

## Offspring of a Virgin

Luke 1:26-38

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*The Lord's Day Morning  
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*This sermon is part of the sermon series "Nine Lessons and Carols"*

Now turn in your Bibles if you would to the Gospel of Luke. We are looking at this extraordinary liturgy that's been around now for over a hundred years or so from Cambridge, the *Nine Lessons and Carols*, and these Lord's Days in December we are going through those Nine Lessons as our sermon texts. This is the Fifth of those Nine Lessons. We have had two, you remember, from the book of Genesis—Genesis 3, and especially verse 15, the seed of the woman bruising, crushing the head of the serpent; and then in Genesis 22, the sacrifice of Isaac, depicting of course the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ on our behalf. And then last Lord's Day we had two texts from the prophet Isaiah, one in chapter 9 which we're going to allude to almost immediately this morning, and one in Isaiah 11.

Now we transition into the New Testament and to what is perhaps the more familiar of the Christmas nativity narratives, the announcement of the pregnancy of Mary, the birth of Jesus Christ of this young teenage girl from Nazareth, the astonishing story of Christmas.

Now before we read this passage in Luke 1, let's look to God in prayer.

*Our Father in heaven, we thank You again as we come to read the Scriptures. We are mindful that this is Your word, every jot and tittle given as the out-breathing of God. We ask Your blessing, Lord, as we read the Scriptures together. Help us to read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest, and all for Jesus' sake. Amen.*

Luke 1, and we're picking up the reading in verse 26. This is God's word:

"In the sixth month..." [that is the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy]...

In the sixth 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, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" But she

was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. 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. And he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

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

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

Thus far God's holy and inerrant word. May He add His blessing to the reading of it.

Last Lord's Day, in the morning Ligon was looking at what was the Third Lesson, from the prophecy of Isaiah, in the ninth chapter. And you'll remember that Isaiah prophesies concerning Jesus, concerning Messiah:

Unto us a child is born; unto us a son is given; the government shall be upon his shoulder...and of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end...upon the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and even forevermore.

Now you will have heard echoes of many of those statements in the words of Gabriel to Mary in Nazareth. Some 700 years and more have passed since that prophecy of Isaiah, and that prophecy of Isaiah of course is picking up on the First Lesson, namely the lesson in Genesis 3:15, often referred to as the *protoevangelium*, the first gospel promise; the first promise that a seed of the woman will come and crush the head of Satan, or crush, destroy, the seed of the serpent. And that theme of the seed of the woman has been expanding throughout the development of the Old Testament Scriptures, and patriarchs and prophets have been contemplating and musing over precisely what it is that God had promised. What kind of seed? What kind of Davidic king? What kind of kingdom would Messiah bring? And who exactly would be this Messiah?

It's somewhere in the region now of 4, perhaps 6 B.C. We're all on board now that Jesus wasn't born in the year 0, but somewhere around 4 or 6 B.C. Historians still look into this with great excitement. Little old Judah is under

occupation, and a Roman occupation, and a Roman occupation for at least the last forty years. Not since the Babylonian exile some 580 years in Mary's past has little old Judah seen a king. The last king was Zedekiah. He, you remember, when Nebuchadnezzar stormed the city of Jerusalem, he escaped by night. He got as far as somewhere in the region of Jericho and was captured. His two sons were killed, murdered. Zedekiah's eyes were put out, and blindfolded he was summarily marched into exile in Babylon, and we know nothing more about him. That was 580 years in Mary's past, but she is about to hear that the king promised to Judah, the king after the likeness of David, the king who would occupy the throne of Israel, of Judah, was about to be born, and that she would be the bearer of that king. She would be the woman mentioned in Genesis 3:15. The seed of the woman was about to come, and to be born in Bethlehem...a nowhere little town (village, you might say) five miles or so to the southwest of Jerusalem.

I want us to look this morning at a number of things that Gabriel says about this Messiah figure. And the first thing that I want us to see in verse 32 is He will be great. He will be great.

### **I. He will be great.**

Luke is writing to Theophilus, a historian — perhaps a fairly well known historian, an accomplished historian. He perhaps had written about great men. Perhaps he had written about some of the great military figures like Alexander the Great, perhaps the greatest military figure that has ever been. Ah, you're going to disagree with me afterwards, I know, but he was certainly up there with the great! I have no doubt Theophilus as a historian had studied the annals of Alexander the Great, the great Greek Empire that had dominated this very region in which Mary now found herself. The Seleucids had come, the Hasmonean Empire had come, now the Roman Empire had come. But Alexander the Great was a great man.

Perhaps he'd studied and written about some of the great philosophers — Aristotle, Plato — whose schools and academies in ancient Greece dominated the world, and still do to this day. You're either for Aristotle or against Aristotle. We have these debates to this very day. Great men.

