

Increase of God's Kingdom Forever (All Age Service)

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 20 December 2009

Preacher: Ruth Newmarch

- [0 : 00] Please be seated. Let's bow in prayer. Dear Heavenly Father, I pray this morning that you warm our hearts as we hear again the astounding message of the angel.
- And I pray, Lord, that you will soften our hearts to whatever your calls are upon us. For we ask it in the name of the Lord Jesus.
- Amen. Well, it is a great joy to be with you all. I've come once to this service, but in general it's been a very happy time for me to come to Holy Trinity and continue doing what is a wonderful children's ministry already.
- It's been tainted a little bit by the loss of my mum a few weeks ago, which has been a big loss for our family.
- But there's just been heaps of joy coming here. So thank you for your warm welcome. I received a text message two or three weeks ago which said this, Just letting my friends know that Steve and I found out we are now third in line for our Philippine child.
- [1 : 33] 2010 is definitely our year. Stay tuned for my little babe adoption shower celebration. Love, Sue. Hug, kiss, hug, kiss.
- The excitement nearly bubbled out of my phone when I got this text message. The announcement of a birth, even though it's not their own child, the fact that they've been childless for many years and have been on a list for many years and now they're three children away from receiving their own was so exciting to this young woman.
- And the birth announcement of any child is most often very exciting because it contains such future potential. Life is going to continue.
- There's going to be change afoot. There's growth. There's a multiplying of love. And then there's activity and preparation. There's so much to do before the baby arrives.
- Well, these 12 well-known verses carefully document by first-hand contact with either Mary or some close to her.
- [2 : 51] The dramatic continuance of the activity at large of Israel's God after a period of 400 years of seeming silence.
- The towering prophecies of Isaiah that an anointed one, a Messiah, a Christ, would be raised up by God were the hope of Israel.
- She had known little political independence since the exile. But that deeply refining experience for her had resulted in some people within her who believed, still amazingly believed, in the God of Abraham and his promises and the covenant with David.
- And they continued to worship God in the Old Testament sacrificial way, generation after generation, faithfully waiting and hoping.
- Well, Luke has already given us the birth announcement by the same angel Gabriel of John the Baptist. The Elijah or the forerunner, the preparer of the people of Israel for their God's coming.

[4 : 12] And the announcement to Mary parallels this. But it surpasses it in that this second birth is going to be superior. It's going to be the fulfillment of God's promises made to Abraham and the covenant with David and all those prophecies in the prophets.

We naturally want to focus on Mary because she's the human being in the picture. And there's a lovely painting of her, a recent one, by a black American artist.

And we are drawn by her humility and her willingness, her innocence and her youth. And what we assume is the very humble setting.

Yet, the passage is bursting with creativity, with national hope, with promise keeping, with royal ascendancy, with power, and with unique supra-biological activity.

The whole thing is about God and his faithful, powerful, if historically lengthy, keeping of his devoted plans for his people Israel.

[5 : 34] It is about the coming of one who will reign and lead the nation of Israel. Now, I don't know if you tend to keep your Bibles open during the sermon, but I'm going to look now in detail at Luke 26 to 38.

You do know it really well already, but if you can follow, we'll go through it carefully. Now, first of all, we're a little bit taken by, well, what sixth month are we talking about here?

But in the context, we seem to be led to the fact that it's Elizabeth's sixth month of pregnancy. And that's confirmed again in verse 36.

And back in verse 5, we're told that Herod is the king in Judea. So the angel Gabriel comes to Mary, not as with Zechariah in the temple, with the sacrifice in full swing to announce John's birth.

And it was very embarrassing that he should be made mute in public as a negative sign that God was going to actually give them a child.

[6 : 46] But the angel Gabriel comes to the small town of Nazareth in Galilee. Just in case you didn't know where Nazareth was, it's up the north in Galilee.

And many of Luke's readers may not have known where Nazareth was. And the first thing we're told by the angel, by Luke, is that the angel comes to a virgin.

