

A Call to Provide

Luke 1:26-38

Intro. About 30 years ago, I experienced something unusual. My father called to share a need. He asked if we could possibly loan them a sizeable sum of money. Because an employee had embezzled company tax withholdings, my father had learned that nothing was sent in for his annual earnings. My father had always been the faithful “bread winner.” To make ends meet, he often worked two jobs. He was the family provider...the one his wife and children turned to whenever we needed something. Yet on this occasion, my parent’s were in need. Their crisis and request created a role reversal. The generous provider was the one asking. The giver was in need.

My story relates to the situation we encounter this morning. Last time we considered **Lk.1:1-25** and A Call to Prepare. Dr. Luke explained how the angel Gabriel had appeared to a faithful old priest named, Zechariah. The angel told him his wife would conceive and give birth to a son whom they were to name, John. Their son would be none other than John the Baptist...the forerunner of the Messiah...the prophet who would fulfill the promise made by Malachi 450 years earlier...the revivalist God would use to prepare the hearts of Israel to receive their king.

From the Bible’s earliest chapters, we learn that God is a Provider. In **Job 36:29-31** one of Job’s friends waxed eloquent in declaring the greatness of God who controls the complex hydro-system that waters the earth. Elihu said, **How great is God--beyond our understanding! The number of his years is past finding out. He draws up the drops of water, which distill as rain to the streams; the clouds pour down their moisture and abundant showers fall on mankind. Who can understand how he spreads out the clouds, how he thunders from his pavilion? See how he scatters his lightning about him, bathing the depths of the sea. This is the way he governs the nations and provides food in abundance.** Notice that last phrase...He provides food in abundance. Notice too, the Lord also governs the nations by sending or withholding rain.

That God provides for His creation is cited often in the Scriptures, especially the Psalms. When idol worshippers at Lystra tried to offer sacrifices to Paul and Barnabas because they healed a crippled man, Paul said... **“Men, why are you doing this? We too are only men, human like you. We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made heaven and earth and sea and everything in them. In the past, he let all nations go their own way. Yet he has not left himself without testimony: He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy.”** So once again, God is to be worshipped because He is a faithful provider. We are the recipients of every good and perfect gift He lavishes upon us.

Yet God’s ultimate provision is His only begotten Son. God gave His Son to die in our place. The substitutionary sacrifice of Jesus Christ was anticipated centuries earlier as recorded in **Gen. 22**. On that occasion the Lord had asked Abraham to sacrifice his only son, Isaac. As Abraham prepared to obey the Lord, his son Isaac noted the fire and the wood. Not knowing what God had asked his father to do, he said, *“father, where is the lamb?”* Abraham answered, **“God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.” And the two of them went on together. When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. But the angel of the LORD called out to him from heaven, “Abraham! Abraham!” “Here I am,” he replied. “Do not lay a hand on the boy,” he said. “Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son.” Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns.**

He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son. So Abraham called that place The LORD Will Provide. And to this day it is said, "On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided." (Gen. 22:8-14) From this event forward, God made Himself known as Jehovah Jireh which means *the Lord will provide*. This place where God provided a lamb for Abraham is called Moriah. It was on this same elevation in Jerusalem that Solomon built the Temple and it was here that God provided His only Son, to die for the sins of the world.

So God is the ultimate provider. This is established again in Paul's letter to Timothy. He wrote, **Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. – I Tim. 6:17**

Though God is our Provider, what we see in this next part of the Christmas story involves a role reversal. Here the God who provides everything we need, sends an angel to ask a young Jewish virgin to provide something for Him. Think of it...the Creator God who made everything and owns everything...sent his angel to Nazareth because He needed something. To advance His plan to save the world from sin and death, God needed this faithful young teenager named Mary. This announcement made by the angelic messenger, consisted of *A Call to Provide*.

On the sermon notes, you'll see how I've divided the passage.

1. The Facts of Mary's life – vs. 26-28 - v. 26 begins with a time notation. Gabriel was sent to Nazareth **6 months** after Elizabeth became pregnant with John. A new chapter in God's redemptive program opened when Heaven's silence was broken by Gabriel's visit to Zechariah. God was doing some new things. Among these new things, was the birth of a male child to an old man and woman. And now for the first time in history, a son would be conceived and born to a young virgin. If we were the advertiser hired to announce heaven's selection of the mother to the long-awaited Messiah, we'd probably do so on prime time TV and the internet. We'd launch a massive ad campaign beforehand. But God did all this quietly and without fanfare. He sent an angel to Nazareth in Galilee, the hometown of Mary and Joseph. Without GPS, street signs or needing to ask directions, Gabriel arrived at the right place. It would seem that angels know their way around.

