

Mary: The Angel Gabriel Foretells Jesus' Birth

SCOTT HOEZEE

In J. R. R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* books, we meet a lot of impressive characters. There are perceptive and fleet-footed elves, strong and stout-hearted dwarves, dashing and heroic men, powerful wizards; but as it turns out in this story, the salvation of the world did not depend on any of these impressive characters; instead, hope was found in the pint-sized hobbits, the smallest of all the characters. In Luke 1, something similar happens. The hope of all the world, and the very hope of salvation itself, rests with one of the smallest characters in the Bible: a simple young woman named Mary. Today on *Groundwork*, we will dig into the story of the day Mary's world, and the entire world, changed. Stay tuned.

DARRELL DELANEY

Welcome to *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Darrell Delaney.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and Darrell, we are right in the middle of our five-part Advent and Christmas series. This is episode three of five. We already looked at the roles played by the Magi, John the Baptist's parents Zechariah and Elizabeth; still to come is a consideration of Jesus' earthly father, Joseph; and then the Christmas story itself, of Jesus' birth; but today, Darrell, we are going to turn to Mary and to the story we often call the Annunciation.

DARRELL DELANEY

Annunciation is the historical event of the Church, where the word of the angel came to Mary to say: You are going to have a son, and his name is Jesus; and historically, there have been churches that have celebrated it nine months before Christmas...May 25th; nine months out from December 25th...and that is when they celebrated this in the Church history.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Interesting; and the other thing that we know, Darrell, about Luke's gospel...and we were in it in the last episode, too, with Zechariah and Elizabeth, John the Baptist's parents...we know that Luke made clear that he did a lot of research, and it sure looks like, Darrell, that one of the things Luke did is he had a long interview with Mary, because Luke includes a lot of things that only Mary could have told him.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; like you said, Luke is actually a historian—a researcher; never had actually, I don't think, met Jesus, but he got his accurate accounts because he wanted to make sure his friend Theophilus got an accurate story on exactly what happened, and he wanted to make sure that that was something that we could benefit from, too; but he didn't have us in mind at the time he was writing it, but he had the people who were Gentiles and women and those on the fringes who needed the message of hope.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly. ¹Luke 1:1 Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, (Luke writes in his opening verses) ²just as they were handed down to us by those who were first eyewitnesses and servants of the word. ³With this in mind, since I myself have carefully investigated

everything from the beginning, I too decided to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus,⁴ so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.

So, there is Luke laying it on the table: I did the research, I know the facts, I did the interviews, and here is what I found.

DARRELL DELANEY

In verse 26 it says: In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, 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 conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him 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 Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end."

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, this, Darrell, is now the second appearance in Luke 1 of the archangel Gabriel. We saw him in the previous story that we looked at in the previous episode when he announced to Zechariah that he and his wife were going to have a child late in their lives; but you know, I supposed, Darrell, that a temple is the kind of place where you might expect to see an angel. I think Zechariah was surprised even there, but you know, it is a holy place... a temple. Where you wouldn't expect to see an angel is where Mary lived.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, this is where I like to say there have been plenty of surprises, where God surprises people with things that he does that are unexpected. So, even though it might be expected to see an angel, I mean, even an angel maybe of Gabriel's stature might have been so huge that he blocks the whole door or whatnot. The fact that he was a stunning and majestic figure and he came to Zechariah, and angels usually are majestic in some way that makes them say, don't be afraid, every time they come.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; and so, there he is, not in the temple this time, but in Nowheresville, Roman Empire... Nazareth... a very no-account town. Mary surely could not have expected this kind of glorious figure, which you just said, had to be majestic, in her own bedroom in the middle of Nazareth in the backwaters of the Roman Empire; and that is not the only amazing thing, Darrell. The amazing thing is that once he gets there, it is like the tables are turned. Gabriel greets Mary as though she were the royal one in the room.

DARRELL DELANEY

Oh, that is really crazy, Scott, because it looks like in this situation, it could be the other way around...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

Mary is saying: Whoa, you are the majestic figure... you are an angel... you are from the Most High God, and who am I? Are you talking to me? Maybe you are talking to someone else. But the fact that he comes in in his humility and gives her a position of honor means that he has heard God's plan for what this salvation is going to be. There has been an old song that I think about when I see this passage. It says: I have a song that the angels cannot sing, and I have been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb. So, the angels are all marveling at this situation because a human servant will be instituted in the grand plan of God to redeem all of creation.

SCOTT HOEZEE

A shocking message for Mary. I do imagine, Darrell, that when he comes and says: Hello, O favored one! You kind of think Mary looked behind her; its like, is there somebody else in the room? You talking to me?!