It's hard to say if Luke had Isaiah 7, 14, you know, the well-known verse, a virgin will conceive and bear a son. It's hard to know whether Luke had that in mind.

But he does describe her first in this way, a virgin, a young woman who's not yet married. But very quickly, we're told she's engaged to a man. And then we're told some important things about him.

His name is Joseph and he's of the house of David. This is going to be significant. Now, just to remind you what engagement meant back then, it was a two-step process.

[7 : 51] It's outlined in Deuteronomy 22 and a couple of other spots in the Old Testament. But it was a witnessed and legally binding and financial agreement which took place, followed often a year or so later by the marriage ceremony after which the groom would take the bride home.

So, that's the background. And then, having dealt with the fact that she's engaged to this guy, Joseph, who's of the house of David, we quickly return to Mary and again we're told she's a virgin and we're given her name, Mary.

So, very scant, narrational detail, but very relevant. But it's what we need to know for the announcement that the angel's going to make.

So, Gabriel greets Mary now as favoured one, meaning the recipient of grace. She is told, in effect, that God is with her.

God is going to help and aid her. Luke, who's often aware of the emotional realm, then gives us insight into Mary's reaction to this greeting.

- [9 : 09] She's attempting to understand what is this? What's happening here? So, the English word is perplexed, but what it really means is she's intensely curious with an edge of concern.
- And, we're told she's pondering. So, pondering isn't something you do just in a one-off kind of way. It's an ongoing thing. You continue to grapple with what, what is this greeting, is her ongoing mental state and emotional state.
- And, the angel graciously responds to this body language by telling her not to be afraid. And, there was a really good reason that she need not fear.
- She had found favour with God. Now, found favour is not just any phrase. It's an Old Testament phrase that is used of Noah and Abraham and Joseph and Gideon and Hannah.
- To find favour with God is to be allowed to receive God's grace freely, giftedly.
- [10 : 30] So, that's the position that she's in as the angel starts to announce why he's come. That's the way she's addressed. So, she's put at peace.
- And, now the announcement proper follows. And, it's kind of in two blocks with Mary's question in the middle which kind of breaks up the two blocks.
- So, firstly, the angel says she will conceive and bear a son. Now, this also follows an Old Testament pattern of announcing births. It's the way the angel announced to Hagar that she was going to have Ishmael.
- And, it's also reminiscent of Isaiah 7, 14. A virgin will conceive and bear a son. So, then the child's name is given just like John's name was given.
- Jesus' name is given which we know means God saves. But, it was a common name in that day. And, Luke doesn't really draw attention to the meanings of words.
- [11 : 34] But, now, this child that will soon be their status, their position and their ministry is described. So, the first thing we're told about the child in terms of his status is he will be great.
- No qualifiers, no great in the sight of God, no great compared to anybody, simply and comprehensively great.
- Here already is a significant figure. son of the most high.
- Now, most high refers to God in his supreme authority as God. And, you might just note a bit of royalty creeping in here because Israel's kings were called sons of God.
- God. But, just in case Mary hadn't picked it up, his royalty is put beyond doubt. Her child will be a royal because the angel says that the Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor, David, no less.
- [12 : 52] God will be a man. In 2 Samuel 7, 8 to 17, we have, in fact, the everlasting covenant that God makes with David.
- Remember where David wants to build God a house and God says, well, you won't, your son Solomon will, but I will build you a house, a lineage that will never end.
- And, there's been partial fulfillment of that in Solomon and all the Davidic kings, but for 400 years, there's been no Davidic king.
- How is God going to keep his promise to David? People must have wondered. Well, we then, we now sort of spot the relevance of why Joseph was already told to us as being of the line of David.
- Now, let's just track back a wee bit. David, held a majestic place in Israel's monarchy. Firstly, he was a man after God's own heart, despite his failures, but he was a towering figure in Israel's history.

