

12//24/17 Lk. 1: 26-38 & 2 Sam. 7: 1-5, 8b-12, 16

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Connie May 11/17/17

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ENTERING THE SCENE:

The last Sunday of Advent brings us to the threshold of Christmas. Our attention shifts to a young woman who is offered a chance to cooperate with God for all of us. One wonders what her response might have been if she had thought she had to check with the Rabbi or chief priest before saying yes. This brings us face to face with the reality that each of us is given our special call from God. All of us will need to ponder as we try to form our yes. Like Mary, we will have questions and like Mary we will be rightly afraid. But like Mary, hopefully will have the courage to give ourselves unflinchingly to our call. We will also be blessed if we have an Elizabeth to confirm our choice.

Lk. 1:26-38

26 In the **sixth** month, God sent the **angel Gabriel** to **Nazareth**, a town in **Galilee**, 27 to a **virgin** pledged to be married to a man named **Joseph**, a descendant of **David**. The **virgin's** name was **Mary**. 28 The **angel** went to her and said, "**Greetings**, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you." 29 **Mary** was greatly **troubled** at his words and wondered what kind of **greeting** this might be. 30 But the **angel** said to her, "Do not be **afraid**, **Mary**, you have found **favor** with God. 31 You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name **Jesus**. 32 He will be great and will be called the Son of the **Most High**. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father **David**, 33 and he will reign over the house of **Jacob** forever; his kingdom will never end." 34 How will this be," **Mary** asked the angel, "since I am a **virgin**?" 35 The **angel** answered, "The **Holy Spirit** will come upon you, and the power of the **Most High** will **overshadow** you. So the holy one to be born will be called the **Son of God**. 36 Even **Elizabeth** your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be barren is in her **sixth** month. 37 For nothing is impossible with God." 38 I am the Lord's **servant**," **Mary** answered. "May it be to me as you have said." Then the **angel** left her.

DISCUSSION QUESTION: Mary said "May it be to me as you have said." What helps me respond this way to God's call in my life?

PRAYER: Lord, you were born into a family who eagerly hoped that the Messiah would come in their lifetimes. When Mary and Joseph prepared for your birth, their prayer would be that if a baby girl, she might be the mother of the Messiah. If the baby would be a boy, he would be the Messiah. So you were welcomed into our world with high hopes. Your parents lived into their calls from God, and so did you. Help me to do the same with my call. Amen.

WORD STUDY AND QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

SIXTH: In Jesus' day people attached a lot of significance to numbers. The number six was used to indicate imperfection or the "human number". It symbolized humanity without God, and often used to indicate human labor as opposed to God's rest.

Does knowing this suggest anything to you about what Luke wants to say here? What comes to your mind?

ANGEL: Angels are messengers of God in the bible. They often bring news or challenges from God.

Have you ever been given news, or offered a challenge from God that troubled you? What was it? How did you deal with it?

GABRIEL: Gabriel's name means God or El is strong. He is listed as one of the seven angels that stand before the throne of God. He is the only angel in the Hebrew Scriptures that is connected with the Messianic expectation, and announces the birth of John the Baptist and Jesus.

Would the Jews who were saturated in the Hebrew Scriptures, have made an immediate association with the Messiah, involved in the two births. Does this help to explain why many people thought John was the messiah?

NAZARETH: Nazareth was the home of Joseph and Mary. It is not mentioned at all in the Hebrew Scriptures. It was a lowly town that was looked down upon by most people. (Jn. 1:46)

How does this information help to explain what God is doing in the birth of Jesus? Does it also help to explain why people did not take Jesus seriously?

GALILEE: Galilee was in northern Israel and was the site of many important trade routes. Its population consisted of people of mixed ancestry, and therefore looked down on by those of "pure blood". No one or nothing good (see John 1:46 and 7:52). This means that Jesus came from a small no-place in a no-good part of Israel.

If you lived in the time of Jesus, would this have affected your estimation of him? How?

VIRGIN: To be a virgin in biblical times was absolutely essential and represented the worth of a girl who was still under the discipline of the father.

