

The Stature of Mary's Baby, and Your Reaction!

Luke 1:26-38

Reformed Church of Wainuiomata, 22 December 2019, 16:30

(Sermon put together by Pieter van Huyssteen with due acknowledgement)

Intro

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ,

You and I have just heard the Holy-Spirit-inspired words of our text (Lk 1:26-38).

Do you believe these words?

Do you realise that there are millions (if not billions) of people on earth today who will laugh at these words and their message?

Yes, some of them look at our passage and say, "I don't think I can believe this story, because this is the only place in the Bible where this story is told!"¹

Then some others look at it and say, "Ha!" "We have heard similar stories from other ancient cultures – folklore that try to embellish the lives of human heroes!" "Yes, we have, for example heard how the Macedonians, tried to make Alexander the Great greater than what he was. So, they claimed that he was born through the union of his mother with the god Zeus!"²

Well, what such skeptics can't (or don't want to) see, is that there is a world of difference between the atmosphere of the pagan stories and that of our text. Indeed, it's only through some very speculative and complex reconstructions of ancient pagan stories that a person can come to see parallels between these stories and our text!

And here's the point: Unless the Holy Spirit works faith in the hearts of people, the Christian can, until he is blue in the face, preach the Good News from our passage, and yet that will not make a dent on cold & hard hearts!

But here's the main message of our passage. It says: "Churchgoer, listen carefully and come see the stature of Mary's baby!" "Then believe, be encouraged, and serve God!"

Here are the three points of this sermon:

- Stature of Mary's Baby
- Encouragement
- Service

Stature of Mary's Baby

¹ Cf. e.g. "The silence of most of the NT writers. The fact that the story is scarcely alluded to elsewhere in the NT (other than in Mt.) is not necessarily an objection to its historicity. If true, the story would have been known originally only in the family of Jesus, and it is not likely that it would have been told publicly. Slanders were made about Jesus' parenthood which would suggest that people knew or suspected that it had not been normal" (Marshall, I. H. (1994). [Luke](#). In D. A. Carson, R. T. France, J. A. Motyer, & G. J. Wenham (Eds.), *New Bible commentary: 21st century edition* (4th ed., pp. 982–983). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press).

² Cf. e.g. **Alexander the Great as God** – an article (posted 28 July 2016) in which Donald L Wasson describes the ancient myths surrounding the birth of Alexander the Great. <https://www.ancient.eu/article/925/alexander-the-great-as-a-god/>

For comments in general regarding stories of gods having sexual intercourse with human beings, cf. Marshall, I. H. (1994). [Luke](#). In D. A. Carson, R. T. France, J. A. Motyer, & G. J. Wenham (Eds.), *New Bible commentary: 21st century edition* (4th ed., pp. 982–983). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press.

Our text tells us that God sent the Angel Gabriel to a young woman called Mary who lived in the province of Galilee in a town called Nazareth, one of Ancient Israel's less-esteemed villages.³

Mary was a virgin and she was engaged to Joseph, a young man from the line of King David.

Engagement in those days was a state that you entered into in a formal and legal way – yes, by contract sealed by oath!

Even though such a couple, in God-honouring way, were not yet living together, the young man could call his fiancée “wife,” and she could refer to him as her “husband.”

Well, suddenly, Gabriel entered Mary's house and said, “Greetings (literally: “Rejoice”)⁴ you favoured one!” “The Lord is with you!”

Wow! What kind words of blessing!

But, despite the warm & cordial atmosphere which Gabriel tried to create, Mary was greatly perplexed when she saw & heard him!

After all, although, by all indications, Mary was of high moral character, she was still a sinner who suddenly stood face to face with a brilliant, sinless being!

So, again, Gabriel calms her down, saying, “***Do not be afraid... for you have found favour with God***” (v.30)!

And what enormous favour it was!!

After all, Gabriel now tells her that she is going to expect a baby – a son; in fact, *God's Son*!

Then Mary asks, “But how can this be, seeing that I am not knowing a man⁵ (seeing that I'm not intimate with a man)?”

Gabriel answers, “***The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you...***”⁶

I want to focus on the word “overshadow.”

