

March 20, 2022

WHO IS JESUS?

Luke 1:26-38

(2 of 13 in a series through Luke 1-7)

In Matthew 16:15 Jesus asked his disciples, “Who do you say that I am?” And at the time Jesus asked that question, many others were asking and answering it as well. Some were saying that he was John the Baptist raised from the dead or a second coming of Elijah or even Jeremiah or another of the prophets. One wonders how they arrived at some of those answers to this question. And yet this question continues to be answered with as many varied and confused answers as were given in the first century. Some in our day claim that Jesus was a great moral teacher and nothing more, others that he was a mad man, and still others a first century prophet who thought God would bring his kingdom and then died as a confused and disappointed man on a Roman cross. And that’s just a sample of the kinds of answers people might give to the question, “Who is Jesus?”

As believers, we get our answers on such questions from the Bible. We believe that the Bible is God’s very Word, given to us by God so that we might have all we need for life and godliness. And, of course, we believe this because the Bible claims this for itself. Consequently, we believe that God sovereignly worked so that every author of Scripture wrote precisely what he chose to write and precisely what God wanted him to write so that we can read our sermon text, for example (Luke 1:26-38), and say, “Luke says” and also “God says” as we read those words. Therefore, the big question for us isn’t simply, “Who do *we think* Jesus is?” but “Who does the *Bible say* that Jesus is?” And if we’re looking for a specific text of Scripture to answer that question, we’ll be hard-pressed to find one better than the text we’re looking at today in Luke 1:26-38.

Luke 1:26-38 feels very much like the narrative that we saw in the opening twenty-five verses. Once more we have the angel Gabriel coming to someone for whom having a child seems impossible and telling the individual to expect to have a son soon. In both cases the individual is shocked and wonders how this can happen. In both cases we’re told that God is simply going to do the impossible. Moreover, in each case, the son to come is going to be great. But as much as these situations have all kinds of similarities, it’s the stark differences that stand out even more. Whereas with Gabriel’s appearance to Zechariah, the angel comes to a priest, in the prominent city of Jerusalem, working at the temple, and announces to him that his barren wife will have a son who will prepare the people for the coming of the Lord, with Gabriel’s appearance to Mary, he comes to a young woman who isn’t anything prominent among the Lord’s people, living in an insignificant town, and announces to her that even though she is a virgin, she will have a son who will be called “Son of the Most High” (v. 32). And I think this is what Luke wants us to see. He puts these two similar announcements together in order to highlight the differences between the two and consequently highlight the differences in the identities between the two promised sons—John the Baptist and Jesus. And ordering these stories in this way, we get a clear picture

of who Jesus is. That's what I want us to see this morning. Who does the angel Gabriel—in speaking to Mary—tell us Jesus is? First, he tells us that Jesus is the Davidic King.

Jesus is the Davidic king

If that phrase, "Davidic King" is unfamiliar to you, I'll explain what I mean. When David was king over Israel there was a day that he decided he wanted to build a temple. The reason makes complete sense, if you follow the story. God was allowing his presence to dwell among the people of Israel in the tabernacle. But the tabernacle is just a fancy word for a tent. Meanwhile, David was living in a really nice house. Therefore, he says to himself, "This is ridiculous that the Lord dwells among us in a tent, and I live in this nice house," so he decides that he wants to build a permanent structure where the Lord can manifest his presence to his people—the temple. Again, that makes complete sense, doesn't it?

But the Lord is never in the place where we do him favors, and so after the prophet Nathan told him to go ahead with the plan, he comes back to David and says, "Not so fast." He told David that God never asked David to build a house for him, and one day that would be done by David's son, Solomon. In fact, not only was David going to do no favor for God, God was going to do a favor for him. God was going to build David house. Not literally. God was going to make David the beginning of a royal line of kings. He was going to make David's line into a dynasty. Specifically the Lord said to David, "When your days are fulfilled to walk with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, one of your own sons, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for me, and I will establish his throne forever. . . . I will confirm him in my house and in my kingdom forever, and his throne shall be established forever" (1 Chron 7:11-14).

Now, there were parts of this promise that you see fulfilled in David's son, Solomon. Solomon was David's immediate son, and he did build the temple. But there is much here that is simply beyond Solomon. In fact, if God's promise is that David would have a son on the throne of God's kingdom forever, there are really only two ways this could possibly occur. Don Carson has noted several times that, either 1) David could have a son who reigns as king who has a son who reigns as king, so on and so forth, world without end, or 2) David could have a son who reigns as king and lives forever.

And so from the time this promise was made to David, God's people looked forward to this coming king in the line of David who would live forever. That's what I mean by "Davidic King." This promised Davidic King would be known as the Christ or the Messiah. And there was obviously much excitement about this promise until, well, it seemed impossible to fulfill. Around 587 BC, the southern kingdom of Judah was conquered by the Babylonians, and the Israelites were taken into exile into Babylon. No longer was there any real throne for any son of David to occupy. If you picture David's royal line as a glorious, royal tree, it's like the tree had been cut down to a stump. And yet, the prophets kept telling the people that God would fulfill his word. He would keep his promise. Isaiah takes this image of the Davidic line as a tree cut to a stump and says, "There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse [Jesse is David's father], and a

brand from his roots shall bear fruit” (Is 11:1). In other words, this promised Davidic king was still to come. Exile wasn’t the last word.