You couldn't blame her for that; but yes; she is going to do something that is going to change the whole course of history, not just the history of Israel. This son that he suddenly tells her she is going to have is going to clearly be the most significant figure ever in Israel, but it looks like he is going to be the most significant figure maybe in the history of the whole world.

DARRELL DELANEY

And this draws out the point of why Luke is writing his gospel in the first place, Scott. He is trying to show that this Messiah is not just for the Jews who have been waiting for him. This Messiah is for women; this Messiah is for children; this Messiah is for people who are disease-ridden, far from God; the ones that everyone thought were unclean, Luke wants to make the reader know this Messiah is for everyone.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; before this episode is out, we are going to see how Mary reflected on that fact, and what she had to say about it later; but for now, who knows what Mary thought the day would bring when she got out of bed. Maybe it was just a typical Tuesday morning. She had breakfast. Her mother reminded her what chores she had to do that day. Whatever Mary thought was going to happen this day, a visit from the archangel of God was not on the list; but after this day, you know, it is one of those events where everything is going to be before and after.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, Mary had her life before the angel, and then Mary had her life *after* the angel; and after the angel, nothing in her life would ever be the same again.

DARRELL DELANEY

Coming up next, we are going to talk about the implications of what this annunciation means to Mary in a practical application. So, stay tuned.

Segment 2

SCOTT HOEZEE

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DARRELL DELANEY

And I am Darrell Delaney.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And Darrell, let's dig right back into Luke 1, and pick up the story right where we left off after the archangel Gabriel told Mary she was going to become pregnant and have a child who, from the sounds of it, was going to change the whole world; and Mary says:

³⁴“How will this be,” Mary asked the angel, “since I am a virgin?” ³⁵The angel answered, “The Holy Spirit will come on 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. ³⁶Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. ³⁷For no word from God will ever fail. ³⁸“I am the Lord's servant,” Mary answered. “May your word to me be fulfilled.” Then the angel left her.

DARRELL DELANEY

Okay, Scott; I have a couple of issues here. The issue that I have is that we looked at the episode, we talked about Zechariah and Elizabeth...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

Zechariah said: How can this be? And the angel says: Oh, your mouth is going to be shut for nine months because you don't believe what I am saying. And now, Mary says the same thing: How can this be? But he is like really gentle with her. He doesn't rebuke her; he doesn't punish her. I am really confused on this. What is the difference between those two comments?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, I don't know; soon after this, Mary is going to go visit Elizabeth and Zechariah; and you can imagine if she told Zechariah this story. He wasn't able to speak, but if he had been, he would be able to say: Wait a minute; you didn't get zapped? I asked the same question and I got zapped! I don't know, maybe the angel expects more of a priest than of a young girl. I am not quite sure, but yes; Mary does kind of ask the same question, and this time the angel says: Now, listen dear; it is going to be this way: the Holy Spirit is going to come. God will overshadow you, and so forth and so on. So, yes; difference in response; but one thing is for sure, though, Darrell. Despite what Gabriel said in response to Mary's question, surely this didn't clear up everything for her on the spot.

DARRELL DELANEY

Just because the angel says: Okay; the Holy Spirit is going to overshadow you and you are going to become pregnant, I cannot see Mary saying: Oh, okay, great; that makes sense.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; got it!

DARRELL DELANEY

That doesn't make sense. It is a miracle. It is a mystery. It actually eludes understanding and explanation clearly; but I think this was more of a faith question: Are you going to be obedient to God even when you don't understand all the details? That would be something that I think heaven and earth were waiting to see if she would respond to.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; but again, surely in the moment, she had tons of questions. We are going to think about this a little bit more in the next episode, too, Darrell, when we get to Joseph; but among other things, she isn't married yet. What about Joseph? It is her fiancé. He wasn't going to buy this angel story, probably. If she turns up pregnant, she is going to say: Well, it was God...it was an angel. I mean, Joseph might not buy that; and what about everybody else? I mean, okay; two thousand years ago, people didn't know a fraction of what we know about how babies get made, but they did know the normal way it happened; and it requires a man and a woman having a relationship; and if Mary didn't have this child by having a relationship with Joseph, she did it with somebody else, and it was going to be a scandal. Certainly, Mary's questions had not all been answered. I mean, you almost expect her to say: Yes, okay; but I still don't get it. How shall this be?! You think she might ask it again.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; so, it actually looks like with the message that the angel gives, if you are thinking about it as a regular person, it might complicate things. Even though sometimes most people would think when God communicates it becomes simpler and easier, but ironically, in this situation, it could appear to be more complicated, with this appearance of a scandal, with the relationship she has with Joseph, with a virgin having a birth in the first place, those things seem fairly complicated from our side of things; but God has a plan that will ultimately work out.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It is interesting, when you say that, Darrell, it makes me think that there probably wasn't...and I cannot think of anybody...I don't know if you can, but I cannot think of anybody in the Bible...a significant figure...who got a special word from God...a special calling from God...that didn't complicate their life instead of simplify it. You know, Abram was a rich man, living out his retirement years in Ur of the Chaldeans, and God says: Go; and he is homeless for the rest of his life, you know. He [God] taps David to be king and his life is complicated. Moses...it is just amazing that the visits of God almost always complicate someone's life. It is not what they had planned; but as we said, Mary must have had a lot of questions, but what is she going to say? Frederick Buechner once imagined in sort of an imaginative portrait, that as Gabriel said these things to her and then waited for her to reply, maybe he was trembling a little under his wings; and maybe all the hosts of heaven were holding their collective breath: What would she say? Everything depends on what Mary will say. What is she going to say? And what she says is simple: Let it be. She says okay. That is amazing.