Perhaps Theophilus had studied some of the great emperors. There hadn't been many great emperors in the time of Theophilus of course, but Julius Caesar...perhaps Augustus. But He will be great.

I wonder what's going on in Mary's mind. Theophilus knew already what kind of greatness Gabriel meant of course, after the fact, but Mary... I wonder what's going on in Mary's mind, because this seed, this child, this Messiah, this Davidic king figure will be born in obscurity in Bethlehem, in a stall...in a cattle stall, in a

manger, a feeding trough for animals. Soon He will be exiled to Egypt. He'll be raised in obscurity in Nazareth. You remember what people said about Nazareth: "What good thing comes out of Nazareth?"

"The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have their nests, but the Son of Man had nowhere to lay His head."

He would be dead by thirty, crucified on a Roman gibbet outside the walls of Jerusalem. He left no great buildings, no great architecture, no amphitheatres, no roads named after Him. He left no books. Not a single book. No poetry. He never wrote a history. He never sat on a throne in Jerusalem. He was never crowned with a golden crown depicting that He was the king of Judah: He had a crown of thorns pressed down onto His brow so that blood trickled down His face and onto His body.

He will be great, but greatness in a way that transcends earthly greatness. He will be great, but His greatness will challenge every category that you employ to measure that greatness. He will be the greatest man that ever lived, but not the Cassius Clay and Mohammed Ali kind of greatness. ("I am the greatest," he used to say. And perhaps he was in his own way.) But this man, this seed, this king, this Messiah... He's just a tiny little zygote inside the womb of this teenaged girl called Mary. That's all He is now. Growing, formed by the Holy Spirit inside the womb of Mary, but He will be great.

## **II. He will be the Son of the Most High.**

The second thing is that He will... [in verse 32 and again in verse 35]... He will be the Son of the Most High. "He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High." And if you drop down to the end of verse 35, "[He] will be called holy—the Son of God."

"The power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God."

I think Luke wants us to understand here that *Most High* and *Son of God* are synonymous terms here. He will be the Son of the Most High. He will be the Son of God. Those two terms are used interchangeably, you remember, by the Gadarene demoniac in Luke 8: "What have You to do with me," he said, "Jesus, thou Son of the Most High God?" using the two terms together. He is the Son of God.

Now we need to be careful. What does Gabriel mean here by *the Son of God*? And we could so easily run in the direction that He is the divine Son in the Trinitarian sense: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit... in the what we sometimes call in theology the *ontological* sense; that He is the divine Son is a

way that you and I are not. But we too are sons, sons by adoption, sons by grace; no longer sons of Adam, but “children of the living God; and if children then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Jesus Christ.” We read in Job 1 that “there came a day when the *sons of God* presented themselves before God, and Satan also was among them.” The term *sons of God*, then, has more than one meaning in Scripture. What does it mean here? Look again at verse 32, and the last part of it:

“And the Lord God will give to Him the throne of His Father David....”

Now *the Son of God* here, or *the Son of the Most High* here, is intimately related to a promise in the Old Testament, and we need to turn back to two passages in the Old Testament. And if you have your Bibles, I want you to turn now to II Samuel 7, and then I want you to turn to Psalm 89. If you haven't got your Bible, there's a pew Bible somewhere before you, and I want us to look at these passages. These are passages that would have been known to Mary. They were messianic passages, they were passages that were often thought about and contemplated over because they contain special promises with regard to the way God would fulfill His promise of redemption.

In II Samuel 7, beginning at verse 12:

“When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers,” [this is Nathan now speaking to David, King David]...

“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. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.”

You hear the echoes in what Gabriel is saying to Mary about a kingdom that is from David and the line of David, and is going to last forever. Verse 14:

“I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son.”

There's the link. David's seed, lineage, kingdom lasting forever, but also a father and a son relationship.

Now of course Nathan is speaking here of Solomon. David is saying ‘I am going to build the Lord a house, a temple.’ And God is saying to David, ‘I am going to build for you a house, a dynasty, a seed; and your name, David, and your rule, David, is going to last forever.’

Now here comes the problem, in verse 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....”

Now how can this possibly be a prophecy with regard to Jesus? Because Jesus is sinless. And the answer to that of course is that first and foremost this prophecy is about the line, the kingly line that comes from David, Solomon and the successors to Solomon — and sin they did. But God will never forget His promise. He will never abandon His faithfulness to His covenant. And so in verse 15 you have one of these extraordinarily important Old Testament words: “...but my *steadfast* love....” It's a Hebrew word that has huge associations; it's the word *hesed*. It's a word often used in connection with God's covenant: “My steadfast love will not depart from him.”

Now turn to Psalm 89, and pick it up right at the center of the Psalm. This is a Psalm by a man called “Ethan the Ezrahite.” Now Ethan was a man who knew what it is to be absolutely depressed. In the previous chapter (it's perhaps the darkest place outside of Calvary...it's the darkest place in the entire Bible), look at the final verse of Psalm 88:

“My companions have become darkness” or, “Darkness has become my companion.”

