

Luke 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 favour with God.

31 You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. (Yeshua)

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.

This morning I want to look at the Encounter Mary has with the Angel Gabriel at the Annunciation of Jesus' birth. This was certainly a life changing event for Mary but it was also the first of many endorsements of the divine identity of Jesus the Messiah.

Angels in Jewish Tradition

At the head of the angelic system described in rabbinic literature are four archangels, corresponding to the four divisions of the army of Israel and their positions in the camp as described in Numbers 2. To the Rabbinic sages this earthly arrangement was a reflection of the heavenly throne.

"As the Holy One blessed be He created four winds (directions) and four banners (for Israel's army), so also did He make four angels to surround His Throne — Michael, Gabriel, Uriel and Raphael. Michael is on its right, corresponding to the tribe of Reuben; Uriel on its left, corresponding to the tribe of Dan, which was located in the north; Gabriel in front, corresponding to the tribe of Judah as well as Moses and Aaron who were in the east; and Raphael in the rear, corresponding to the tribe of Ephraim which was in the west." (*Numbers Rabbah 2:10*)

We find no mention of angels' names until we reach the Book of Daniel, where Michael and Gabriel make their appearance. (*Daniel 10:13, 21; 12:1 and 8:16; 9:21*)

*To my right Michael and
to my left Gabriel, in
front of me Uriel and
behind me Raphael, and
over my head God's
Shekhinah
["the presence of God"]."*
—**From the *Kriat
Shma*, prayer recited
before the *Shma* when
going to sleep**

This fact led the Rabbis to assert that the names of the angels were something that the returning exiles brought with them from Babylonia. (*Jer Talmud, RH 1:2, 56d*) Michael and Gabriel are the most prominent of the angels, and are often mentioned together as the anonymous divine messengers cooperating in a task in the Bible narrative. According to the sages Michael and Gabriel visited Abraham after his circumcision, Michael's task being to announce the future birth of Isaac while Gabriel's was to destroy Sodom. (*Gen. Rabbah 48:9-50:2*) Together they recorded the birthright was sold to Jacob by Esau; (*Gen. Rabbah 63:14*) accompanied God when He came down on Mount Sinai; (*Deut. Rabbah 2:34*) refused to take Moses' soul when his time came to die; (*Eccles. Rabbah 9:11, 2*) and then stood at either side of his' bier after his death. (*Deut. Rabbah 11:10*)

To these deeds that sages add some intriguing descriptions such as the idea that Michael is made up entirely of snow and Gabriel of fire, and though they stand near one another they do not injure one another, thus indicating the power of God to "make peace in His high places." (*Job 25:2; Deut. Rabbah 5:12*) According to the *Aggadah*, both Michael and Gabriel will be among those who will accompany the Messiah, and they will then contend with the wicked. (*Otiyyot de-Rabbi Akiva Shin*)

Michael was considered superior to Gabriel in rank (*Babylonian Talmud Berakhot 4b*) and wherever Michael appears, the glory of the *Shekhinah*, the Holy Spirit, is also bound to be found. (*Exodus Rabbah 2:5*)

Many of these views would have been commonly held in Jesus' day. They would have formed part of the oral tradition, and as such, they give us an insight into the expectations and of the people in the Gospel accounts.

THE ANGEL

Luke 1:19 I am Gabriel: "the angel of the Lord". Why was it Gabriel and not the superior Michael who announced the birth of Jesus?

In Jewish tradition Gabriel, not Michael, was associated with the Tribe of Judah – the tribe from which King David had come. He is also identified with Moses and Aaron from whom the standard for the Messiah is set.

The angel is identified as Gabriel, who in **Daniel 9:20-25** announces the seventy weeks of years and the coming of an anointed one, a prince. By alluding to Old Testament themes in **Luke 1:17, 19** such as the coming of the day of the Lord and the dawning of the messianic era, Luke draws attention to the salvific significance of the births of John and Jesus.

THE ANNOUNCEMENT

In Luke's account the announcement to Mary of the birth of Jesus is parallel to the announcement to Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, about the birth of John.

In both events the angel Gabriel:

* appears to the parent who is troubled by the vision

(**Luke 1:11-12, 26-29**)

* then the person is told by the angel not to fear (**Luke 1:13, 30**).