DARRELL DELANEY

It is amazing, and I think it is something that is kind of a framework for our lives, too, where if the Lord has a will for our lives, the best response is: I am the Lord's servant. I want to do what the Lord wants from me. I want to obey that will, even though it may sound complicated; even though it may be different than what I expected; I still need to say: Yes, Lord; I am your servant.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And that is exactly what she does say; and again, surely, she had questions that were not answered in the moment, immediate questions like what is Joseph going to say? What is my mom going to say? What is everybody going to say in Nazareth? But she also could not possibly have known what she was signing up for...

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

She could not possibly have known that eventually in history she would become known as the *Mater Dolorosa*—the Mother of Sorrow—or sometimes the Mother of all Sorrows. You know, ten months from now, as we will read in a later chapter in Luke, this old man, Simeon, at the temple is going to say: A sword is going to pierce your soul, too, because of your child. Mary couldn't have known any of that in the moment; and yet, as you say, Darrell, she presents herself as God's servant; she presents herself and says: Let it be; I am okay with this. That is indeed a model, I think, for all of us.

DARRELL DELANEY

It's a beautiful thing, too, when we serve a God who knows the full plan; as we walk with him and take each step of obedience each day, we are saying yes to your will each day; we are repenting when we don't say yes to your will, when we take matters into our own hands. I think Mary is showing us that this is the way that we need to live, where we submit to the will of God in our lives; and it can be very difficult, but this still is the way that we need to live.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And if Frederick Buechner was right in his imaginative portrayal, that maybe Gabriel was trembling a little to wait to see what she would say; maybe all the hosts of heaven were holding their breath. What will she say? This the key moment. This is supposed to be the mother of the Messiah. When Mary says let it be...whhhh...everybody must have let out their breath...

DARRELL DELANEY

Hhhhh...

SCOTT HOEZEE

She said the right thing. Salvation is off and running. God's plan is going to go forward. But in just a moment, we also want to look at a song that Mary is going to sing a little while later; after she has a little time to reflect on this, she is going to sing a song, and that song will reveal some of what started to brew in Mary's heart and mind as to the meaning of all of this. So, we will look at that in just a moment. Stay tuned.
Segment 3

DARRELL DELANEY

I am Darrell Delaney, with Scott Hoezee, and you are listening to *Groundwork*; and Scott, we have been talking about the Annunciation, and we see that Mary, even though she comes from a town that is way out in the middle of nowhere, we see God bring the angel Gabriel to her to bring this powerful message; and it is very, very interesting to see what happens next.

SCOTT HOEZEE

She agrees: Let it be, she says; and then, she decides to visit her cousin Elizabeth because the angel said: Hey, your cousin Elizabeth...too old to have kids...not so. She is six months along. She is going into her third trimester, we would say today; and so, Mary visits her, and when she does, she sings a song, and it goes like this. This is still Luke 1 at verse 46:

And Mary said:

“My soul glorifies the Lord ⁴⁷and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, ⁴⁸for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, ⁴⁹for the Mighty One has done great things for me—holy is his name. ⁵⁰His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation. ⁵¹He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. ⁵²He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. ⁵³He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty. ⁵⁴He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful ⁵⁵to Abraham and his descendants forever, just as he promised our ancestors.”

DARRELL DELANEY

It's really good to see Mary rejoicing in this situation; and what I see in this song, Scott, is that she recognizes her lowly state, but she also recognizes what God will do through her that is going to impact all the people of the world. So, that is a real powerful thing, because you never know what small instrument God can use. The natural he uses, but he does supernatural things with it for his glory's sake.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, it looks like in the time between what we just looked at, Gabriel's visiting her and then her getting over to Elizabeth, some things kind of clicked in her head. She connected some dots, and said: Whoa, if God is exalting little ol' me, maybe that is what God always does; and maybe that is what God is going to do through my Son. The rich are going to be sent away empty; the hungry will be filled. The powerful and the arrogant...they are going to be scattered to the four winds, but lowly people like me are going to become the most important people in the world.