- [14 : 05] He brought together the disparate, dysfunctional tribes that we read about in the Judges into a cohesive kingdom with a capital city and a king reigning over all twelve of them.
- Jerusalem, and the capital city was going to be the place where God's name would dwell, where a temple would be built, Jerusalem.
- So in announcing this royal birth and connecting it to David, God is keeping his promises. Luke actually mentions David a lot in these opening chapters.
- Bethlehem is called the city of David. So here then in the angel's announcement is a massively important piece of information for Israel.
- It is nothing less than the continuation of what God had begun in his commitment to Israel as that united nation under David.
- [15 : 08] Jesus' birth then is grounded in the story of Israel. He is historically placed by Luke. The realm of his royal activity is Israel, the house of Jacob.
- Now, however the eternal nature of his reign will play out, he is not being disconnected from human history but bound to it, to Israel's history in particular.
- father. And the angel does make it very clear that this new incumbent to the throne will reign forever and his kingdom will have no end.
- Said twice just in case we might miss it. God's covenant with David is happening and here at last is something permanent for Israel, something they have longed for, for 400 years.
- And I think here is a connection to the Isaiah 9 passage that we just had read earlier. the birth of this messianic child where it says his authority will grow continually and there will be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom.
- [16 : 28] He will establish it and uphold it with justice and righteousness from this time onward and forever more. So connected to David and connected to the everlasting.
- However, whether the Jews as a nation would recognize him and accept him is another matter.
- A matter with which Luke will engage throughout his gospel. A matter which we must engage with. For in the wisdom of God it is through the Jews' national rejection of their Messiah.
- That we have the chance to step forward for adoption. Or like the Jews to reject him or not take him seriously or sidestep his calls on our lives.
- Now, the baby to be born to Mary comes first to Israel as their promised national sovereign who will reign forever. Mary's son's ministry will be to reign and we recognize that in this reigning is an authority.
- [17 : 48] It's an authority over the people of Israel. Now, this is also a theme that Luke is going to pick up again and again in the opening chapters showing us how it plays out in Jesus' authority to teach and his authority to heal.
- people of people of Israel. But also his authority over people like Roman centurions whose children he heals and the Syrophenician woman.
- So this royalty has authority in Israel but curiously beyond. Now, at this point Mary just interrupts. How is this going to happen?
- I'm a virgin. Some have wondered why Mary didn't assume that well, she'd marry Joseph and she'd become pregnant after the wedding and that would be how it would happen.
- But her question seems to imply that she understood that the pregnancy was going to begin almost immediately. And I think that's indicated by the way the angel says in verse 31, and now you will conceive.

[18 : 55] It does sound pretty imminent. But her question is not a doubting question like Zacharias, who wants a sign. It is a genuine question of puzzlement.

How can someone who's engaged, who can't possibly have a child, become pregnant? She does understand the biology of the situation. So the second part of the announcement is Gabriel's reply.

Mary's question. And it also plays into what he wants to say anyway, which is to give a clear proclamation that this birth is going to occur by divine intervention.

Now it's given in kind of two parallel statements with the resulting description of the child. So the first bit of the parallel parallel is that the Holy Spirit will come upon Mary.

The Holy Spirit will be the agent of God's work. And the coming upon Mary is a little bit reminiscent of perhaps the Spirit hovering over the water at creation.

[20 : 09] Now the second line of the parallel statement is that the power of the Most High will overshadow her. So we see the Holy Spirit coupled with this divine authoritative power of God and it will come upon her or overshadow her.

Now that overshadow word is used of the Shekinah cloud which rested over the tabernacle. It's sometimes used in the Psalms metaphorically of God's overshadowing protection of Israel.

And Luke uses it again of the cloud that overshadows the disciples at the Transfiguration. So it is the glorious nearness, sometimes visible presence of God which will work through the active creative agency of the Holy Spirit to bring forth this new life.

life. And so we see that the God who created life out of nothing at creation without any human agency can also create life in the womb.

The result of this conception though will be one who is holy, the Son of God. God. Now it's hard to know what Luke actually means here by holy, whether he means set apart for a special task or whether he means without sin and therefore an early reference to Jesus being divine, being God.