According to the norms of that culture, Mary was at most 14 or 15 years old and Joseph was 17 or 18. Even before her name is mentioned, Mary is described as a **virgin pledged to be married**. The fact that she was a virgin is obviously important because it's repeated in the next verse. The word translated **virgin** is *parthenos* in Greek. Unlike other Greek words which mean maiden / *young girl* / *or woman of marriageable age*, *parthenos* can only mean **virgin**, or a female who had never experienced sexual intimacy with a man. Though Mary was **pledged** or engaged to be married, she and Joseph had kept themselves morally pure. This is confirmed by **Matt. 1:18** which says, **This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit.**

According to Jewish marriage customs, the engagement period was known as the *kiddushin*. This period of preparation lasted one year and was then followed by the wedding ceremony. During this year the couple lived apart even though they were legally married in the sight of the Law. If at any time during the *kiddushin* either party violated their vows or were found to have behaved immorally, a formal divorce was required to annul the marriage contract. This explains **Matt. 1:19** which says, **Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.** But we're getting ahead of ourselves. Notice that **v.27** says Joseph was a descendant of King David. This fulfilled the ancient prophecies concerning the genealogy of Israel's Messiah.

From the historical record in **Matt. 1**, we learn that Mary also descended from David. The legal line to Israel's throne was established by Joseph's relation to David through David's son, Solomon. The blood line was established by Mary's relation to David through David's son, Nathan. With amazing precision, God delivered His chosen Messiah exactly as promised in a way that certified His identity. Yet just as we saw with Zechariah and Elizabeth, God's plan involves faithful people...not as lifeless chess pieces...but human beings who trust Him. Human beings humble enough to acknowledge God's rightful claim to use their lives for His purposes.

As we said last time, people were typically stunned and fearful when they came face to face with an angel. So have to disarm and calm us down with a smile and a friendly word. **v. 28** says the angel approached Mary this way, "**Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.**" The words, **highly favored** are related to the Greek noun *charis*...the word for grace. The angel wanted Mary to know she was an object of God's grace...His unmerited favor.

Religion has elevated Mary to the status of co-redeemer and one to be prayed to and worshipped. The Bible doesn't support this. The Bible introduces Mary as a sinner who needed God's salvation as much as any other human being. Though unworthy of such high honor, God chose her to be the vessel through whom His Son would be born. The humility and faith of this young woman is revealed in the words, "**The Lord is with you.**" Mary knew the Lord and walked with the Lord. She believed the promises God had made to His people. Like Zechariah and Elizabeth, she lived her life in obedience to the Lord's commands. Though ordinary / poor / and resident of a small town off the beaten track...she possessed a faith that qualified her to serve God and provide for His unusual need.

2. The Fear in Mary's heart – vs. 29, 30 – As somebody said, "*God has never let me down, but He's scared me to death a couple of times.*" Unlike Zechariah, Mary didn't doubt the truthfulness of what the angel said, but she **was greatly troubled at his words**. The Greek word translated **greatly troubled** is *diatrasso* which means *to be confused or perplexed*. In plain English, "she was all shook up!" The fact that she **wondered what kind of greeting this might be** means that at first she didn't know whether the angel had come with good news or bad news.

To reassure Mary, Gabriel repeated himself. He said, "**Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God.**" Gabriel said "**Do not be**...*phobeo*, which as you guessed, means to be afraid/ apprehensive / or frightened. Whenever God asks us to do something new and strange we tend to become confused and frightened. Whenever normal patterns are disrupted, alarms go off in our heads. God has wired in these alarms as a warning system to protect us. But while this built in alarm is normal and healthy, there's a soul-destroying kind of fear that can grip and take control of us.

People are sometimes gripped by the fear of death / the fear of losing a child or spouse / the fear of sickness / or the fear of unemployment and loss of income. The Bible says the fear of man is a snare...a trap. This kind of fear can be completely irrational because it's often based on some dreadful thing that hasn't happened yet and probably never will. For Mary, fear was just a momentary reaction to circumstances she had never experienced before...like a visit by an angel. She listened to the angel, believed what He said and got over it. She refused to let fear move in and take control. But the other kind of fear can be sinful and paralyzing. It can prevent us from doing what God asks us to do. Mary illustrates the fact that trust in God can't coexist with fear.

So, God tapped Mary on the shoulder and asked her to do something. She didn't feel worthy of His grace to her. I think her response can be summed up in these two words... "*Who me?...Why should God be so gracious to me?*" That's how humble people respond when God asks them to do something. When called to provide something for the One who made her and saved her, she felt unworthy. She felt unworthy and un-entitled.

