

Luke 1:1-38  
December 1, 2024

Luke's Gospel is special for many reasons. Luke was a doctor, a man of science and evidence and proof. And he was a Gentile Christian who had come to believe in Jesus Christ as his God and Savior. As we see in the opening lines of the reading, he is, like a journalist, interviewing all the primary sources and putting together a comprehensive, detailed, factual account of Jesus, his life, his death, his identity, and what it all means. Another beautiful thing Luke does, especially in the first two chapters of his Gospel, is he records for us the good news of Jesus Christ from the lips of different people, and even angels. That's what we are focusing on today- the good news of Jesus Christ as spoken by the angel Gabriel who appeared both to Zachariah and Mary. And the good news, or the "Gospel" according to Gabriel can be summed up in three main points: **1. God hears your prayer. 2. Nothing is Impossible with God. 3. God becomes vulnerable.**

**1. God Hears Your Prayer.** By this time in Israel's history, there would have been around 20,000 priests serving great temple in Jerusalem, and the daily task of burning incense in the presence of God was a high honor that most only got to do once, if that. A lot was taken, and it fell to an old priest named Zachariah. A good man. A respected man who truly believed in God, his prayers were sincere, and his faith was strong. And yet, God didn't give him the one thing that he and his wife had asked for- a child. In that day and culture, barrenness wasn't simply a sad thing, it was a disgrace and those who had no children were assumed to have done something to deserve it, and that stigma followed Zachariah and Elizabeth everywhere they went. But not today. Today, he was given the terrifying privilege of going into the presence of God in his temple to burn incense and offer prayers for the people. As he is praying, he is nervous- he's in the presence of God! But then he's terrified as a real angel from God appears next to the altar. Think about that! A supernatural being is with you in the room and you can't escape. And this angel doesn't destroy Zachariah- he gives him good news. "Don't be afraid of me! I'm not going to hurt you. Your prayer has been answered." What prayer? Well, Zachariah would have likely been praying for the coming of the Messiah, that the savior of Israel would finally come and make all things new! But Gabriel says, "Also your prayer that you and Elizabeth have been weeping for for decades. She's going to have a baby. And he will fill you with joy and everyone who hears will praise God for his mercy, and everyone who says the boy's name will be reminded- 'God is gracious.'" And he will be a mighty prophet- the one that was promised by Malachi- the new Elijah that would bring people back to trust in God and turn away from sin right before God himself dwells with his people. "He's coming, Zechariah, and he's going to be your son. God has heard the prayers of his people, and your prayers Zechariah." In reality, Zechariah hadn't likely prayed for a son in decades. Similarly, many his people had been praying for God to send his special servant for centuries, and many likely stopped like Zachariah- it took too long. And finally, finally it's happening. Zachariah and Elizabeth, Israel, and really, all Christians know this feeling. Praying to God for years and years, or just for a long time for relief, that blessing, that person, that baby, that conversion. And Gabriel comes to all of us and says, "contrary to what you think, God hears you, and he is either going to give you exactly what you're asking for or something even better. But you might have to wait until his time is right.

Zechariah thought all he wanted was a son, but God wanted to give him a prophet, the new Elijah, the greatest preacher of all time, and the one God would use to bring people into his arms in repentance. God hears you, and while he may ask you to wait, it will be worth it. How can you trust that?

**2. Nothing is impossible with God.** Zachariah, for whatever reason, doesn't believe the angel's word. He's a believer! He trusts in God! But for whatever reason, when he heard God's promise, he didn't say, "That sounds great!" but rather, "No, that can't be. We're too old." Can you hear the frustration in Gabriel's voice? "I'm Gabriel! I'm an angel of God! I stand in God's presence and he told me to tell you this and you dare to tell me that I'm incorrect? That God doesn't understand biology?" And we can scoff at Zachariah for his unreasonable doubt, but we do the same thing. God has us in a place where we don't want to be, and since we can't think of a reason, then there must not be and God must not really be in control! We can't see why God would disallow a certain lifestyle or challenge something that we as moderners think is true, so we figure, "well, God must be wrong, or that part of the Bible isn't really serious." We want something, God says, "no," and we say, "too bad, I want it anyway!" All of it comes from unreasonable, irrational, foolish doubt. If God really is who he says he is, if God really is the creator of the universe, if God really is as good as he says he is, why wouldn't we just believe and do what he says? It's really that simple, and Zachariah needs to learn this. He needs to learn to listen to God's promise more and air his own opinion less. This is something that Mary, a teenager from a tiny, insignificant town called Nazareth understands. She hears what Gabriel says- that she is going to become pregnant although she's never been with a man. God is going to perform a miracle, he is going to enter his creation and do something that's never been done before. Mary accepts this because she, along with the angels of Heaven, understand this truth- NOTHING is impossible with God, and if there's a difference between what I think is possible, what I think is right, what I think makes sense, what I think should happen in the world, and what God says, I'm the one who needs to shut my mouth and listen. And think about what this meant for Mary! She wasn't married yet! And people had calendars back then! How many people in her village would believe her when she said, "no, this is from God?" But she knows God can do all things and she accepts this because whatever God has in mind is infinitely better than anything she can come up with. And I know that sounds rather harsh, but choosing to let God be God and let him decide what's true and good actually enables you to enjoy him for who he is. Your savior. Your God who became like you.

