

Title: Let it be, according to your word
Text: Luke 1.26-38
Theme: Promise kept and promise made
Series: Luke #3
Prop Stmtnt: God makes promises that demonstrate how he is keeping promises.

Bubba and Giovanna had been married for some time now. In spite of her efforts to refine his tastes and elevate his sophistication, Bubba still preferred his pizza and football, leaving Giovanna on her own to pursue her love of Caviar and fine art. One day, Giovanna was on a trip to France, when after a particularly thrilling day for her at the Louvre, she called Bubba to see how he was doing. He answered and rather curtly, blurted out that, "well, your dog died." Giovanna was heartbroken but also frustrated that Bubba just said it, so bluntly without preparing her at all. So after she composed herself, she told him that he needed to be more sensitive and tactful when telling someone something like that. Bubba had no idea how to do this, so he asked, "What should I have done?" She said, "Well, on the first day when I called, you should have told me that my dog was on the roof. Then the next day you should have said, that he had fallen off the roof. Then the next day when I called you should say that you took him to the vet and the vet was doing everything possible. The next day you should have said that it wasn't looking too good and then finally, you could tell me that my dog had passed away." Bubba, wasn't too sure about all that, but said, "ok." Giovanna then asked, "how's my mom doing?" Bubba thought for a minute and then said, "She's on the roof."

We can all appreciate the value of preparing someone for news that is hard to hear. But what I want you to see, is how much effort God makes to prepare this world for the most incredible news that anyone could hear and that is, God is coming to this earth to fix the mess that we have made.

Read Text:

Here is the account of Gabriel's appearance to Mary in order to inform her that she is going to have a son. But I want you to see how God does this. It is fascinating! God is not like Bubba. God layers his promises and overlaps them in such a way that piece by piece by piece he builds a case for our faith. He tells us beforehand what is going to happen. Then as he fulfills those predictions, he reveals way more detail about how that is going to work because he wants you to see it. He wants you to believe it. He wants you be amazed by it. He wants you to buy into his plan. He wants your entire heart, soul and mind to be captured totally by God. But in this case, the point of amazement and wonder is also point of skepticism. God announces through the angel Gabriel, that his Son is going to be conceived by a young virgin woman without means of a physical union with a man. Does God expect us to go, "ok, sounds cool."? Certainly, there is a clear sense in which if God says something, we are to believe it. But, notice HOW God says it. God knows that this is a hard for us to believe because this is a miracle. We have never seen anything like this before or since. Of course, people are going to be skeptical. Of course, people are going to wonder how this could be. Mary wondered the same thing. Both Elizabeth and Mary were not naïve, sheltered, ignorant women who had no idea of how babies were made.

They had thousands of years of human history behind them and were both part of strong communities where the women knew how to take care of the women and knew how to talk about things. God knows that this announcement is out of the box for Mary and for us. So, I want you to see how God prepared Mary for this and in so doing he prepared us so that we can believe this as well.

So, now we can begin to understand our text from last week. Gabriel announced to Zechariah that he and Elizabeth were going to have a son in their old age. This was definitely unusual, but not to the level of what Mary was going to experience. John was the forerunner for Jesus. Yes, but in so doing, Elizabeth's "miracle" was the sign that Gabriel used for Mary's sake to assure her that what she just heard was indeed going to take place. So, even in fulfilling his promise to bring about the Elijah figure in the person of John the Baptist, God is easing us into the announcement that Mary is going to give birth to the Son of God and he is easing Mary into it as well. And what we are going to see is that the miracle of the virgin conception of Christ is another means by which God eases us into understanding more and more of who Christ is and what he came to do. This pattern is all through Bible and is particularly clear in the life of Christ.