Her feelings were miles from the crowd that feels God and other people owe them something.

3. The Wonder in Mary's mind – vs. 31-34 – Long before the advent of ultrasound, and even before Jesus was conceived, Gabriel told Mary she would **give birth to a son**. There was no doubt about it...paint the baby's room blue! In fact, the angel said, **“you are to give him the name Jesus.”** **Jesus** is *Yeshua*. *Yeshua* means Jehovah saves. When the angel appeared to Joseph a short time later, he added this, **“She will give birth to a son, and you are to give Him the name Jesus, because He will save his people from their sins.” - Matt. 1:21** From before His conception, God said this child born to Mary would be the Savior of mankind...the One He promised at the time of the fall. So now we know what God needed and what He asked this young Jewish virgin to provide. He asked Mary to provide Him with herself. 600 years earlier the prophet Isaiah had made this promise... He said, **Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel. – Isa. 7:14** The virgin is Mary from Nazareth!

The angel went on to say five things about Mary's son:

- **He will be great** – Can anyone deny the fact that Jesus is great? He's the greatest most significant person in all of history. Someone has written: *“Of all times, He is the turning point / of all love He is the highest point / of all salvation, He is the starting point / of all worship, He is the central point.”* Jesus is truly great and worthy of all praise!
- **He will be called Son of the Most High** – In these words, Mary couldn't have missed the significance of who her baby would be. And neither should we. The fact that Jesus was **Son of the Most High** pointed to His equality with Yaweh, the God of Israel. Mary, can you grasp this? *“Your baby will be God's Son!”* In Jewish thought, the phrase, **son of** meant this boy was a carbon copy of his father. **Son of** was used to refer to one who possessed his father's qualities and attributes. In every respect, the name **Son of the Most High** implies that Jesus is both co-equal and co-eternal with God the Father...God the Most High!

Later Jesus said, **“I and my Father are One.”** This claim aroused the hostility of the Jewish leaders who had already decided He was an imposter who must be eliminated. Murderous men can eliminate a man, but they can never eliminate God. After wicked men crucified and buried Jesus, Paul wrote...**He was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord. - Rom. 1:4**

The first 2 promises made by Gabriel were fulfilled by Jesus at His first coming, but the remaining 3 will be fulfilled when He returns. I've combined them as one.

- **He will be given the throne of His father David / He will reign over the house of Jacob forever / His kingdom will never end** As David's descendent, Jesus will reign over Israel and the nations during the 1,000 year Millennium and beyond into the eternal state. The Lord made these promises in **II Sam. 7:16** – To David He promised, **Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever.”**

Mary must have immediately connected these promises with those made to David. David and Israel's leaders understood these prophecies referred not only to David's immediate son, Solomon, but beyond Solomon to the future Son who would rule forever. In **II Sam. 7:19** David said, **“And as if this were not enough in your sight, O Sovereign LORD, you have also spoken about the future of the house of your servant.”**

Before we consider the next part of the narrative, let's go back to the 2nd promise. Gabriel wasn't the only angel to call Jesus by the title, **Son of the Most High God**. **Mk. 5** records the story of a demon possessed man who lived among the tombs in Gadara. When this man saw Jesus from a distance, **He shouted at the top of his voice, "What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? Swear to God that you won't torture me!" For Jesus had said to him, "Come out of this man, you evil spirit!" - Mk. 5:7, 8** That was the demon speaking! The angels of heaven know who Jesus is but so does the Devil and the fallen angels. Human beings are the only ones in the Universe who doubt and deny Jesus...who refuse to believe the record God has given concerning His Son.

Mary's mind had to be racing a mile a minute. Her biggest unanswered question was how? **v.34 - "How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"** Biologically speaking, this isn't possible!

Those who claim that a literal belief in the virgin birth is unnecessary are wrong. Our culture doesn't like firm, definitive answers like that. It's not politically correct. But the fact is...the virgin birth is an underlying assumption in everything the Bible says about Jesus. To cast aside the virgin birth is to reject Christ's deity / to deny the accuracy and authority of Scripture / and to undermine a host of other related doctrines that form the heart and soul of the Christian faith. Mary clearly understood that something supernatural would have to happen for her to be pregnant.