My brother & sister, this very same word is also used there where, at one time, Moses could not enter the tabernacle because the cloud of God's *presence covered⁷ the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle.*⁸

Yes, it was at that stage that we then read (in Ex 40:35), “***Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud had settled/dwelt on it...***”⁹

³ Cf. Jn 1:45-46, “***Philip found Nathanael and told him, “We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.”***”

⁴⁶ “***Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?***” Nathanael asked” (Emphasis mine).

⁴ Χαίρει – a Present Active Imperative 2nd Person Singular of χαίρω whose basic meaning is: **to be in a state of happiness and well-being, rejoice, be glad.** However, as imperative, it became the normal way to greet a person, from there why many English versions have rendered it as: “Greetings!” For this and more cf. e.g. Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000). [A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature](#) (3rd ed., p. 1074). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

⁵ ἐπεὶ ἄνδρα οὐ γινώσκω = *seeing/since a man not I know* (in which “know” means having sexual intercourse)

⁶ [New American Standard Bible: 1995 update](#). (1995). (Lk 1:35). La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.

⁷ In Hebrew, *wayakhās* (וַיִּכְסֶה) which is a Pi`el Waw Consecutive Imperfect 3rd Masculine Singular of the verb *khissah* (כִּסָּה), *to cover*.

⁸ [New American Standard Bible: 1995 update](#). (1995). (Ex 40:34). La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.

⁹ Ex 40:35 in Hebrew: וְלֹא-יָכַל מֹשֶׁה לְבֹאֵ אֶל-אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד כִּי-יָשַׁב עָלָיו הָעֶנָּן וַיִּכְבֹּד יְהוָה מְלֵא אֶת-הַמִּשְׁכָּן.:

The Hebrew word expresses the idea of *settling down*; of *dwelling*; of *resting* and *abiding*.

And so, it was by a special work of God that His Holy Spirit would come down on Mary; yes, that the power of the Most High would, through *covering*, *overshadowing*, *dwelling*, *resting* and *abiding*, work conception in Mary!

Wow!

My brother & sister, just like God Himself is too high for us to fathom, so, too, can you & I not fully understand & describe in biological/physiological terms how exactly God did this.

But what we do get from our text is that, of this special Baby, *Mary* would be the mother and *God Himself* would be the Father!

And in this way, then, would be fulfilled the prophetic word spoken by Daniel to King Nebuchadnezzar when Daniel said to him *that a rock would be cut out, but not by human hands/doing*. – *a Rock that would strike the statue of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream – a statue representing the world’s empires up until the coming of God’s Anointed One – that Anointed One who would be that “Rock” not made by human hands/will, but by God; yes, that Rock that would come and crush all worldly rule to establish God’s Kingdom that would never end!*¹⁰

A “Rock” – a baby – conceived not by human doing!

And so, this also explains why Gabriel tells Mary (in v. 32 and v.35) that this baby Boy would be called: “*Son of the Most High*,” and “*Son of God*,” and why He would be *holy*! This also explains why the *LORD God would give Him the throne of His father David* (v.32), and why *He would reign over the house of Jacob forever, and why His kingdom would have no end* (cf. v 33).

In other words, “Dear Mary, can you see why you have found favour in the eyes of God?” “*Your Son will also be God’s Son!*” “And this Son will be fulfilling the promises God, more than a thousand years ago, made with King David that God would give him a Son from his offspring who would reign on his throne forever!”¹¹ “Surely, although Solomon was the first of David’s offspring to rule on David’s throne, he was still only a sinful mortal human being who reigned for but a season.” “After all, Mary, although Solomon was also called, “Son of God,”¹² God was not his Father in the way that God will be your

Ex 40:35 in Greek: καὶ οὐκ ἠδυνάσθη Μωυσεῖς εἰσελθεῖν εἰς τὴν σκηνὴν τοῦ μαρτυρίου, ὅτι ἐπεσκίαζεν ἐπ’ αὐτὴν ἡ νεφέλη καὶ δόξης κυρίου ἐπλήσθη ἡ σκηνή.

Lk 1:35 in Greek: Πνεῦμα ἅγιον ἐπελεύσεται ἐπὶ σὲ καὶ δύναμις ὑψίστου ἐπισκιάσει σοι.

