

Who Will He Be? Luke 1:26-33

As followers of Christ it's really important for us to keep growing more and more in our knowledge of him. We aren't just following religious practices; we're following a person and seeking to know him and become like him more and more. When you first become a Christian you know very little about Jesus so we spend time studying God's Word to come to know who we're following and devoting our lives to. The Bible is full of passages that teach us about Jesus and we're going to look at one today that is very special, and it has to do with Christmas.

One of the great Christmas stories is when the angel Gabriel visited Mary to tell her she was going to have a baby. It would have been a frightening and awesome experience. He appeared suddenly and told her all kinds of amazing things that were going to take place – things that she would be right in the middle of. One of the things the angel told her is who her baby would be and that's what I want us to look at today. The angel described Jesus in a unique and personal way that was meant for his earthly mother to hear so she would understand the magnitude of who he would be.

So I want us to try to look at his description and how Mary would have understood it so that we can know Christ more deeply and come away with a similar sense of awe and wonder that she must have felt as we look forward to celebrating his birth just 10 days from now.

Read Luke 1:26-33.

²⁶In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, ²⁷to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" ²⁹But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. ³²He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father

David, ³³ and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.”

This is the first time Mary would have found out she was going to have a baby and the first time she had thoughts of what he would be like – much, much different than any other pregnancy! Normally a woman finds out she’s pregnant and then begins to dream about what that baby will be like, but for Mary, it was all announced to her ahead of time. She was betrothed, or legally pledged to be married, but not married yet and had never been with a man, so she wasn’t pregnant and she wasn’t thinking or dreaming about a baby growing inside her. And of course that all changed when this visit happened. So all of her first thoughts and dreams about this baby were shaped by the things the angel said.

He gave her seven details to ponder and I want to look at the first four today and the last three next Sunday. First, he would be a boy. Seems rather straightforward, but in the Jewish community, a firstborn son had special significance for the rest of the family going all the way back to the Passover in Egypt.

Most of us are familiar with what happened on Israel’s last night in Egypt with the angel of death and the Passover, so I won’t retell it. But it says in Exodus 13 that after God spared the lives of the firstborn in Israel who were covered by the blood of the Passover lambs, he commanded that from that time forward, all the firstborn sons in Israel were to be consecrated to him. The Reformation Study Bible points out that the firstborn of the Israelites were not exempt from the judgment of the 10th plague – the only reason they were spared was because of the blood of the Passover lamb. Therefore, in future generations, this sparing of the firstborn would be signified by consecrating every firstborn male to the Lord. According to the Berean Study Bible, *“consecration involved dedicating something or someone for a sacred purpose. This act of consecration signified a divine claim over the firstborn, setting them apart for God’s service.”*

But this consecration not only signified God’s claim over the firstborn son, but over every child born in that family. The Reformation Study Bible states: *“Firstborn of humans and cattle were sacred to the Lord. Like the firstfruits of*

the harvest, the firstborn from the womb represented God's claim on all.” So firstborn sons would be consecrated to the Lord in Israel to represent the rest of the children in the family and to signify God’s divine claim over all.

So when she heard that her firstborn would be a son, I think Mary would have understood these things and known that Jesus, would be consecrated to the Lord as the representative of the rest of her children. Little did she know that he represented not only her children, but all who would trust in him and become his brothers and sisters. Jesus is our representative as well, and as such, his life, death, and resurrection counts for us. It redeems us from sin and brings us to God. And that is one of the things we can celebrate as we prepare for Christmas.

The second detail Mary was given was that she was to call his name “Jesus,” or actually, “Iesous” (Ee-ay-soos) is what she would have probably heard. According to Strong’s Lexicon, the name Iesous was common in that society, so Mary would have known what it meant. “Iesous” is the Greek form of the Hebrew name Yehoshua, or Joshua, which is a combination of two words: YHWH, the name of God, and Yasha, which means “to save” or “to deliver.” So the meaning of the name that was to be given to her son, is “Yahweh is salvation” – Iesous.

I don’t know how much Mary would have understood about what her son would have to do with Yahweh’s salvation. We’ll see more next week, about what it meant when the angel told her that Jesus would be given the throne of his father David. When she heard that she likely would have thought that he would be king over Israel and God would use him to save her people from the oppression of the Romans. But we know how the story unfolded and how Jesus lived a perfect life of righteousness before God, died on the cross to pay the penalty for sin, and rose again to claim victory over sin and death and condemnation. And we know that for all who put their faith in him, God unites us to Christ and everything he did to save us from our sins. His life, death, and resurrection becomes ours and we receive eternal salvation.