How would this impair Mary's ability to understand the challenge offered her by Gabriel? If she would have gone to the temple for advice, what do you think she would have been told?

JOSEPH: The name means "may God add". We know little about this man other than he was willing, like Mary, to do what God was calling him to do.

How did God 'add' by way of Joseph?

DAVID: The name means "beloved". God's promise to David is now about to be fulfilled in and through someone from the 'house of David', namely Joseph.

Do you think that Joseph had any idea of the role he was about to play in salvation history? Does anyone? Do you?

MARY: This name seems to derive from Miriam. Some interpret the name "bitterness", others "sweetness". Both words evoke the sense of taste.

What kept Mary from becoming bitter, given all that her yes to God required of her? Has your life included events that could have caused bitterness, save for your faith in God's love? Did anything that started out bitter become sweet?

GREETING: The word means to address someone, often with kind wishes. This sets the tone of the encounter, and allays any apprehension that meeting someone new might cause.

Did this work in this instance? If so, how can you tell? If not, how can you tell?

TROUBLED: This word is loaded with feelings. It often includes uneasiness or annoyance.

Can the fact that God often asks hard things of people be a cause for Mary's troubled feelings?

AFRAID: As a young girl, Mary was rightly afraid of this visitation from the messenger of God.

Does the angel's message help to calm her fears? If you know that you have found favor with God, can anything frighten you?

FAVOR: To be favored is to have a kindness given to you by someone. It necessarily means that someone has good will towards you. *Has God ever 'favored' you with a challenge that helped you find God's will in the situation? Did it feel like good will at the time you were in it? Do you think Mary (before the resurrection) saw her life with Jesus as a favor to her?*

JESUS: The name means, "Yahweh is salvation".

What do you think Mary made of this information? How does verses 1:32-35 help make sense of all this?

MOST HIGH: In early Hebrew faith life, Yahweh was seen as the most high of all the gods before the idea of one God took firm root. People often used other words when speaking of God, such as the most high. Their reverence for God's name made them reticent to write or speak the word.

Do you think Mary understood all that was happening to her? How can you tell?

JACOB: The name means, "may God protect". Jacob was Isaac's second son and the ancestor of David.

How was God protecting the people by way of Jacob? Does having all the right 'players' help Mary make up her mind to say yes to Gabriel?

HOLY SPIRIT: In the Hebrew Scriptures there was a concept of the holiness of God's spirit, but until Pentecost, the people would not have experienced it personally. We often only know what is really happening to us in hindsight.

If you were Mary, do you think you would have comprehended this at the time? Have you ever said yes to something at a feeling level, long before your mind understood what was really going on? Do you think it was that way with Mary?

OVERSHADOWED: This word appears often when God is interacting with creation. It appears in Genesis as God created, in the desert as God led the people, in Luke where Mary conceived Jesus. There is a hovering, brooding dimension to this reality.

How is God hovering/brooding over your life this Advent? Do you feel expectant with new life? How?

SON OF GOD: All believers who loved God and tried to live in accordance with God's will were called sons (children) of the Most High. People in Jesus' time would not have found it unusual to be called a child of God. Most of the Caesar's called themselves sons of the gods.

If you were Mary with this common understanding, would you be totally clear about what this meant? In studying the gospels, do you get any hints that can help answer this question?

ELIZABETH: The name means, "El is fullness". After a lifetime of emptiness, now Elizabeth is full.

How does her fullness fill your faith life this Advent? Has this past year included any fulfillment of your prayers?

SERVANT: A servant does what the master requests. Servants are not free. Unlike hired hands they owed their lives to those who owned them. It was a step above slave, but not much of a step.