[22 : 00] Now as the gospel develops, both of these become true of Jesus. But it's important not to push what is being said further just because we have hindsight.

Let's think of what Mary's been told already. At this point she knows her child will be the Messiah, in the royal line of David, in keeping with God's covenant promises, to reign in some ongoing eternal sense for the sake of the Jewish nation, and that this conception will be by divine creative power of God's Holy Spirit, not by natural biological means.

Maybe Jesus' divinity is being revealed here, but possibly it's enough for Mary to know that her child will be set apart, if she hadn't already guessed, for a very special task.

Some commentators think that it is, Luke does want us to know that he's divine and the angel's message contained that. I think it's hard to say.

And then the angel graciously gives Mary a sign, and although Mary didn't want one, she's really grateful for it, because she acts on it immediately, as the next section in verse 39 shows us.

[23 : 27] There's another lovely painting here. Her relative Elizabeth, in her old age, has also conceived a son, and now she's in her sixth month of pregnancy, though she was considered barren, for nothing is impossible with this God.

I just think how gracious that was of the angel, because imagine how Mary's feeling, but now she's got a relative who's going through a similar, extraordinary experience, someone she can relate to and share with and travel with.

How sensitive. Now, I don't know if you were reminded of Sarah, way back in Genesis 18.

Remember when she's told that she's going to have Isaac at whatever she was, 90-something, and then she's reprimanded by the special messenger for laughing, and he asks this rhetorical question.

Is anything too wonderful for God? And here it is again, in statement form, affirming that nothing is impossible with God.

[24 : 41] And we know that Zachariah, like Sarah, had already fallen into the unbelieving, sceptical category. So it comes as such a wonderful joy to have Mary's simple, trusting, faith-filled, triple consent, that she, like the child Samuel in the temple, like Isaiah in the vision of God in the temple, is willing.

She says, here I am, the servant of the Lord, let it be to me according to your word. How exemplary, how willing to connect with God's will, how humble and trusting, how challenging.

would that we learn from this response, to bow in confident trust before God, on the occasions when he makes his will and call clear to us.

Please give us, O Lord, such a response. Now I want to add that we see here in this birth narrative strand, a symbolic ending of the old covenant, and an ushering in of the new.

In the Old Testament, the extraordinary births were to elderly or barren women, sometimes they were both. Their husbands were required, and their children were God's instruments for the nation of Israel.

[26 : 34] We can think of Sarah, Rachel, Rebecca, Hannah, and now lastly Elizabeth falls into that category, with John becoming the voice of preparation for the coming king.

But Mary breaks the paradigm. She is young. She's not yet fully married. Her fertility is not in doubt.

Her husband is not needed, and her son will be great, royal, reign forever. His kingdom will have no end.

His conception will be by the creative power of the Holy Spirit as the agent of the Most High, whose child he will be. Though we have in the back of our minds that he will be brought up in the house of Mary's husband-to-be, Joseph, who is of David's kingly line.

So with Mary, the old paradigm ends and the new paradigm is established.

[27 : 43] No longer are God's instruments born in an extraordinary way for Israel alone. That's the Old Testament paradigm.

But in this new paradigm, God himself steps into human history in the person of God the Son, and it becomes clear that this is for all humanity.

So here is the announcement. A rich 12 verses giving us cause to marvel at the devoted plans and purposes of a powerful, created to the point of extravagant and astounding, faithful, promise-keeping God.

God is able to work with human beings, even young, inexperienced ones who are open and willing to achieve divine activity within human history to rescue and reign his people.

This indicates that God is determined. He intends his kingdom and sovereignty to grow and grow and continue forever.

[29 : 06] Now here is permanence. Permanence for us, commitment to us. Here is security and here is belonging to a sovereign and to a people to be part of.

May this reinvigorate us to persevere in faith and live in hope this Christmas. May it give us courage and energy and willing supple hearts.

I beg you to leave your crusty scepticism, take it off as a garment and leave it at the door and recommit yourself to a God who is committed to you within time but for eternal reign and rescue.

And he will do the unexpected. Amen.