So it wasn’t just national salvation for the Jews, it was eternal salvation all people of faith. Amazing! And all of that is wrapped up in the name she was to give her son – the name Iesous.

The third detail is simply that “he will be great.” And again, that would have meant something to her. If someone tells you, “Your kids are great!” that would mean, they’re special, fun, wonderful, or something like that. But the word for “great” that the angel used is “megas,” which means: large, great, in the widest sense. It was used to denote abundance or magnitude. Strong’s Lexicon says, “The Greek adjective "megas" is used to describe something of significant size, importance, or intensity. In the Greco-Roman world, greatness was often associated with power, wealth, and influence. The term "megas" would have been understood in this context, highlighting the grandeur or superiority of a person, place, or event.”

So I think this detail is looking forward to many aspects of how Jesus would be great, including in his incarnation (which was the miracle of the God-Man), his ministry as the Messiah, his central role in the redemption of mankind through his death on the cross, and his exaltation after his death and resurrection when he was seated at the right hand of God the Father, high above all rule and authority. So Jesus would be great to the highest degree imaginable, and even beyond imagination. That’s who this baby would be.

Tied closely to his greatness is the next detail the angel gave, which is: “He will be called the Son of the Most High. First of all, I want us to understand the meaning of “Most High.” This title appears throughout Scripture and Mary would have been familiar with it. In the Old Testament, it was used to describe God’s supreme status. In the New Testament, Strong’s Lexicon says: “It emphasizes God’s sovereignty, majesty, and authority over all creation. Often used in doxologies, praises, and declarations of God's supreme power and glory.”

But there is something more than that that we need to see. Strong’s also says “In the ancient Near Eastern context, the title "Most High" was used to distinguish the God of Israel from other deities, asserting His supremacy and unique position as the one true God. This title reflects the monotheistic belief of the Israelites and their understanding of God as the ultimate authority over heaven and earth. In the Greco-Roman world, where polytheism was prevalent, the use of "Most High" in reference to the God of Israel would have been a clear statement of His unparalleled status.”

So there's comparison to other gods embedded in this title and it's important for us to know this, because I think that's how Mary would have understood it, and it's an important factor to be able to understand when her baby boy was actually called "the Son of the Most High." As important as this title is, there's only one person in the Bible who actually called Jesus the Son of the Most High, and that was a demon possessed man on the island of the Gerasene's. His disciples never called him that, nor the religious leaders, nor the crowds, only the demons in this man.

He lived in the wild and was very violent and dangerous but he couldn't be bound because he often broke shackles and chains apart. He was possessed by a host of demons named Legion, and no one had the strength to subdue him. Yet when he saw Jesus he ran and fell before him and cried, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me." That was the only time Jesus was called by that title. Legion was terrified of him and I think it was because they knew him as the Son of the Most High God. They could have called him something else, but that's what they went with, and I think it's because in the spiritual realm, that's the way that Jesus was known. Among angels and demons and all rulers, authorities, powers, and spiritual forces of evil, Jesus was the Son of the Most High God.

The Bible reveals that there are angels of many different kinds, purposes and ranks, there are also fallen angels, or demons, of many kinds, purposes and ranks as well. In Scripture these are referenced as gods with a small "g." These are false gods and you see them all over in Scripture in nations who worshipped them. But there is only one God with a capital "G." He is the Almighty, the Creator, the Eternal One, the one true God, higher than all other gods. He has no equal. He is the Most High God, and all angels and demons know it and refer to him that way.

And the Most High God has a Son. Not in the way we think of sons. I have sons – they are my children. But the Son of the Most High is not the child or offspring of God. He is God. He is One with God the Father and Holy Spirit. So the Son of the Most High was one of the persons of the Most High, and feared by demons as the Most High. And that's who Mary's baby would be. "He will be great and he will be called the Son of the Most High."

Colossians 1:15-18 says, *“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. ¹⁶For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. ¹⁷And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent.”*

Hebrews 1:3-4 says, *“He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, ⁴having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.”*

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to him , and now, as his followers who are united with him forever, we too have his authority because he lives in us. The Son of the Most High is in you. Therefore, we need not fear the enemy or stand helpless in the day of battle. We can stand firm in the Lord and withstand any spiritual attack.

I wanted us to see these things this morning so we could understand the wonder that Mary must have felt as she began to think and dream about her baby, but also so we could deepen our understanding of who Jesus is and the precious gift given to us at Christmas. Jesus is our brother and perfect representative who has reconciled us to our Father. His name is “Iesous” and he is God’s gift of salvation to us. And he is very great, the Son of the Most High, in whom we have authority over the enemy and can stand firm today. As we turn now to a time of worship, let us ponder these things as we sing praises to the newborn King.