1. **God tells us all that we need to know** (which is a lot!) (26-30)

God tells us all that we need to know, but he does not tell us all that there is to know. God tells us all that we need to know now, but not all that he is going to reveal as time goes on. Zechariah and Elizabeth and now Mary, and shortly, Joseph needed to know that they were going to have sons and that their sons were major players in the plan of God. A few years later Jesus would call men to follow him as disciples. Little by little he began to reveal to them who he was, what he had come to do, and what it meant to follow him. Piece by piece by piece he laid a foundation for their faith. The way that God reveals with such detail should speak so warmly and directly to your heart. Your God loves you. Your God wants you to see how good, how great, how perfect, how intentional and Sovereign he is. You need him, true. You have to have him, true. But God is not after your obliging submission, he is after your heart. He wants to capture your affections and set them ablaze by his grace. So, understand that these announcements are not out of the blue. They seem like it to Zechariah and Mary, but are part of a detailed plan.

Gabriel's announcement to Mary is very similar to his announcement to Zechariah. The scene is set, the angel appears in private, the person is afraid, Gabriel offers reassurance, Gabriel then delivers his message about a baby being born and states the name of the child, describes the importance of the child, addresses the reaction of the listener, speaks to the role of the Holy Spirit, and concludes with the woman saying words of acceptance and trust. But there are notable differences too. Here Gabriel informs the woman first and not the man, for reasons we will understand. Instead of being in the Temple, this time Gabriel shows up in a village that is so small, that Luke tells us that it was located in Galilee since it was likely that many people had never even heard of it and Mary responds in faith, not disbelief. So, on the one hand, these accounts are linked because the birth of the forerunner anticipates the birth of the Messiah. On other hand, they are linked because Elizabeth is Mary's cousin. And what a gift to Mary it was to

know that God had done something amazing for Elizabeth. And what a gift to Elizabeth it was to know that God had done something even more amazing for Mary.

Again, I will state the obvious. What Gabriel said to Mary is not only unusual, it is humanly impossible. Every generation tends to be guilty of what C.S. Lewis calls “chronological snobbery.” We think that because we have smart phones that we are smarter than anyone else who ever lived before us. That’s a joke. It was just as hard for Mary to believe what she was told as it is us, in fact, probably more because it was happening to her. Did I really hear that? Did I dream that? People are going to think that I am crazy. But there it is. God told her all that she needed in that moment. He didn’t explain that God had to become a man in order to be the 2nd Adam. He did not explain that the Messiah would suffer and die as the perfect sacrifice for our sins and would have to be a human in order to die as the perfect representative for humans. That would come later. All that Mary needed to know now was what Gabriel told her.

I have a lot of questions that I ask God about and I suppose that you do too. But I don’t ask those from a posture of challenge, but from a posture of trust. God does not need to tell me anything more than he has already revealed. You and I have all that we need for life and godliness now. (2 Peter 1.3) Some of you act as if God owes you more, when you really haven’t taken the time to study, understand and listen to what he has already said.

So, in the 6th month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy, Gabriel appears to a virgin in Nazareth. If you knew anything about Nazareth, it was probably not good (John 1.46). Luke also notes that she is betrothed (that is a legally binding engagement) to Joseph who was of the house of David. And then tells us that her name is Mary. Notice something else that God tells Mary through Gabriel. He calls her, “O favored one” and tells her that the Lord is with her. She was terrified for obvious reasons. Mary lives in Nazareth! This is not the place for angels. But then in reassuring her, Gabriel tells her again that she has found favor with God. Now, I will speak more to this in a couple of weeks, but the word that is translated favor is the same word that is often translated grace. Please note what the text is saying. Mary is not the source of grace. Nor is she, as I used to say growing up as a Buckeye fan, “Hail Mary, mother of grace, but Notre Dame is in 2nd place.” Mary is the recipient of grace. It is God who has given favor to her. It is God who has poured grace upon her. This was not earned by Mary, because then God would be giving her justice. No, God was giving her grace and he loved to give her grace and by his grace he was engaging her in his plan to bring the Messiah into the world. And you know what? By his grace he has engaged us in his plan to bring the news that the Savior has come to the world. It does not matter if you are an old priest or a poor, young woman. God’s plan is based on his grace.