So, yes; as you just said, Darrell. It is a good message for all of us. Pastor John Timmer, in a sermon one time...and this might not have been original with him...but I remember in his sermon he said: You know what it is like? It is like all the values of the world are going to get turned on their head; and it is like somebody going into a fancy department store during the night and changing all the price tags around so that in the morning when people come to the store, a diamond bracelet is on sale for \$15.00 and a bag of walnuts costs \$1,000.00. All the values are going to be different, Mary says, because of what God's Messiah is going to do.

DARRELL DELANEY

All of the values are different now, because the way up is now the way down. If you want to become a master, you must become a servant; and the powers of this world, they thought they were on top, but they are actually being brought low by a lowly savior named Jesus, who is going to be lifted high on the Day of Atonement. So, those who are humbling themselves, God is exalting; and those who are exalting themselves,

God is humbling. So, there is an upside-down thing happening here.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And it is like a snapshot preview. You know, if you go to the movies, there are previews of coming attractions; and that is sort of what Mary's song is like here, it is like the preview of coming attractions. It is in Matthew's gospel, although the Beatitudes are in Luke's gospel, too; but when Jesus gets to the Beatitudes, that is what he does; he turns the world upside down...

DARRELL DELANEY

Literally.

SCOTT HOEZEE

The meek, they are going to inherit the earth, not the powerful; those who weep, they are going to laugh; those who are hungry, they are going to be filled; those who are poor, they are going to be enriched. That is just what God does. But you know, Darrell, when you think about it, God has been doing that kind of thing all along in the Bible.

DARRELL DELANEY

It is really hopeful because you see that he has done this with Abraham and Sarah, he has done this with David, he has done this with many different people. Look at Moses; he thought that he was very small and insignificant, and God used him as an instrument. It is very hopeful for you and me, as well, because we might feel like our situations are far beyond God's reach, or even, we failed so many times that we cannot actually do anything good; and God says: No; I am going to use you to get my name's glory out there. I am going to use you to make my name great; and you might think you are small, but don't ever tell God you are small, because God can use you. It is really powerful.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; you mentioned Abram and Sarai, and that is really a theme. We have seen this on previous *Groundwork* series, too, Darrell. It is kind of a theme in the book of Genesis that God is always choosing the unexpected, and usually the underdog. So, a retired pair of senior citizens like Abram and Sarai, who couldn't have children when they were young, and you know, virile...oh no; they are going to be the parents of a whole nation. Now, that doesn't make any sense. He chooses Jacob, not the older brother Esau; Joseph, not his eleven older brothers. Later, as you said, he will choose David. Even Samuel thought: Wow! Look at all these sons of Jesse. They are really impressive! And God says: Nah, not the big ones. Get the little guy...

DARRELL DELANEY

We'll wait...go get him.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; God is always doing that; and now he did it with Mary; and of course, ultimately it is kind of how he is going to do it with Jesus. The Savior of the world, born in a barn? That will be the last episode of this series, but God is always doing that; and as you just said, Darrell, boy, if any of us think we are insignificant, that God cannot do great things through us, we need to be reminded, God always does great things through the likes of little ol' us!

DARRELL DELANEY

It's a beautiful thing, Scott, when we realize that we have an extraordinary God who likes to do extraordinary things, but he does it with ordinary things and ordinary people; and so, he is the lifter of our heads; he is the one who shows us that he has all the power. When the person who God uses...when they have blessed someone's life and when someone changes, they look back and they know it was God, because there was no way they could get there because of who they knew or how much they earned or any of those things. It was because God moved powerfully.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; something you just said, Darrell, reminded me of Paul's line in the New Testament, in Corinthians, where he says: We have this treasure in earthen vessels...

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

In jars of clay. God took the most precious thing in the world, the gospel, and he put it in these fragile clay pots like you and me...cracked pots, like you and me! What a place to put something so valuable, but that is God for you. So, yes; if you are not a talented preacher or an effective missionary or some super-smart theologian, it doesn't matter. If you just bake pies for the church rummage sale and send encouraging notes to people, or make a phone call when somebody is down, that is all you in the church: That's all I do... No, that is not all. That is exactly the kind of thing God wants to see; and so, I think, Darrell, that Advent and Christmas, they remind us of a myriad of things that are part of the larger good news that just is the gospel; but again, Mary's example and Mary's song reminds us that we are all vital players in God's grand story. When we yield ourselves to God and say: Let it be; I am your servant. God can and will do great things through us.

DARRELL DELANEY

Well, thank you for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We hope you will join us again next time as we continue our study of the Christmas story by examining Joseph's visit from the angel Gabriel.

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SCOTT HOEZEE

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Printed on January 30, 2025