4. The Submission in Mary's spirit – vs. 35-38 - v.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. I don't know how some read this verse and still say the virgin birth is unnecessary and peripheral. In terms that are reverent and perfectly discrete, Gabriel explained the delicate mystery of the incarnation. Unlike natural conception, he explained that Jesus would be conceived by the power of God creating an embryo in Mary's body. The fact that the power of the Holy Spirit would **overshadow** Mary reminds us of the creation account of **Gen.1**. There **the Spirit of God** is said to have been **hovering over the waters** as God's creative work began. Those who reject the Genesis account of creation and the fact that God supernaturally created the Heaven's and the earth...will have great difficulty believing the virgin birth and the miracles performed by Jesus. But if you believe God's testimony about the creation of the universe and the origin of life, you'll have no trouble believing God's testimony about the virgin birth. And listen...if God can't create life in the womb of a virgin, it's doubtful that He can speak new life into the heart of a sinful human being! To deny one super-natural act of God is to cast doubt on all the rest!

So how important is the virgin birth? Gabriel said, **So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God**. The word **so** means on account of or because it will happen this way. If Jesus didn't come in this supernatural way, He would have been an ordinary human being and not **the Son of God**. As an ordinary human being, He would have inherited a sin nature like us and therefore, could not have been the perfect and sufficient sacrifice for the sin of mankind. But because His conception was supernatural and God is His Father, He is the perfect / holy / unique / only begotten Son of God. He is the infinite God in human form...the only One qualified to redeem us. In **I Tim. 3:16** Paul wrote, **Beyond all question, the mystery of godliness is great: He appeared in a body...** The Incarnation is the foundation of Christianity which is explained by the virgin birth.

vs. 36, 37 say, **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.** God has a wonderful way of providing assurance for those who trust Him. Amen? Mary believed God. She believed the message sent from God by way of Gabriel. Her questions were not expressions of doubt...she just wanted to know **how** such a thing could happen. God loves to reward faith with sight and always in that order. If we sincerely take God at His Word, He will open our eyes to see more and more of His truth.

So God provided Mary with assurance that came through fellowship with her cousin, Elizabeth. Now Elizabeth was much older than Mary and well past normal child-bearing years. For years she'd been unable to conceive. Yet at that very moment, cousin Lizzy was 6 months pregnant! What could account for these miracles of conception? There could be only one explanation...The angel said, "**For nothing is impossible with God.**" It was humanly impossible for these ladies to be pregnant...but both of them were in a family way. This was God's doing. His salvation plan was moving forward. The God who provides everything had found two ladies willing to surrender themselves to His plan and purposes. Though this must have been crazy big for them to grasp, they were providing God with just what He needed to provide salvation for the entire world.

As the story continues, Mary immediately hurried to the home of Zachariah and Elizabeth in the hill country of Judea. Though Zechariah was still unable to speak or add anything to their conversations, Mary's faith was strengthened in the fellowship of this old priest and his wife. I picture Mary and Elizabeth giggling like two school girls given leading parts in a school play. This part of the Christmas story ends with Mary's response. Her response demonstrates her willingness to provide what God asked of her. "**I am the Lord's servant,**" Mary answered. "**May it be to me as you have said.**" **Then the angel left her.** Mary surrendered herself to the plan of God. She called herself the Lord's *doulas*...the Lord's bondservant. As an obedient **servant** who just heard her master's voice, she said, "**May it be to me as you have said**" or "*so be it.*" From that moment on, Mary's life changed forever. Her pregnancy would be misunderstood. There would be whispers when she went to the marketplace. Joseph would question her love and be tempted to divorce her. And some centuries after her time, religion would make the sinful mistake of elevating her to an undeserved status. Yet with remarkable humility, she said, "**May it be to me as you have said.**"

When I got over the initial shock of my father asking for money, I said, "*Yes, of course we will!*" I once read that raising a child from birth to college graduation costs somewhere around \$400,000...not to mention the nurturing and constant TLC required. Now in a way too insignificant to be worthy of mention, we had an opportunity to repay His generosity.

But how unusual!...How extraordinary...How irregular...How amazing it is to learn that the God who is sufficient in Himself, would ever experience need. Yet is it really that strange that God would ask us to provide something for Him? In **Rom. 12:1** Paul wrote, **Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--this is your spiritual act of worship.** By means of the Holy Spirit, Mary's body became the vehicle for moving God's redemptive plan forward. She played a pivotal role in God's plan by providing herself...by making herself available for God to fill and to use.

I wonder if God's call to provide is really that different for you and me? God is seeking space in our lives...space He can occupy and fill so others may benefit from His great salvation. Mary offered herself as the Lord's bondservant. To those who believe and are saved, Paul wrote, **Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace.** The call of Christmas is a call to prepare, but it is also a call to provide. God asks each of us to make room in our lives for Him. Having received the indescribable gift of eternal salvation, it's entirely reasonable for us to offer our lives to Jehovah Jireh, our provider.