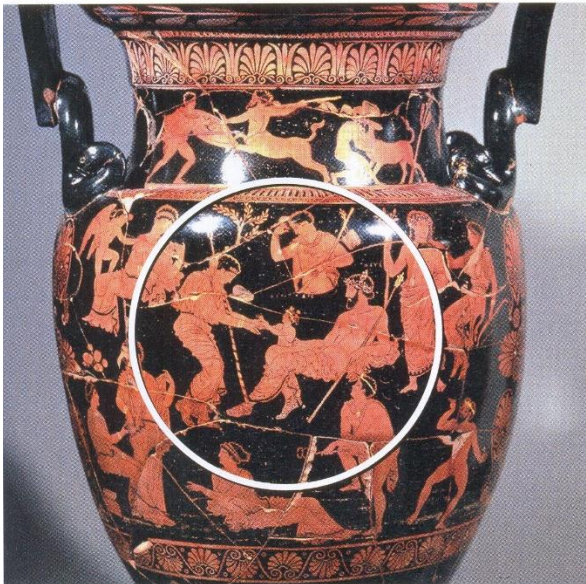
Some translations use the word handmaid instead of servant. Which word works best for you? Why?

PARALLEL TEXTS: Lk. 1:27 // Mt. 1:18; Lk. 1:28 // Ruth 2:4; Jud. 13:18; Lk. 1:30-34 // Gn. 17:16, 19; I Sam. 1: 9-20, 27, 30-33; Lk. 1:30 // Lk. 1:13; Lk. 1:31 // Lk. 2:21 & Mt. 1:21; Is. 7:14; Lk. 1:32f // Is. 9:6-7; Mi. 4:7; 2 Sam. 7:12-16; Lk. 1:33 // Dan. 2:44; 7:14; Lk. 1:35 // Mt. 1:20; Lk. 1:37 // Gn. 18:14; Ex. 40:34; I Kgs. 8:10; Hag. 2:7;

OTHER TEXTS OF THE WEEK: 2 Sam. 7:1-5,8-11,16; [Ps. 89:2-5,27,29](#); Rom. 16: 25-27; Lk. 1:26-38;

Revised Common Lectionary: 2 Sam. 7:1-11, 16; Lk. 1:47-55; Rom. 16:25-27; Lk. 1:26-38;

SUPPORTIVE INFORMATION:



THE SON OF A GOD. Although there are no exact parallels for the story of the virgin birth of Jesus, other well-known tales of gods bearing children by mortals were common in the Greco-Roman world. One example is the mythical birth of Dionysus, the Greek god of wine. Zeus impregnated the princess Semele, but through the meddling of his jealous wife, Hera, Zeus revealed himself to Semele in all his divine glory, something no mortal could survive. As Semele lay dead, Zeus rescued the fetus from her womb and sewed him into his thigh. A few months later, the fully developed baby Dionysus was born from Zeus's leg, as shown on this Greek red-figure *krater* from the early fourth century B.C.E. Freyne believes that this and other similar myths of semi-divine beings made the gospel story of the virgin birth easier to accept for a Hellenistic audience.

Biblical Archaeology Review. 11-12/2010 Pg. 45.

"Contemplative" describes a way of living, a way of loving, a way of being, a way of seeing. Contemplation is not something we do at a particular time of the day. Contemplation is rather living here and now the day in which we find ourselves. Contemplation has to do with the everyday. It is not a question of withdrawing from the world but rather a way of being in the world. One can retreat from the world and still not attain contemplative presence. One can be headed in the wrong direction even in the desert. One can be hurrying to accomplish something even in a monastery. There can be a rush toward enlightenment. Contemplation doesn't have so much to do with "doing" as it does with "letting it be done unto me" (Lk 1:38). It means attentiveness to a different sense of time and timing.

BECOMING CONTEMPLATIVE by Donald Goergen, OP Published in PRIESTS AND PEOPLE, (London, England) June, 2002. Pg. 1.

That first century lacked not only a clear separation of church and state, it also lacked a clear separation of heaven and earth. Turn for a second from the end to the beginning of Jesus' life. Christianity said, according to Luke 1:26:-3.8., that Jesus was born of Mary and the Holy Spirit, of a human mother and a divine Father. Paganism could not respond in rebuttal that such was quite impossible. Pagans knew, after all, of the birth of Aeneas from a divine mother and a human father. Closer to home, there was the claim that Augustus himself was conceived from a divine father and a human mother. Atia spent the night in Apollo's temple, the god visited her in the guise of a snake, and "in the tenth month after that Augustus was born and was therefore regarded as the son of Apollo," according to Suetonius's *The Lives of the Caesars: The Deified Augustus* 94:4 (Rolfe 1.267). Against such a background, the best paganism could offer to refute Luke was this, from Celsus's late-second-century *On the True Doctrine*: "Are we to think that the high God would have fallen in love with a woman of no breeding?" (Hoffmann 57-58). Not that it could not happen, but it could not happen to a peasant woman. In a world where gods and goddesses, spirits and immortals regularly interacted physically and sexually, spiritually and intellectually with human beings, the conception of a divine child and the vision of a dead person are neither totally abnormal nor completely unique events. Pgs. XVIII-xvii.