Now that's pretty dark. If your friends are darkness, that's pretty dark! Ethan knew all about trials and tribulations. He knew all about difficult times.

Now in Psalm 89, written by the same man, a contemporary of Solomon, pick it up at verse 28:

My steadfast love I will keep for him forever,  
And my covenant will stand firm for him.  
I will establish his offspring forever  
And his throne as the days of the heavens.  
If his children forsake my law  
and do not walk according to my rules,  
If they violate my statutes and do not keep my commandments,  
Then I will punish their transgression with the rod  
and their iniquity with stripes,  
*But ... [same as II Samuel 7] ...I will not remove from him*  
my steadfast love  
or be false to my faithfulness.

There's the promise. The seed of David will rule and reign forever.

Now how will that be? There has been no king in Jerusalem for 580 years. And now Gabriel is coming to Mary and saying that promise that a seed after the lineage of David is coming to rule and reign, that promise I am going to keep: He will be great and He will be the Son of the Most High, the Son of God; and

because He is the Son of God, He will rule and reign forever. And you've got to imagine that Mary is turning these things over in her mind and wondering what exactly it is that Gabriel is talking about

### **III. You will call His name Jesus.**

And so in the third place, not only will He be great, not only will He be the Son of the Most High, the Son of God, of the lineage of David, whose kingdom is going to last forever, but “you will call His name Jesus.” His name will be Jesus. Verse 31 — “You shall call His name Jesus”—*Jeshua*, the deliverer, the savior. And, “You will call His name Jesus because He will save His people from their sins.” This kingly figure, this great person who is to be born, whose dominion and reign is going to last forever, His name is going to be Jesus.

“How sweet the name of Jesus sounds in a believer's ear;  
It calms his sorrows, heals his wounds, and drives away his fear.”

Mary didn't know it yet, but this king, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, had come to rule and reign forever, but not in Jerusalem. Not like David and Solomon, in Jerusalem...not like Zedekiah in Jerusalem; not to overthrow the Roman Empire, but to rule and reign as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords over the whole earth.

But first of all, in order to do that and in order to save and rescue His people, He had come to die. The shadow of the cross lay upon Him from the moment He was conceived. He had come to be our sin-bearer. He had come to die for us. He had come to lay down His life for us. He had come to stand in our place; to be the second Adam, to be the seed of the woman, to undo what Adam had done. To deliver us. To rescue us.

What does this mean for us this morning? Two things.

Do you remember how — and I think Brad is going to take up this passage in Luke 2 next Sunday evening, but let me anticipate it just for a minute. Do you remember what Luke says about Mary? That “she pondered these things in her heart.”

You're saying perhaps some of this this morning was pretty deep. It wasn't really, but you might be saying it was pretty deep. You haven't been in II Samuel 7 and Psalm 89 recently!

Will you be a Mary today?

Before you come to the beautiful carol service this evening, one of the most extraordinary things that this church does...before you come this evening, as a

preparation for that spend a few minutes in II Samuel 7 and Psalm 89, because that's what Jesus is fulfilling. He came to be the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. And ponder it, and meditate on it, and turn it over in your mind, and fall down like the angels do and say "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."

And secondly, look at what Mary says in verse 38. It's an astonishing thing:

"Behold, I am the servant of the Lord. Let it be to me according to Your word."

Where do I begin? This young teenage girl, betrothed to Joseph, unmarried, never had sexual relationships, and she's pregnant. And it's as shocking then as it is now...perhaps more so then than it is now.

You remember the story about C.S. Lewis. He's in Oxford, in that quadrangle there in Oxford, in his office overlooking the quadrangle, the square. A don was speaking to him, and they've just read Wesley's hymn, *Hark! The Herald Angels Sing*:

"Late in time behold Him come,  
Offspring of the virgin's womb."

And this clever man says to C.S. Lewis, "Isn't it wonderful that we know better?" And Lewis says to him, "What do you mean?" And the don explains to him, "Well, isn't it better that we know that virgins don't conceive and give birth?" And Lewis says, "But don't you think they knew that too?" Isn't that the point? Don't you think that Dr. Luke knew that?

And what does Mary do with the news? How does she break this to Joseph? You've got to admire Joseph. She goes away for several months of course to be with Elizabeth, but when she comes back, well, it shows. She's pregnant.

"I am your servant, Lord. Let it be according to Your word."

And you think you've got problems? Then do what Mary did, and bow in humble submission to the providence of God and say, 'Whate'er my God ordains is right...whate'er my God ordains is right.'

Let's sing together hymn No. 208, *O Come, All Ye Faithful*. Let's stand and sing to God's praise and His glory.

[Congregation sings.]

Receive the Lord's benediction.

*Grace, mercy and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ be with*



*you all. Amen.*

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