

Christmas Through Mary's Eyes – The Announcement

November 30, 2008 - Luke 1:26-38

I've got an assignment for you today. Imagine you live 2012 years ago. God is going to advance His salvation plan. It's time to send Jesus into the world. He gives you the job of figuring out how to do it. There are no budget limitations. You have access to all kinds of power. You can even do a virgin birth. What might we come up with if we were given that assignment?

Well I suspect some guys might want to do a WWF (World Wrestling Federation) style entry. Now first I need to make a disclaimer. I do not watch WWF. In fact, I can't stand professional wrestling and all the chest thumping that goes on. But I do have the Score sports channel. Occasionally I turn on the Score to read the scores in the bottom right hand corner. Sometimes WWF is on while I'm catching up on the scores.

I see these unnaturally built men come through lights, smoke and loud music in front of a big crowd. Thousands of people scream "Snakeman rules" or whatever they yell. It seems to work for that crowd. So maybe we would have Jesus arrive through the smoke and lights to a screaming crowd. Or at least he could run out through an

inflated football helmet with a God logo on the side at a football game. That would be impressive.

If you're a hip woman, maybe you'd think Jesus should go on the red carpet in Hollywood. Then he could give some interviews to the hottest magazines.

Wherever Jesus appears, it's got to be in a significant media saturated city like New York, Paris, Toronto or maybe Hollywood. And if we want to go with God's idea of a virgin birth, we've got to pick a woman with an international reputation. That will automatically draw attention to Jesus. Maybe a singing star or a movie star; how about Angelina Jolie? The world seems fascinated with her kids. How might we introduce Jesus to the world? How did God do it?

Well God used His own extraordinary resources combined with very ordinary earthly resources to bring Jesus here. God broke every marketing rule in the book to announce Jesus' coming. Yet it worked. The fact many of us in this room call ourselves Christ followers proves it. So today we begin to explore how God introduced Jesus to the world.

As we enter into the Advent or Christmas season today, we will again focus on the Christmas story from the Bible. Last year, we looked at the account from Matthew. This year, we will be looking at the Gospel of Luke. I've decided to focus our study on Christmas through Mary's eyes. Luke provides the most detail about Mary through his account of the Christmas story.

But who was this Luke fellow anyway? Luke was NOT an eyewitness to the events of Christ's life. He was not a disciple and we don't even know if he met Christ. We do know, however, that he became one of the Apostle Paul's companions. Four times in the book of Acts, which Luke also wrote, he uses the term "we" to describe Paul and his companions. Luke accompanied Paul on some of his missionary journeys and trips. Paul reveals to us that Luke was a doctor. In Colossians 4:14, Paul calls Luke "our beloved physician."

Luke's training and the circles he frequented seem to direct the Gospel of Luke. In fact, in the first four verses of the book, he tells us who he's writing to and why he's writing it.

Luke 1:1-4 (ESV)

1:1 Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, **2** just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, **3** it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, **4** that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.

Luke reveals a lot here. Many have written narratives of Christ's life. There were eyewitnesses who delivered the narrative to Christians later on. He followed all things closely. He presents an orderly account. Luke did careful research. He interviewed eyewitnesses. He compiled the data and now presents a historical narrative of Christ's life. Why? Verse 4. "So that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught." You know the "stories" about Christ, Theophilus. Some people will try to tell you they are just stories, myths, inspirational writings that didn't really happen. But I've compiled this Gospel of Luke so that you may know with certainty the things you have been taught."

Luke goes on to write about salvation history. God works out his purpose. The life and ministry of Jesus would clearly reveal this. But it didn't finish with Jesus. God's purposes continued right into the life and witness of the early church. It continues today through this

church and our lives. Through these broad brush strokes revealing the advance of God's purposes, Luke especially highlights God's concern for individual people. In fact, Luke highlights groups that were looked down upon in the first century: women, children, the poor and the disgraced. We see his emphasis in the first chapters where Luke describes the birth narratives of both John the Baptist and Jesus with much focus on their mothers. So today as we enter into Luke's Gospel, he points out who and what God uses to accomplish His salvation purposes. By the end of our time together, my hope is you will have several answers to that question and some things to consider regarding your own availability to God's purpose.

Luke 1:26-38 (ESV)

Birth of Jesus Foretold

26 In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, **27** to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. **28** And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" **29** But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. **30** And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. **31** And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. **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, **33** and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

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

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. **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. **37** For nothing will be impossible with God." **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.

Now my claim from this text is that; God uses extraordinary resources combined with ordinary resources to accomplish His salvation purposes. God's salvation purpose is to reconcile sinful man with himself.

E = Extraordinary; O = Ordinary

Who/what does God use to accomplish His saving purposes?

