

## Mary in Scripture - Part 2 of 8 - The Annunciation

**Reading: Luke 1:26-38; Acts 1:14**

### Gospel Annunciations

This scene is found only in Luke, a gospel dated in the mid 80s, addressed to third generation Christians. It is a gospel closely related to its sequel, Acts of the Apostles, the story of the birth of the Church, and, as in the gospel, 'the mother of Jesus was there.' It is from Luke's gospel that authentic knowledge of Mary and devotion to her emerges.

Luke begins the earliest picture of Mary as a maiden of twelve to thirteen years of age. Writing from a post-Resurrection perspective he touches upon the mystery of her calling to be the Virgin Mother of the Messiah. The scene has been carefully prepared by the foretelling of the birth of the Baptist in the annunciation to Zechariah, a parallel (or diptych) to interpret the meaning of Mary's call.

The connections are apparent to the careful reader: the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy and same angelic messenger, Gabriel. The contrasts are there too: Zechariah in the south and the temple in Jerusalem, with Mary in the north living at Nazareth in Galilee; Elizabeth's advanced years and barrenness with Mary's youth and potential.

### The Annunciation Pattern

The dogmatic constitution *Dei Verbum* states that the Old Testament "contains matters ... in them, too, the mystery of our salvation is *present* in a hidden way" (DV #15). Luke has gone back to the literary form called 'Annunciation', that occurs often through the Old Testament. Luke uses it for both John the Baptist and Mary; Matthew will use it also; it is basic to the call of Isaiah and Jeremiah as well as others.

The five steps in the pattern are as follows:

1. The *appearance* of an angel of the Lord or the Lord.
2. *Fear* as reaction to being confronted by such a presence.
3. The divine *message*:
  - a. The visionary is addressed by name.
  - b. A qualifying phrase describing the visionary.
  - c. The visionary is urged not to be afraid.
  - d. A woman is with child or is about to conceive.
  - e. She will give birth to the (male) child.
  - f. The name by which the child is to be called.
  - g. Interpretation of the name (etymology).
  - h. The future accomplishments of the child.
4. An *objection* by the visionary as to how this can be or a request for a sign.
5. The *giving of a sign* to reassure the visionary.

### The Characters

Gabriel, whose name means 'strength of God' or 'man of God' brings good news to the parents of the precursor, John, and the holy one, the Son of God, Jesus. As with the earlier books of the Bible, angels and humans are involved in God's plans. The mention of

Elizabeth in her sixth month (the sign element) will lead to a three month visit by Mary (vv.26 and 56). In v.27 Luke unlike Matthew focuses exclusively on the Virgin Mary rather than on Joseph of the house of David. Mary herself would likely be of the priestly line of Aaron as was her cousin.

God's first greeting to Mary through Gabriel is "You have been found to be full of grace." Now we know who Mary is in the plan of salvation and how she is called or named by God. Mary is already found to be with grace even before she gives her consent to be the mother of the Messiah. From the earliest times in the church Mary has been called the all-holy one. The transformation of Mary operated by the grace of God has already taken place prior to the Annunciation. Already we can see the grounds for the dogma of the Immaculate Conception. What is being said here is that God, in loving kindness, has graced Mary in such a way that she never turned away from God. Gabriel tells her "You have found favour with God."

### **Back to the Old Testament**

Luke does not quote the Isaiah 7:14 prophecy, the virgin (Greek Bible *parthenos*; Hebrew Bible *'almah* 'young woman') shall conceive, as Matthew does but Luke too implies its fulfilment in the calling of Mary to respond in trust and faith to the angel and to conceiving and giving birth to Jesus. Like the gospel writer we already know the full story of Jesus' life, death and Resurrection. Luke is painting this scene within his inspired contemplative reflection, capturing it through the lens of sacred time rather than as a precise chronological moment. The entire mystery of Christ is captured at a glance through the lens of Resurrection faith.

The titles of Christ appear: "He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of....David....he will reign over the house of Jacob....of his kingdom there will be no end." These Messianic and Christological terms will be applied to Jesus throughout the gospel, but are realisations of identity that come after the Resurrection about who it was who walked among us. Given that the last part of the gospel to be written was the Infancy Narratives, then such late understandings are applied to the beginnings. We must never forget that out of Easter came the Gospels, including the Annunciation account itself.

Mary asks how all this is possible since she has no marital relationship with Joseph. Then begins the dialogue through the angel's response that the Holy Spirit will overshadow her and thus the one born of her will be called holy and a son of God. It is because of his conception by the Holy Spirit that Jesus is Son of God. 'Son of God' is used of Adam in Luke's genealogy (3:38) and for the Risen Christ in Acts 13:13, implying one who lives because of God's direct, creative intervention. The full meaning of the title 'Son of God' is recognised by his disciples only after the Resurrection: "The apostles proclaimed above all the death & resurrection of the Lord. *After Jesus rose from the dead and his divinity was clearly perceived*, faith far from destroying the memory of what had transpired, rather confirmed it. (OTHG, also DV and CCC, my italics).

### **Nothing will be impossible with God**

This already graced young woman responds with her free consent to the summons of God: “Here I am, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.” These words are an assertion and expression of faith and an insertion of herself into the long line of women who have, in the course of Israel’s history, faithfully served the purposes of God – Sarah, Ruth, Deborah, Judith, Esther, etc. Her response contrasts with that of Zechariah, and is more than adequate to the display of God’s grace working in her. In this young woman of Nazareth we see the first instance of what will be a constant pattern in Luke: the generous response of those on the margins to the outreach of God’s race.

### **Reference**

Buby, B. (1997). *Mary of Galilee vol.1: Mary in the New Testament*. St. Pauls: Manila.

CCC = *Catechism of the Catholic Church*

DV = *Dei verbum*

OTHG = *On the historical truth of the Gospels*

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