Crossan, John Dominic. *The Birth of Christianity*. NY. HarperSanFrancisco. 1998.

“All Christian life is meant to be at the same time profoundly contemplative and rich in active work... It is true that we are called to create a better world. But we are first of all called to a more immediate and exalted task: that of creating our own lives. In doing this, we act as co-workers with God. We take our place in the great work of mankind, since in effect the creation of our own destiny, in God, is impossible in pure isolation. Each one of us works out his own destiny in inseparable union with all those others with whom God has willed us to live. We share with one another the creative work of living in the world. And it is through our struggle with material reality, with nature, that we help one another create at the same time our own destiny and a new world for our descendants.”
Thomas Merton

The role of freedom and otherness in Christology is evident also in the involvement of the Holy spirit in Christ's being (Lk. 1:35). The fact that Christ was ‘born of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary’ according to the Creed, implies that the event of the Incarnation took place in freedom on both the divine and the human side, and that Christ's unity with us was a unity in otherness. The Spirit is, by definition, connected with freedom and with the distribution of ‘division’ of gifts in a personal way. Pg. 37
Zizioulas, John D. *Communion and Otherness*. NY. T & T Clark. 2006

I suggest that the role of the Spirit in creation may therefore be regarded as that of mediating between God and the world, bringing into relationship that which would otherwise be separated by the otherness of Secondness.
Andrew Robinson. *Zygon* 3/04. Pg. 127. (Article on the Trinity and creation)

The only church Father that mentions anything like a virgin birth is Ignatius of Antioch who died around 107 CE. He was an early ecclesiastical writer; martyr and bishop of Antioch in Syria for 40 years. Importance of the virgin birth starts to take shape around the year 400 CE.

Mt. 1: 18-23 and Lk. 1:26-35 trace Jesus' divine sonship to the moment of his birth from the Virgin Mary. The Infancy Gospel of James goes to great lengths to prove Mary's suitability as the mother of God's son. The Gospel of the Hebrews goes even further, describing Mary as a divine “power that came down into the world” (fragment 1).
Charles W. Hedrick. *The 34 Gospels: Diversity and Division among the Earliest Christians*. Bible Review. 6/02 Pg. 30.

Moved by similar theological motives, both Matthew and Luke make a point of locating Jesus' birth in the town of Bethlehem. But, significantly, they establish that point in different ways. Luke tells about the census-driven trip to Bethlehem, with no room for Joseph and Mary in the inn. It is Nazareth that stands at the center of Luke's account: Joseph makes his home in Nazareth (Lk 1:27); Nazareth is where the angel Gabriel visits Mary (Lk. 1:26). It is from Nazareth they leave (Lk. 2:4), and to Nazareth they return (Lk. 2:39,51). Bethlehem is simply the destination of a momentary excursion, a side trip, albeit on that suffices to establish Jesus as a native of Bethlehem. Luke's narrative, centered in Nazareth, with the family making a special trip to Bethlehem where the birth takes place, reflects the history of the tradition itself, in which Bethlehem comes to displace the older Nazareth tradition. In the tradition, as in Luke, Bethlehem is an insertion into a Nazareth story. Pg. 23. Beck Robert. *Banished Messiah*. Eugene, OR. Wipf & Stock. 2010/