Extraordinary resource #1 **E#1 – God used the angel Gabriel (26)**

"In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God." The sixth month refers to Elizabeth's pregnancy mentioned in the first verses of Luke 1. Now whenever angels are involved, something extraordinary is about to happen. There are lots of angels in the Bible. But Gabriel is one of only 2 angels named in the Bible. The other is Michael. Gabriel is a messenger for God. In the account before this one, he announced to an older priest named Zechariah, that his elderly barren wife Elizabeth will have a son. He would be the forerunner to the Messiah or Promised One. Zechariah doubts this can happen. So

in pronouncing judgment upon Zechariah for doubting angelic orders. Luke 1:19 “I am Gabriel who stands in the presence of God and I was sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news.” Gabriel also appears in Daniel 8 to explain some of Daniel’s visions to him. Revelation 8 tell us there are seven angels who stand before God. So Gabriel is a high ranking angel in God’s order who has now been sent to deliver another message. Luke must have received this information from Mary or someone close to her because no one else was there when Gabriel arrived. So this account begins with God’s extraordinary resource in the angel Gabriel. But God sends Gabriel to an ordinary place.

Ordinary Resource #1 - **O #1 – God uses the ordinary city in Galilee named Nazareth** to accomplish His salvation purposes. Verse 26 again – God sent Gabriel “to a city of Galilee named Nazareth.” It seems, at first glance, that this is a pretty important place. After all, it is a “city.” But actually, Greek doesn’t have a word for what we’d call a town. It had a word for village or polis (city) which really meant town. “Metropolis” means city. So this Nazareth was not just a little village. But it was not much more than a town.

Yet more belittling is the mention of where Nazareth was located – “in Galilee.” To us, Galilee is this wonderful region where Jesus performed miracles and sailed on the Sea of Galilee. Ancient readers knew of Jerusalem and the region of Judea. That’s where you found the action. That’s where anyone with political aspirations needed to be born. But Gabriel goes to an unknown town in a region looked down upon by many in the capital. It’s kind of like God sent Gabriel to Westlock or Devon or some little place like that. But this is exactly where Gabriel needed to go. For more of God’s ordinary resources would be found there.

O #2 - God used an ordinary betrothed couple to accomplish His salvation purposes. (27). Verse 27 Gabriel was sent “to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph of the house of David.” In our day, an ordinary engaged couple would usually consist of a couple of twenty somethings who have jobs and some direction for their lives. In those days, girls were betrothed to marry very young. Notice the text says she was a virgin betrothed to a man. These were often arranged marriages and it was normal for girls to get betrothed in their 13th year. That means they could be 12 years old in

their 13th year. Grade 7 or Grade 8 girls; you're likely the same age Mary was when she got betrothed. Betrothal was legally binding. You actually had to go through a divorce to break off the betrothal. This was still normal in their context. Just as Luke named the ordinary city Gabriel went to, he names the man. Joseph was a good Hebrew name but nothing spectacular. He was a descendent of David but so were the many others who would travel to Bethlehem that Christmas.

Luke finishes verse 27 with another point. "And the virgin's name was Mary." Here we find Ordinary resource #3 – **O #3 – God used an ordinary virgin named Mary** to accomplish His salvation purposes. Now why does Luke make this statement? He's already made mention of the girl. He's already mentioned her virginity. But he goes back to her to accomplish two purposes. One, he points out to the reader that her virginity will somehow play a huge role in what's about to happen. And two, he names her. Though he has pointed out her ordinary status, he does not want to follow ordinary convention by leaving her a nameless woman. Yes she is a young girl from an ordinary town in an ordinary situation even with an ordinary name.

But she does have a name and is about to face the greatest and scariest news of her life.

Verse 28. And he (Gabriel) came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you." The expression, "Hail Mary, full of grace" is derived from this verse. However, Gabriel is not saying she is the giver of grace but the receiver of great favor from God. She will play a privileged role in God's salvation plan.

But this good news is met with concern by this ordinary girl. Verse 29 – She was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be." We don't know what troubled her because she doesn't say it. Perhaps it was fear at the sight of an angel. Perhaps it was that in her modesty, she did not understand why a high ranking angel should greet her in such special terms. But Luke has this information and shares it with us.

Gabriel senses her fear. So he comforts her with words of assurance. "Do not be afraid Mary, for you have found favor with God." As He continues we discover another extraordinary resource God is about to introduce into this situation.

Verse 31 – “And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus.” Extraordinary Resource #2 – E #2 – God would advance His salvation purpose through **an unborn son named Jesus**. Again Luke provides a name. This time, the name means a great deal. Jesus or “Joshua” in Hebrew means “the Lord is salvation.” Mary’s son will somehow be connected to God’s salvation purpose.