¹⁰ Cf. Dan 2:34 & 44, “While you were watching, a rock was cut out, but not by human hands. It struck the statue on its feet of iron and clay and smashed them. ... In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever.”

¹¹ Cf. 2 Sm 7:11b-17, **Moreover, the Lord declares to you that the Lord will make you a house.** ¹² **When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom.** ¹³ **He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.** ¹⁴ **I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men,** ¹⁵ **but my steadfast love will not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you.** ¹⁶ **And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.’ ” ¹⁷ **In accordance with all these words, and in accordance with all this vision, Nathan spoke to David.****

¹² Cf. 2 Sm 7:13-14, **He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.** ¹⁴ **I will be his father, and he will be my son. When he does wrong, I will punish him with the rod of men, with floggings inflicted by men** (Emphasis mine).

Son's Father!" "So, Mary, here in the person of your (and God's) Son, God will be fulfilling that promise made to David!" "Mary, that's why, by God's command, you must call this Boy, "Jesus" (Yeshua), which means, "He saves" – short for *Jehoshua* which means, "Yahweh saves!"

My brother & sister, we have just heard point 1 of this sermon. So, what is the message point 1 holds out to you and me? Yes, how does point 1's message apply to you & me? Well, in short: it wants you & me to see (and be stunned by) the stature of Mary's baby! Look, Mary's Son had the highest stature a human being has ever had – and ever will have!

No wonder the Apostle Paul would later on say that, regarding this Jesus, *God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in Him*,¹³ and, in Him *all the fullness of Deity lives in bodily form*!¹⁴

Well, so far re point 1: "Stature of Mary's Baby."
Here is point 2...

Encouragement

My brother & sister, how did Mary respond?

Well, not in unbelief! Yes, she did not respond in the manner that Zechariah reacted when the same angel (Gabriel) told him he would have a son!

You see, when Mary said, "How can this be?" she was not mistrusting the words of Gabriel. No, she just wanted to have clarity as to how a woman who is not yet married – a woman who is not yet in the state of *knowing* a man – could possibly have a baby!¹⁵

Well, it was then that Gabriel encouraged Mary; yes, when he told her about The Holy Spirit who would come upon her, and about the power of the Most High that would overshadow her (v.35).

But then Gabriel encouraged her further by giving her a sign to confirm that what he had just told her, would indeed come true!

Here is the confirming sign: i.e. that an older relative of Mary, Elizabeth who had been barren and well-advanced in years,¹⁶ was already six months pregnant with a baby who would become the forerunner of Mary's Son!

Yes, Gabriel's words said as much as: "Mary, here is for you a confirming sign!" "You remember Elizabeth, your older relative who was barren?" "Well, God has powerfully worked in her barren womb so that she is now expecting!" "Granted, unlike the baby you're about to conceive, Elizabeth's baby has a *human* father, but, nevertheless, God still engineered that conception inside barren Elizabeth's womb!" "So, Mary, go to Elizabeth and see for yourself, and be strong!"

My brother & sister, how else did Gabriel encourage Mary?

Well, by saying to her (in v.37), "...*nothing will be impossible with God.*"

¹³ Col 1:19 *For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him...*

¹⁴ Col 2:9 *For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form*

¹⁵ Cf. Lk 1:34 *Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?"* (NASB); *And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I have not had sexual relations with a man?"* (Lexham English Bible, which on this point renders the Greek better. The Greek literally translates to, "...since a man I do not know").

¹⁶ Cf. Lk 1:7 *But they had no children, because Elizabeth was barren; and they were both well along in years.*

Well, think with me: Can God really, without the help of a human husband, make Mary conceive? To ask it in another way: Is baby Jesus the first human being whom God created directly – yes, without human intervention?

No!

God has done that before! So, God has already shown that He can do it!

You ask, “When did God do that?”

Well, when He created Adam!¹⁷ Indeed, no human being helped God *then*!

Thus, is it nonsense to say, “Nothing is impossible for God”? Is it impossible that God, without the help of a human husband, could work conception in Mary?

No!

Not at all!

He can do it! He has shown His creative power in abundance!