Thus the consensus view is that the author is a Gentile writing to a primarily Gentile audience, sometime in the last first or early second century. Indeed, some scholars suggest that the first two chapters are additions, created in the early second century and designed not to foreground the practice of Judaism, but to counter the arguments of [Marcion](#), a Christian teacher who promoted the idea that the God of the Old Testament was not the one revealed by Jesus (the stereotype of the “Old Testament God of wrath” vs. the New Testament God of love” is a recrudescence of the Marcionite heresy. Pg. 97.
Levine, Amy-Jill & Brettler, Marc Zvi. *The Jewish Annotated New Testament*. NY. Oxford Univ. Press. 2011

The official date of Christmas was established on Dec. 25th around 900 CE, and replaces the festivals that marked the return of the sun in the lengthening of the days. For a deeper understanding of the challenge the angel poses to Mary look up; Sirach 26:10-12; 42:9-10; Dt. 22:13-21: Nu. 5:11-31.

Mary: a word dreamer. As each of us is called by this Word to be. This suggests that we become pregnant by listening. We hold the shell of the word, its sound, deeply to our ear, which it curiously mirrors in its own spiraling shape. We become as little children in the way we listen, wide-eyed with wonder as the world of the infinite sea rumbles into our brains. This is incarnation, the word pitching its tent within us. Thorpe, Douglas. *Poetry, Madness, and the Inner Ear*. Parabola, Summer 1992. Pages 44f.

In The [Gospel of the birth of Mary](#), chapters two and three tell of Mary's birth by way of angelic visitations to both Joachim and Anna her parents. In chapter 3:2 we find: “For I am that angel who hath offered up your prayers and alms before God, and am now sent to you, that I may inform you, that a daughter will be born unto you, who shall be called blessed above all women. “ Later in chapter seven we find the angel Gabriel we find a parallel to today's reading of the Annunciation. Later in 9:7 we find: “Hail thou who art full of grace, the Lord is with thee; thou art blessed among women.”
[The Lost Books of the Bible & The Forgotten Books of Eden](#). World Bible Pub, Inc. 1926. Pages 19, 22-3, 29.

The artist is a sacrament maker, a creator of emphasized, clarified beauty designed to make us see. Andrew Greeley

Very early on, the heretical belief that Jesus was not truly human ([Docetism](#) – to seem or to appear), spread throughout the early communities. [Tertullian](#) in his document: [On the Flesh of Christ](#) refutes this belief in chapter two. (Pg. 219) Later on in his work [On First Principles](#) he comes back to this same subject in [Against Praxeas](#) in chapter 27 (page 413). Another early document by [Origen](#) against Celsus, chapter 28, addresses Jesus’ human birth. (page 85). Origen revisits this issue in his [Homilies on Luke](#) in Homily 6 chapters 3 and 4 (page 373-4). In [The Proto-Gospel of James](#) we find once again mention of the Annunciation in chapter 12 (page 251). Ehrman, Bart. *After the New Testament*. NY: Oxford Univ. Press. 1998.

Some other great men that were thought to be fathered by gods: Sargon of Akhoda, Amenophis of Assyria, Alexander the Great, Plato, Aesculapius, Dionysius, Heracles, Hermes, Romulus and Remus, Augustus Caesar, Siddhartha Buddha.

Luke’s idea of the “power” of the “highest-one” overshadowing and “coming upon” Mary, the submissive “slave-girl” (*doule*), the “most-favored” one that the *kyrios* (master) has visited (Luke 1:35, 38, 28) has echoes of Greco-Roman stories of divine-human intercourse and of the sexual accessibility of a slave woman to a master (Ex. 21:7-11; Deut. 15:12, 17). Streete, Gail Corrington. *The Strange Woman*. Louisville, KY. Westminster John Knox Press. 1997. Pg. 128.

In Luke’s gospel, the true disciple as the one who hears the word of God and does it. (Luke 1:38).