**3. God is becoming vulnerable.** Gabriel's words here to Mary are likely familiar to you- we say them almost every year. They're likely so familiar that we forget what he's actually saying. Gabriel is telling this young woman named Mary that the person who is going to be in her womb is the Most High God of Heaven and Earth. In her womb, the Lord who fills the entirety of the Universe is going to be become small- so small that he can be contained the womb of a young woman named Mary, and the baby is going to be named, "Jesus." "The Lord Saves." He will be a human being! But he is also immortal- he is going to reign over God's people forever because he himself is God. Do you know what this means? Not only is God infinitely powerful and all knowing- he can hear all our prayers and can do the impossible- infinitely more than we could ever imagine- he is also infinitely loving and kind and merciful- so much so that he would be

willing to lower himself to our level in order to dwell with us and eventually sacrifice himself in our place. Dorothy Sayers says it like this: *He [Jesus of Nazareth] was not a kind of demon pretending to be human; he was in every respect a genuine living man. He was not merely a man so good as to be "like God"—he was God. Now, this is not just a pious commonplace: it is not a commonplace at all. For what it means is this, among other things: that for whatever reason God chose to make man as he is—limited and suffering and subject to sorrows and death—he [God] had the honesty and courage to take his own medicine. Whatever game he is playing with his creation, he has kept his own rules and played fair. He can exact nothing from man that he has not exacted from himself. He has himself gone through the whole of human experience, from the trivial irritations of family life and the cramping restrictions of hard work and lack of money to the worst horrors of pain and humiliation, defeat, despair, and death. When he was a man, he played the man. He was born in poverty and died in disgrace and thought it well worthwhile.* Let's take it a step further. God asks you to trust him. God asks you to not doubt him and be patient and submit yourself to his will. Yet, we don't. So Jesus Christ, God himself, did it perfectly in our place. Jesus lowered himself so low that he needed the Father's protection and providing, although he is his equal. Jesus lowered himself and hid his glory and power and made himself so low and weak and vulnerable that he had to trust his Father for every and wait and ultimately endure the wrath of Hell while his Father turned away. I know it's hard to trust him- especially when he doesn't make sense and makes you wait and makes you ask again and again. But if Jesus was willing to do it as well, and if he was willing to do it in your place endure the real punishment you deserve, it must be possible, and it must be worth it- even if it's painful. So, my friends, be patient. Wait for God's time. The things you're asking for, the things you're angry about, he knows and he promises he hears you and can all things. Wait, and trust like Mary that he is so good and so gracious that although you may not understand, you can trust. And while you trust, it's okay to ask questions- at least like Mary.

What? I thought we were supposed to simply trust in God! Yes, but look at Zachariah and Mary: Both are given promises by Gabriel, and both ask questions. Yet, Zachariah is cursed and Mary is given an explanation and praise. What? Was Gabriel just in a bad mood? No. The truth is, Jesus wants you to trust him, but that doesn't mean turning off your brain. It's good to have questions. But Zachariah wasn't asking that question in order to learn, it was because he foolishly believed that if he could think of a way it could happen, neither could God. And the same happens today- people ask questions about God, the Scriptures, doctrine, but already have their mind made up. That's not faith, and it's really not very rational either. Why would you assume that you know more than God- if he really is who he says he is? But look at Mary- first, when Gabriel comes, she analyzes the situation. She wonders what kind of greeting this might be- really that means that she's thinking, "Okay, is this real? Am I hallucinating? If not, why he is here?" Then when Gabriel tells her about what's going to happen, she asks, "I haven't been with a man yet. How can this happen?" She's not doubting, she's genuinely wondering how God is going to do this! You should do the same. Ask questions. Ask hard questions. If you don't get something, please ask. I can't promise I'll have all the answers, I can only repeat what God says in his Word. But asking good questions, wanting to learn more about God and his ways, and being honest when you don't understand something: that's a sign of faith, and God loves it when we want to learn more about him. So, the Gospel according to Gabriel is this: "God is so good,

so kind, so merciful, you can trust him even when he doesn't say yes right away because he came here, became like you, suffered for you, so you could be like him- glorious, perfect, holy. And if you have questions- please ask. Amen.