But Gabriel doesn’t stop with the simple name. Verse 32 – He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High.” Extraordinary resource #3 – E #3 – **An unborn son who will be called Son of the Most High**. Gabriel adds to Jesus’ name. This title sets him apart from all others and makes him Son of God in a special sense. He will be given the throne of his father David. So even though he would not receive the lineage of David through his earthly father Joseph, he would receive it somehow through Mary. And Gabriel declares, He will reign forever. His kingdom will not end. There were high expectations for the Savior or Messiah in the first century. The Jews anticipated a ruler who would deliver them from the Romans and give them their freedom. But they didn’t expect him to live forever. Here

Gabriel picks up the ancient prophesies of an eternal kingdom for this son Mary will bear.

But all these titles and magnificent declarations miss one key point. Mary is not too shy to speak up about it. She doesn’t doubt but she wonders aloud. “How can this be since I am a virgin?”

Gabriel’s answer provides Extraordinary resource #4 – E #4 – **The Holy Spirit and the power of God will come upon Mary to bring about a virgin birth**. “Speaking with reverent reserve, Gabriel says the Holy Spirit will “come upon” Mary and the power of God will somehow “overshadow” here. This delicate expression rules out the crude idea of the Holy Spirit “mating” with Mary. Gabriel makes it clear that the conception will be the result of divine activity.

Now, this is one of the most difficult and disbelieved claims in the Bible. You might even struggle with not only the virgin birth but the entire Bible. You might be here today because you were dragged here, pressured or simply to be polite. You might view me as “a curious example of arrested development” but nothing more. Some will ask “Weren’t these just inspiring stories to encourage people to

consider Jesus special?” Isn’t this account much like pagan myths of gods and women?

Well first of all, the virgin birth is a distinctive Christian doctrine. There is no Jewish parallel. But in addition to that, the pagan myths tell of gods mating with women. So the virgin birth is not parallel to the pagan myths either.

We must also consider the source. Remember Luke offered careful investigation. His purpose was to assure Theophilus of the certainty of the things he’d been taught. Luke wrote the Gospel so that readers like Theophilus would know these are not just myths and fairy tales with which we can enchant our children. Luke claims this happened to real people in real places.

If you think friend, “it’s a nice story, but it doesn’t work for me.” Think again. It’s not a nice story if it’s a made up one claiming to be true. It’s the biggest lie in all of history. Luke goes to great lengths to prove the historicity of this story. It’s not about what works for you. It’s about what’s true and what isn’t. This account claims Jesus was born of a virgin; there is no one in all of history who comes close to that. So either He is who this book claims He is or He’s a liar;

this is a lie. It’s not a nice story. So will you consider or reconsider the possibility that this might be true?

Gabriel finishes his explanation to Mary with one more resource in verse 36. Ordinary resource #4 – **O #4 – God uses An elderly woman called barren who was now in her sixth month carrying the Messiah’s forerunner to accomplish His salvation purposes.** Gabriel has stated how the virgin birth will occur. But now he backs up this claim with a real life of example of God’s ability to overcome huge obstacles. Luke has already told this story. But Mary had not yet heard the news. Gabriel announces that the one “called barren” is now in her sixth month. If God can enable a barren woman to have a child, He can make a virgin birth happen. Gabriel concludes “nothing is impossible for God.” Mary has heard enough. She heroically embraces this call. Even though it might mean shame, embarrassment and stoning, she joins in God’s salvation plan.

God uses extraordinary and ordinary resources to accomplish His salvation purposes. That means God can use you. We are ordinary people living in an ordinary place. St. Albert is not world famous. We might be well known in certain circles. But we’re really

ordinary people. Yet God continues to combine His extraordinary resources with ordinary resources we have. Many of you bring an eternal perspective to those at work panicking because of the economic situation. God uses some of you in the right place at the right time to bring God's message to a person in need.

I talked to someone this week hindered from their regular workout because of an injury. So they had to go at a slower pace. That meant they connected with someone who regularly worked out more slowly. They ended up talking. My friend discovered the other person was searching because his church had gone in directions he could no longer support. So there was an ordinary Christian slowed down by a physical ailment doing an ordinary activity of walking; God brought them together to encourage that gentleman that there is still truth.

Many of you will encounter lots of people through Christmas gatherings. Your presence might be used by God to provide comfort, reassurance and/or hope for someone there. Some of you use your ordinary gift of cooking or baking to encourage the shut-ins or those with sickness in their home. Some of you pray and through your prayers God brings healing or improvement or blessing. God sparked

a vision in some of you to serve as Operation Christmas Child collection center last March at the Association meetings. Now we've had the privilege of serving beside other Christians from this community to serve in this capacity.

Many of you brought Shoe boxes and backpacks last week; some of you will provide backpacks for the Kindred House; some provided winter suits for needy kids; some will provide mittens and toques for Kinettes; some of you have served a meal at Mustard Seed. These are all ordinary things but when combined with God's extraordinary resources of grace, love and strength, God's salvation work advances.

You never know what ordinary place or space God will use to accomplish His saving purposes. Our job is to walk with Him through daily life. Offer our ordinary resources for His purposes. And then respond like Mary when He calls. "I am the Lord's servant, may it be done to me as you have said."