Lk. 1.26–38: The annunciation. 26: Sixth month, after John’s conception. Gabriel, see 1.19. Galilee, northern Israel. Nazareth, a small village (cf. Jn 1.46) in southern Galilee, outside of the NT unattested in first-century literature. Although Matthew and Luke locate Jesus’ birth in Bethlehem (Mt 2.6 specifies in Judea), Jesus was known as being from Nazareth (see, e.g., Jn 1.46). 27: Virgin (Gk “parthenos”); Luke emphasizes the term (also v. 34). Engaged, the wedding contract (“ketubah”) had been signed. M. Avot 5.21 sets the ideal age for a man to marry at eighteen; Josephus, following Roman norms, married at about thirty. House of David, one dominant Jewish messianic expectation was that the messiah would be David’s descendant (see 2 Sam 7.12). Mary (Gk “Mariam”), from Heb “Miryam”; the name, recollecting both Moses’ sister Miriam and Herod’s Hasmonean wife Mariamme, was common among first-century Jewish women. 28: Greetings, a traditional Greek salutation, which can also be translated “Hail” as in “Hail Mary” (Lat “Ave Maria”). The Lord is with you, see Judg 6.12; 2 Sam 7.3; 2 Chr 15.2. 29: Perplexed (Gk “diatarassō”), the related term (“tarassō”) in 1.12, referring to Zechariah’s vision, is translated “terrified.” 31: You will name him, 1.13n. Jesus, Gk “Iesous,” from Heb “Yehoshua,” “the Lord saves” (see Mt 1.21), a common name in the Tanakh and subsequently. 32: Son of the Most High, indicating royal authority (2 Sam 7.13–16) and rectitude (Sir 4.10; see also Dan 7.25); “Most High” translates the Heb “El Elyon” or “YHWH Elyon” (e.g., Gen 14.18–22; Ps 78.35). Throne of his ancestor David, v. 27n. on the promises to David, see also Ps 89; Jer 23.5–8; Pss. Sol. 17.4,6,21; etc. 33: House of Jacob, synonym for Israel (Ex 19.3; Isa 46.3; 48.1, Jer 2.4; Ps 114.1; and elsewhere). Kingdom there will be no end, see 2 Sam 7.13,16, which use the Hebrew “ad ‘olam,” “forever,” of the Davidic dynasty. 35: Holy Spirit . . . overshadow, see 1.15n., Ex 40.35. Son of God, in 3.38, Adam is a “son of God”; cf. 2 Sam 7.14. Luke develops Jesus’ divine nature throughout the narrative. The virginal conception is clearer in Mt 1.23. No Jewish texts regard Isa 7.14 as predicting the messiah’s birth or take Son of God as indicating anything other than divine adoption (2 Sam 7.14; Ps 2.7; 4QFlor 10–13). 36: Your relative Elizabeth, indicating Mary’s priestly ancestry. 37: Nothing will be impossible, see Gen 18.14 concerning the birth of Isaac; Jer 32.17; Zech 8.6. 38: Servant, Gk “doulē,” “slave.” Pg. 99. [The Jewish Annotated New Testament](#)

If our God is both incarnate and implanted, both Christ and Holy Spirit, then an unfolding inner dynamism in all creation is not only certain, but also moving in a positive direction, with a divine goal that is always set before us. Richard Rohr

The final end of the Incarnation is the realization of God’s union with the entire universe. —Alan Watts

The eternal birth which God bore and bears unceasingly in eternity is now born in time, in human nature. St. Augustine says this birth is always happening. But if it does not happen in me, what does it profit me? What matters is that it shall happen in me. Meister Eckhart

SUGGESTED READINGS:

Links to all the books mentioned in this guide are on The Ark web site: www.theark1.com

Beck, Robert. *Sunday Homilies: Cycle B* 2015. Pgs.14-17. . To order contact Carol.Oberfoell@loras.edu

Beck, Robert. *Sunday Homilies: Cycle B* 20075-6. Pgs. 15-18.

Beck, Robert. *Sunday Homilies: Cycle B* 2009-10. Pgs. 13-16.



Mary, / Nazareth girl: / What did you know of ethereal beings / with messages from God? / What did you know of men / when you found yourself with child? / What did you know of babies, / you, barely out of childhood yourself? / God-chosen girl: / What did you know of God / that brought you to this stable / blessed among women? / Could it be that you had been ready / waiting / listening / for the footsteps / of an angel? / Could it be there are messages for us / if we have the faith to listen?

Weems, Ann. *Kneeling in Bethlehem*. Philadelphia. Westminster Press. 1980. Pg. 25.