

God is With Us Luke 1:26-38

Christmas Eve 5pm Service

A few days ago, a friend sent me a quote from a book he was reading that he sent to an unbelieving friend of his. The book was *The Mysterious Case of Rudolf Diesel: Genius, Power, and Deception on the Eve of World War I*.

Here's what you need to know to get this quote: Wilhelm II was the last German Emperor and King of Prussia from 1888 until his abdication in 1918, which marked the end of the German Empire and the House of Hohenzollern's 300-year reign in Prussia and 500-year reign in Brandenburg. (Wikipedia)

What a difference between the way King Jesus chose to arrive in a dusty corner of planet earth and how Kaiser Wilhelm II chose to make his grand entrance known:

“As Wilhelm traveled for state visits in his royal yacht Hohenzollem, a fleet followed. And as he disembarked, behind his person followed three valets, a hairdresser, and an assistant whose sole function was to appear at the proper time with a can of wax used to twist the ends of Wilhelm's mustache into their distinctive upward turns.”

What I want to share with you tonight is not really a sermon, but a short reflection on the announcement of Jesus' birth as recorded in Luke 1:26-28. I will read the text and make some observations as I go.

1. Luke 1:26–28

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!"

The 6th month refers to the 6th month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, who was carrying John the Baptist. In that 6th month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph.

Nazareth was a nowhere town, impossibly small. Even then cities were the location that people believed was where important events happened.

I'm told that some who live and work on the coasts in our country call the land between the west coast and the east coast flyover country. That means it's only of interest or significance as you look down from 30,000 feet while flying from one power coast to the other. I can tell you that people who live in Kentucky don't care much about what people on the coasts think about them. I'm sure that's true of others. Regardless, our impulse drives us to consider what's big as what's significant, what's loud is what matters, where the power brokers of the day live is what bears watching.

But God in his wisdom chose to enter the world in obscurity, and when he came he did so quietly. That is, unless you consider that incident with the shepherds. But even though that was a big show for a moment, it was to the humblest and most obscure workers on the planet. Even back to the ancient Egyptians, people didn't think much of shepherds.

So, God sent the angel Gabriel to a city of Galilee, that's 70 or so miles from Jerusalem, to a town called Nazareth which was a small region of Galilee.

That's like saying where I'm from in Cumberland, KY near Hiram and Totz. Or here locally perhaps that its between Skinquarter and Chula out off of 360, except that's not far enough from the power centers of Richmond.

God sent the angel to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph. This detail leads scholars to think that she was likely very young as that being the age typically that young girls were married. The whole society

would have depended on producing offspring and so girls far younger would marry and begin to have children. As the dad of a sixteen-year-old girl, I'm not recommending we return to that practice, but in this country, we've gone to the opposite extreme, to our own harm, and it's worse in other countries like Japan.

The virgin's name was Mary. Luke speaks this straightforwardly as history. **If the Bible were as riddled with fiction as progressives want to say it is and if we don't take Luke at his word for what he says here, then there's no good reason to trust him later when he offers the Golden Rule or many of the other teachings of Jesus. Luke speaks this just as straightforwardly as he relates the sermon on the mount.**

Gabriel said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you." These words uniquely apply to Mary. But in a sense, they could be said to any believer. You could greet any believer you know in just this way. "Greetings, O favored one. The Lord is with you!" She is not favored because of her religious performance. God favored her based on his choice of her to be the mother of Jesus. She did have a unique role. Obviously no one else would do this but her.

2. Luke 1:29–33

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."

She was greatly troubled at the saying. She tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. She thought about it. It troubled her. It was a

message that interrupted her normal way of living. Nothing would ever be the same for her from this point. In her heart she thought, she wondered, and she sought to discern the significance of these words she was hearing.

And the angel Gabriel then said to her as she is in this heightened state of receptivity and as she ponders the meaning of the angel's words. Unlike the actual birth narratives and unlike at the resurrection appearances of angels, we are told nothing of Gabriel's appearance. However, it's possible that it was not only what he said that greatly troubled her but his appearance as well. But what the text says that troubled her was the saying. Regardless, here's the rest of the message Gabriel delivers, "do not be afraid, Mary."

There's our clue that his appearance might have been a good bit more just an average person talking with her. She's not just troubled, she's afraid, otherwise, there would be no need for him to say this. Do not be afraid Mary, for you have found favor with God. Not you have earned favor with God. You have found favor with God.

Even if we grasp that we have done nothing that would earn God's merit, that's not what we believe in Mary's case. We tend to think that she is something else. Maybe we aren't worthy, but she is. But that's not what he says.

For you have found favor with God but favor, for certain, provides the right description of what has happened to her.

The message continues. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. After he announces his name the angel breaks off into worship!

“He will be great!”

• How unusual to say that of a baby not even born yet. My 2 youngest grandchildren are amazing. And I think they are great. But this was said before he was born.

“He will be called the Son of the Most High”

• I urge you to try an experience for me sometime in the next day or so. We’ve heard these words too many times, we need something to wake us up.

What could Mary have thought about the meaning of that phrase.

“And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David”

“and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever and of his kingdom there will be no end.”

3. Luke 1:35–38

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.

Luke carefully explains to her and for our benefit how this would happen. That Jesus was born of a virgin is the whole ball game. If this is off, none of the rest of this matters. It’s what we would call a first order doctrine. If there’s nothing unique about Jesus’s birth, then there’s nothing unique

about his death, no matter how tragic and how great an injustice. No one can rightly say that the ethical teaching is good, but the miracles are not.

You will conceive in your womb without the involvement of a man. That's what the angel means. Mary wonders how that's going to work. They were not confused about the basic reproductive system.

- **The Holy Spirit will come upon you. And the power of the Most High will overshadow you.**

- **contrast to stories of ancient gods produce demigods**

- **child to be born will be holy. Son of God.**

- **Relative Elizabeth in her old age. Also conceived a son.**

- **Mary, if wrestling with believing this. Already at work. Elizabeth elderly and to this point not able have children. Verifiable fact. 6 months pregnant. Mary goes to visit.**

- **Mary says, behold, I am servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.**

- **We will know we've worshiped well. Heard from God well, when this simple statement gets provoked out of us.**

- **Will you pray. Behold, I am the servant of the Lord. Let it be to me according to your word.**

- **Very much like what Jesus told us to pray later. Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.**