 2020

© 2020 The Revd Ian Hardcastle

Here we are on the Fourth Sunday of Advent. Through Advent, we have considered the comings of Christ. We started by concentrating on the second coming of Christ – the events at the end of the age, that great day when he returns in power. We moved back in time to hear John the Baptist prepare the way of the Messiah by calling the people to repent and baptizing them in the river. Now we dial back further to another announcement – his birth.

The Messiah was and is a great hope of the Jewish people. The word means anointed. In the Old Testament, kings, priests and prophets were anointed for their roles. From early in Genesis, there are hints of the One who is to come, but this reading from Second Samuel is the first time that the idea of that One being a King of the house of David. In a divine irony, the desire that David had expressed to build a temple or house for God was reversed by God promising to make a dynasty - a house from David. The mysterious, promised One would be an anointed son of David.

And so it is that when the angel Gabriel spoke to Mary, he announced that she would bear a baby who would be the promised Son of David.

I want to consider the Virgin Birth first then look at what this reading tells us about God, about Jesus and what it tells us about Mary.

### **The Virgin Birth**

The Apostles' Creed describe the Virgin Birth like this: "God's only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary ...". The Nicene Creed reads, "For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven, was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and became fully human."

Maybe you boggle at the idea of the Virgin Birth? Some people crudely misrepresent it to mean God had physical intercourse with Mary. That is certainly not what is described or intended. That thinking is typical of Greek myths but anathema to Jewish understanding and theology. What is said in the Gospel is that the Holy Spirit would overshadow Mary. The conception was a spiritual act not a physical act.

God has power and abilities we cannot imagine. That is obvious since God created all that is. We are finite, he is infinite. We certainly cannot expect to understand all his knowledge or his ways. In fact, Paul wrote "the

foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength."<sup>1</sup> The incarnation (that is God taking on a human flesh) is not a normal event. I cannot see any difficulty in the idea that the God achieve it by any means he wished. There might have been other ways, but this was the means chosen by God.

Dr Darrell Bock writes in the NIV Application Commentary, "A person's response to the truth of such an event also suggests their world view about God and his ability to act in the world. The difference in worldview involves a picture of God as a spectator in the creation in contrast to a view of deity that sees him as a creative participant with us in life."<sup>2</sup> In other words it shows whether we are a deist seeing God as distant and inactive or a theist believing God is involved and active in the world.

The Virgin Birth highlights **the uniqueness of Jesus**. The Saviour had to come from God. No ordinary human could atone for humanity, because ordinary humans are themselves sinners. The Saviour had to be sinless to atone for sin. Salvation cannot come from human effort but only by the work of God, himself. Our salvation took the supernatural work of God and that was evident at the beginning of Jesus' life when as Paul puts it, "God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the Law, so that we might receive adoption as sons."<sup>3</sup>

The Virgin Birth makes possible **the uniting of full deity and full humanity** in one person. The saviour had to be divine to save us, but he had to be human to represent us in the atonement. Since he was born of a woman, we can be sure he is human and understands our weaknesses. Since he was conceived by the miraculous work of the Holy Spirit we can have confidence that he is divine and powerful to save.

The Virgin birth also makes possible **the sinlessness** of Christ. It is the teaching of the New Testament that we all inherit a sinful nature. Jesus' conception without a human father makes him different from everyone else in that the line of inheritance was interrupted. We may not understand how this makes the difference to the inheritance of sin but the words of the angel say it is because of this divine act, that the child will be called holy, the Son of God.

"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." [RSV]<sup>4</sup>

If belief in the Virgin Birth of Jesus remains a struggle, I would say get on with putting your trust in Jesus as your saviour and pray about your struggle asking God to help you.

## About Jesus:

What do we learn about Jesus from this passage? Humanly, he was of tribe of Judah and was descended from King David. Mary was descended from David.

The name Jesus, *Yeshua* in Hebrew means 'God saves'. This name was given to Mary by the angel. It is strong indication of the future ministry of this child.

The angel says he will be great and the Son of the Most High. Now we are getting into regal and divine descriptions. God would give him the throne of David so he is the Messiah.

And he would reign over the house of Jacob (Israel) for ever. His Kingdom will never end. Now the description has gone into the realms of eternity and the divine. Only one being can rule for ever without end and that is God.

What do we learn about Jesus from this passage? He is the divine Son of God, the Messiah, who will save his people and rule forever.

---

<sup>1</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:25

<sup>2</sup> Bock, Darrell, 1996, *The NIV Application Commentary: Luke*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, p61

<sup>3</sup> Galatians 4:4-5

<sup>4</sup> V35. "therefore" also appears in ESV, KJV, NLT. The Greek word *διό* is translated therefore. With *και* it can mean "and so" still drawing a conclusion.

## About God:

His faithfulness. He promises and he acts as he has promised. This is seen in the short term promises to Mary being fulfilled. It is seen in the long term promise to David being fulfilled - it was not forgotten or neglected by God. In the fullness of time, according to his own plan and purpose, the promise was fulfilled.

We see that God is aware of individual humans and our character. The messenger Gabriel wasn't sent to find any woman, but God sent Gabriel to Mary in that time and place. We are individually known to God. In spite of the multitudes, you are personally known to God.

## About Mary:

Mary was a peasant girl in a humble town on the outskirts of the land of Israel. She was most likely a young teenager possibly as young as 14 given the marriage customs of the day. She was betrothed to Joseph but not yet married. Three times it is stated that she is a virgin.

Mary is naturally frightened at the angel's greeting. This is a normal Biblical response to seeing an angel. And the angel, as is usual, tells her not to be afraid. When she is told the overwhelming message he has for her, her reaction is not to dismiss it or refuse but to wonder about it – as well she might! The personal consequences could be fatal. Adultery was punishable by stoning. She could be rejected by Joseph and left an unwanted pregnant woman with a bad reputation and little hope of another marriage.

Then comes her response. It is one of submission and trust: "I am the Lord's servant. May it be to me as you have said." What a fine response that is! This is the ideal answer from anyone called by God. She has no credentials, no skill, nothing to offer but willing obedience and availability. When God calls us to a task, a role, an action, we may be inclined to argue. We may not want to do; we may not like the consequences – real or imagined. However, we show the right attitude when we say to God, "Use me as you will. I will not refrain from serving because I do not feel qualified or usable." God wants us to trust him. He will not call us to something he cannot equip us to do. It is in our weakness that his strength is shown best.

Mary gives us the example of going wherever God leads, knowing that he will supply whatever is needed. Thirty years later, she showed the same attitude when she instructed the servants at the wedding feast in Cana, "Do whatever he tells you."<sup>5</sup>

Friends, we can all grow in the lessons from this passage. We can grow in trust and belief in our miracle-working God.

We can grow in our understanding and trust in Jesus our saviour.

We can grow in willingness to say "Use me" to God and not hold back through fear or self-doubt.

All scriptural quotations are taken from the *Holy Bible: New International Version* ©1972, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Societies. Used by permission of Zondervan Publishing House. All rights reserved.

---

<sup>5</sup> John 2:5