* After the announcement is made (**Luke 1:14-17, 31-33**)

the parent objects (**Luke 1:18, 34**)

* and a sign is given to confirm the announcement (**Luke 1:20, 36**).

The particular focus of the announcement of the birth of Jesus is on his identity as Son of David (**Luke 1:32-33**) and Son of God (**Luke 1:32, 35**).

The account presents parallel scenes (diptychs) of angelic announcements of the birth of John the Baptist and of Jesus, and of the birth, circumcision, and presentation of John and Jesus. In this parallelism, the ascendancy of Jesus over John is stressed:

* John is prophet of the Most High (**Luke 1:76**);

Jesus is Son of the Most High (**Luke 1:32**).

* John is great in the sight of the Lord (**Luke 1:15**);

Jesus will be "Great" (a LXX attribute, used absolutely, of God alone) (**Luke 1:32**).

* John will go before the Lord (**Luke 1:16-17**);

Jesus will be Lord (**Luke 1:43; 2:11**).

* where John is described as "prophet of the Most High." **Luke 1:76**

Jesus is the Son of the Most High:

"Most High" is a title for God commonly used by Luke (**Luke 1:35, 76; 6:35; 8:28; Acts 7:48; 16:17**).

Mary's questioning response (**Luke 1:34**) is a denial of sexual relations and is used by Luke to lead to the angel's declaration about the Spirit's role in the conception of this child (**Luke 1:35**). According to Luke, the virginal conception of Jesus takes place through the Holy Spirit, the power of God, and therefore Jesus has a unique relationship to Yahweh: he is Son of God.

A Misconception and this conception

A very common misconception has been made because of what is said here and needs to be dispelled. It was propagated in some circles that the reason for the necessity of the virgin birth was that this was the only possible way of keeping Jesus from inheriting the sin nature. They go on to teach that the sin nature was transmitted through the male only. Since Jesus did not have a human father He was sinless. He only had a human mother and the sin nature is not transmitted through the mother. Actually, nowhere in the Bible does it say that the sin nature is transmitted through the male only. What kept Jesus from inheriting the sin nature was not the absence of the male seed, but the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit. If God wanted to, He could have produced a sinless being using both the male seed and the female egg. The reason for the virgin birth is that this is the way that God chose to do it, not because this was the only way. He chose to do it this way, and in doing so fulfilled prophecies that He stated in the Hebrew Scriptures. The way this is going to be accomplished is by the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit. Ultimately, it is not the birth of Jesus that is a miracle, since He was born like any other baby. The miracle is the conception; and by the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit

she is going to conceive. Because the conception comes by means of the Holy Spirit, two things will result:

- (1) the product will be sinless. He shall be Holy.
- (2) He shall be called the Son of God.

THE SERVANT OF GOD

Miriam's response to the Angel's announcement has been an inspiration to followers of Jesus in every generation.

"I am the Lord's servant, may it be to me as you have said."

Luke 36-37 The sign given to Mary in confirmation of the angel's announcement to her is the pregnancy of her elderly relative Elizabeth. If a woman past the childbearing age could become pregnant, why, the angel implies, should there be doubt about Mary's pregnancy, for nothing will be impossible for God.

Vs. 38: The angel's message and sign satisfied Miriam. But, she must have been very much aware of the ridicule she was going to open herself up to. It is to her credit that serving God was far more important than the accusations of people. At this point, Miriam totally submits herself to the will and care of God. And well she might in the light of three things.

First, the Old Testament penalty for a betrothed virgin suddenly found to be pregnant was execution by being stoned to death. Miriam had to trust God that when it became more and more apparent that she was pregnant and not yet married to Joseph that God would protect her so that she would not be

executed.

Second, she had to trust God to protect her from the reaction of the community. She had to believe God would protect her from being totally ostracized from the community, and, therefore, her child being forever labeled illegitimate.

Third, she needed to trust God for her relationship with Joseph. This was a truly great concern because he was in the process of divorcing Miriam from the betrothal relationship.

APPLICATION.

There are things that we have to trust God for because we have no control over them. Mary's response to this situation is willing trust which overflows to rejoicing. What a difference this is to begrudging faith which resents not having the whole picture.