2. God makes more promises even as he keeps his promises. (31-33)

Matthew records the appearance of Gabriel to Joseph, while Luke records the appearance of Gabriel to Mary. Matthew points out that the birth of the Messiah to a virgin was promised in the OT, by Isaiah the prophet. So, here we are 600 years later and God is keeping that promise, but in so doing, notice the 7 additional promises that God makes.

- You will conceive and bear a son
- You will call his name Jesus
- He will be great
- He will be called the Son of the Most High (clear statement of Son of God)
- The Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David
- He will reign over the house of Jacob forever
- Of his kingdom there will be no end.

Do you see how these build on each other? Conception birth of a son, named Jesus (the Lord is salvation), great, Son of God, King in David's line, King forever over God's people and King forever over all. Try to put yourself in the position of Mary. First of all, an angel shows up without even texting you and letting you know that he was coming. He then completely blows your mind by telling you something that is absolutely going to change every plan that you had ever made for the rest of your life. Everything changes from this moment on. And, if you can imagine it, what Gabriel says is stunning, overwhelming, mind-blowing, incomprehensible and absolutely cataclysmic. Your son is going to be the King of Kingdom that will go on forever and will have no limit. It will last forever and rule over everything that there is and will be. And you are a no-account girl living on the wrong side of the tracks in a run-down village in a country that is ruled by the Roman Empire. How are you supposed to believe this? It all starts when your monthly cycle is interrupted. Then your stomach begins to grow, you get tired, your appetite changes, and then, you feel a kick and little by little, the first promise is made clear. You have conceived. God's big promises are built on his little ones because he wants us to have assurance, or as Luke says, certainty. We can trust God with the big promises because of how faithful he is all of his "smaller" ones. At the same time, Paul reverses the order in Romans 8 when in essence he says that you can trust God with the little promises because of the big ones that God has done. The point is very clear. God makes promises so that you will believe in him and believe him. That is what Mary did and that is what our response is to be.

3. **Our response is to believe!** (34)

When Mary asks, "How will this be, since I am virgin?" she is not challenging what Gabriel said, she is believing it, but is curious as to how the biology of this is going to happen. It is possible that Mary is asking about the timing of this. Is this going to happen after I get married to Joseph and you are preparing me now, or is this something else? Look at her statement carefully. "How will this be." She is accepting the "will be" part, but is rightfully fascinated with the "how" part since she is a virgin and obviously knows how conception takes place. That is a great response. Notice that she did not sit in judgment of Gabriel's announcement and demand more information or even a sign before she determined whether or not she was going to believe. She believed and asked for some insight. Mary is saying, "I'm in. I don't know how all of this is going to work exactly, and I'm hoping you can tell me, but I'm in."

If your parent tells you to do something, there is a right way to ask "why" and a wrong way to ask "why." If you ask "why" as if you have a right to challenge their authority as your parent, then you are dead wrong. If you say, "Hey, I'm doing it, no problem, do you mind sharing with

me, why?" That is totally different. I love that and as a parent encouraged that. You have every right and freedom to ask me why AS you obey, not because you are determining whether or not you are going to obey based on my answer. Obedience is looking for understanding. In Mary's case, her belief is driving her desire for understanding. And God loves that and Gabriel is prepared for her response.

Let's go back to point 1. God tells us all that we need to know and our response is to accept it and believe it. Is there more, yes. And God may choose to reveal that to you as is the case here with Mary. But, beloved, you and I have enough information from God and enough promises from God to obey God without a challenging posture. Take what you know about God and interpret what you don't yet know in light of that. We can ask God questions, but we are not ever in a position to question him, as if he answers to us. What faith challenge are you facing right now? How does the response of this young woman (15-16 years old?) encourage or challenge your response? Zechariah did come around, as we will see, but his initial response was not as quick as Mary's was. I am not making a generational statement because later on we will meet Simeon and Anna who, though old were very tender to God, but I do think that it is worth noting and being mindful of the fact that Zechariah was older but, in his case, his age and experience created a hesitation to faith, whereas Mary was immediate. O God, give us hearts that are willing to believe like Zechariah, but ones that believe and respond as fast as Mary. So, Mary asks and...