But I think mankind (also you & I) get, at times, so used to life in this world that we look at ourselves and at creation from a mere under-the-sun perspective! And so, unless we force ourselves to stand still and look at life from an above-the-sun perspective, you & I will not realise that the birth of even *every* baby is a God-initiated miracle! I mean, consider how small the cells are from which a baby gets formed! They are microscopic! Yet, by God’s design, in those microscopic cells already sits the germ-seed of every limb and organ of what will become a fully-grown human being: the heart is already represented by cells in that unformed tissue; so are the arms & legs, and the ears & nose; so, too, the reproductive organs although they won’t be needed until many years later! And so, what miracle – the conception, growth and birth of every baby! And how true the words of Gabriel: “Nothing is impossible for God!”

So, what do you & I see here under point 2 of this sermon?

Well, we see that when God calls someone for a task, He also kindly & graciously grants that person encouraging confirmation by which He strengthens him/her for the task which He has called them to! That’s what He did to Mary!

Here is the last point...

Willing Service

My brother & sister, you & I can only imagine how Mary must have felt about this news! I mean, what will Joseph say/do when he sees she is pregnant? What will the people in small-town Nazareth say? Think of all the gossip! Will they ever believe her?

What if they don’t?

Could it be that they will even stone her? After all, is that not what God’s Law prescribed for marital unfaithfulness?¹⁸

¹⁷ Point made by Bock, “The only other person to have had such a direct divine intervention in his birth was Adam—a point Luke will note in 3:38” (Bock, D. L. (1994). *Luke* (Lk 1:26–29). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press).

¹⁸ Cf. Dt 22:13-21 *If any man takes a wife and goes in to her and then hates her¹⁴ and accuses her of misconduct and brings a bad name upon her, saying, ‘I took this woman, and when I came near her, I did not find in her evidence of virginity,’¹⁵ then the father of the young woman and her mother shall take and bring out the evidence of her virginity to the elders of the city in the gate.¹⁶ And the father of the young woman shall say to the elders, ‘I gave my daughter to this man to marry, and he hates her;¹⁷ and behold, he has accused her of misconduct, saying, “I did not find in your daughter evidence of virginity.” And yet this is the evidence of my daughter’s virginity.’ And they shall spread the cloak before the elders of the city.¹⁸ Then the elders of that city shall take the man and whip him,¹⁹ and they shall fine him a hundred shekels of silver and give them to the father of the young woman, because he has brought a bad name upon a virgin of Israel. And she shall be his wife. He may not divorce her all his days.²⁰ But if the thing is true, that evidence of*

Yet, despite all these concerns and fears, Mary said to Gabriel, “***Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.***”¹⁹

And so, Mary showed great faith! She believed the words of God! In particular, she believed that the Son whom she would conceive and give birth to would be God’s Son – i.e. God (and no human man) would be the Father of this holy Child!

Did Mary, at this stage, have the full picture of her Son’s task – of His pain and suffering? Could she, here where she had to respond to Gabriel, envisage how a sword would pierce her very own soul²⁰ some thirty-plus years later where she would be standing near the cross?

I doubt!!

But she trusted that the One who has begun something great in her will also know how to give strength and uphold whatever betide!

How does this apply to you & me?

Well, firstly, that as you & I hear the words of our text, we will believe that Mary’s Baby is who the Bible says He is – the Son of God, fully man and fully God!

Secondly, although you & I will not carry Jesus in the way Mary did, we will nevertheless walk with Him and not be ashamed of Him, and that we will serve God Triune obediently and willingly, from the heart; serving on His terms and for His glory, trusting all the time that, for the life and witness to which God has called you & me, He will also give strength to the measure!

Praise God!

AMEN (2,192 words excluding footnotes)

virginity was not found in the young woman,²¹ then they shall bring out the young woman to the door of her father’s house, and the men of her city shall stone her to death with stones, because she has done an outrageous thing in Israel by whoring in her father’s house. So you shall purge the evil from your midst (Emphasis mine).

¹⁹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Lk 1:38). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

²⁰ Cf. Lk 2:34-35, ***Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: “This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against,³⁵ so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too”*** (Emphasis mine).