4. **Once again, God will tell us all that we need to know to bolster our faith.** (35-37)

What is her answer? In a word, it is God. Look at v.35. Do you realize what is happening here? Gabriel, is giving a lesson on the doctrine of the trinity to a poor, young girl on the other side of the tracks in the backwater of Israel. I love the fact that we have seek to build a culture of theology in our men, women and students. And here is a great apologetic for it. Gabriel's answer to Mary's question is an example of the Trinity in operation. The Holy Spirit comes upon Mary, the power of the Most High (a reference to the Father) will overshadow her and she will have a child who will be called holy – the Son of God. The Godhead is all in on this and causes this conception to come about. God the Father and Spirit prepared a body for the Son of God (Hebrews 10.5). The involvement of the Holy Spirit in hovering over Mary sounds a lot like what the Spirit did in creation in hovering over the face of the waters. The Holy Spirit is the ultimate helicopter parent and is hovering over Mary who has been informed that she is going to be earthly mother of Jesus. The Spirit of God gives life. By using this language it only adds to Mary's confidence. Our Creator God spoke the world into existence. He brought it about from nothing. His Word is that powerful. Therefore, for God to now create a physical life in Mary, is so easy. All of life comes from God. Whereas the first man Adam was formed from the dust of the ground, the 2nd Adam, Jesus was formed in the womb of Mary. Again, we have called this a virgin birth. To be more precise it is a supernatural conception by a direct act of God. Jesus said in John 6.63, "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all." Life comes from God. When you admit and embrace the reality of God, then you have to admit and embrace that impossible no longer exists. The reality of generation by the Spirit in Mary illustrates regeneration by the Spirit in us.

Then Gabriel gives her a sign in order to encourage her. Behold (Hey, listen to this), your cousin Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. What an incredible encouragement for Mary. God is doing something; you are part of it and you are not alone. You might want to talk to your cousin Elizabeth, you guys have something in common, though different, you are connected. Older, younger, married, not yet married, not able to conceive, able to conceive, both will have sons. Both are part of the promises that God is keeping and both are gifts to each other as evidence that the other is not crazy.

Gabriel's response is marked by theology, evidence of assurance through community, and then another reassuring pronouncement. "For nothing will be impossible with God." You know where that comes from, right? That is what God said to Abraham when he told him that Sarah was going to have a son.

5. **Once again, our response is to believe with humility and surrender.** (38)

Do you realize what was at stake for Mary in this moment? You cannot hide a pregnancy forever. She would be a target for public shame, gossiped about, misunderstood, and ostracized. Joseph would probably divorce her (which is how you broke off a betrothal), then no one would want to marry her and she would be condemned to a life of poverty and rejection. I am certain that all of this fear was firing synapses in her mind. The announcement was incredible, but the weight of the mission was overwhelming.

About 1,100 years before this, Ruth said to Naomi, "Your people will be my people and your God will be my God." I'm all in. About 600 years before this, Isaiah said, "Here am I, send me." I'm all in. About 480 years before this, Esther recognized that she had a mission to accomplish from God and in surrendering to it said, "If I perish, I perish." 506 years ago Martin Luther stood alone at the Diet of Worms and said, "Here I stand, I can do no other, so help me God." This is what we do beloved. We believe. With humility, resolve, and surrender, we believe. Mary said, "Behold, I am the servant (bondslave) of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." About 33 years later her son would say, "Not my will, but yours be done."

This is what saving faith looks like. We hear the Word of God. We hear and understand what God has revealed (the gospel) and we believe, with humility and surrender and give the keys of our lives to God. Let it be, according to your word.