However, year after year passed without any appearance of the Messiah—this promised son from David’s line. I mentioned last week as we looked at Luke 1:1-25 that the declaration that Zechariah’s wife was barren and both were advanced in years was a hint to the reader that something was coming. The people of God may have been under Roman rule and tyranny—like in the dead of winter—but spring was coming. God was about to burst onto the scene with his saving activity. And yet those verses just gave us a precursor. Zechariah and Elizabeth’s miraculously born son was just to be the forerunner, preparing the people for something greater.

Well, we see that something greater in the announcement to Mary. Just as God sent Gabriel to Jerusalem to make an announcement to Zechariah, so Gabriel is sent again. This time to a little, easily disregarded city in Galilee named Nazareth. He was sent to give a message to a virgin. But she was a virgin who was betrothed—meaning that they were legally engaged—an act that usually took place about a year before a couple would be married. But notice what we’re told about the man to whom she is betrothed. Luke tells us that this young woman named Mary was “a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, *of the house of David*” (v. 27).

And with that, our ears perk up again, don’t they? Could it be? Could this be the moment in which God was going to bring the promised Son who would come and live forever and bring God’s rule to the earth and reign forever? Well, listen to what the angel says. First, he greets Mary quite casually, saying, “Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you” (v. 28). She was obviously afraid and confused by this. She’s confused because a man would rarely show up and speak to a woman with whom he was unfamiliar. But also, he is a majestic being so that she is afraid, just like Zechariah was. Then, after telling her that she’ll conceive and bear a son (whom she’ll name Jesus), she is told, “And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end” (vv. 32-33).

Clearly this is the angel saying that Jesus is the promised son of David. He is the Messiah (the Christ). He is the one from David’s flesh who would become the eternal king. This is why many who thought him to be the Messiah were crushed as he died on the cross on that Friday. How could he reign forever if he was dead? The answer, of course, came on that Easter Sunday morning as he rose from the dead—never to die again. And consequently he lives forever and reigns forever, fulfilling the very promise that God had made to David.

This is why Luke included that important note about Joseph being “of the house of David.” He would become Jesus’ earthly adoptive father, and it seems that according to Matthew’s genealogy, if you traced out the line of David forward, seeing who would be the rightful king (should Israel have had a king at this time), the rightful king would be Joseph. So, it is not by accident that Jesus will be born of Mary who is betrothed to Joseph, who will become Jesus’ adoptive father, thus showing him to be in the line of David. Again, he is the Davidic king.

And on this note of Jesus being from David's line and having a fully human nature, one of the things we want to make clear is that just as God the Son took on flesh and was born of Mary, thus becoming fully human, he did not somehow shed his human nature after he was raised from the dead. His human nature was glorified—as ours will be at the resurrection. But he is fully man. Right now, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of David, descended from David's line, is reigning over the world at the right hand of God. A man is reigning on the throne. That's what we sang earlier as we sang together, "Thou hast raised our human nature, in the clouds to God's right hand. There we sit in heavenly places. There with Thee in glory stand. Jesus reigns, adored by angels. Man with God is on the throne. Mighty Lord, in Thine ascension. We by faith behold our own." "We behold our own," of course meaning that we behold a man—Jesus, the Christ, the Son of David, reigning on the throne. Therefore, as we answer the question, "Who is Jesus?" the first answer is that he is the Davidic king. Second, we see that he is our sinless savior.

Jesus is our sinless savior

But it's clear that the angel isn't telling Mary that her son will be a normal human being. For one, he's going to be sinless. As the angel tells us that she'll conceive and bear a son, she asks the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?" (v. 34). Now, what's fascinating to me about this is that she (rightly) assumes he means she'll have a baby *as a virgin*. I mean, it would seem that she'd tend to think, "Oh, you mean I'll get pregnant after Joseph and I get married, through the typical means of procreation?" But she rightly understands that she'll get pregnant before getting married and outside of sexual activity. That's why she asks the question about how this can happen since she is a virgin. And Gabriel answers, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God" (v. 35).

The answer to how she'll conceive is that the Holy Spirit will simply cause it to happen. God will make this impossible reality take place. This is what the angel assures Mary of as he mentions that her relative Elizabeth is also pregnant though she was old and barren, noting, "For nothing will be impossible with God" (v. 37). But note how when the angel tells Mary that Jesus will not have a biological human father but will be conceived by the Holy Spirit, he says, "Therefore the child to be born will be called holy" (v. 35). This, I think, is a reference to the sinless of Christ. He is not from Adam's line as is every other human being, and therefore he is not sinful and guilty as is every other human being. He is the sinless one. And so he is human in every way that we are, except as to regards our sin, corruption, and guilt. He never had any inclination to sin. He never sinned. He never incurred guilt through who is was or what he did. Therefore, when he died on the cross—suffering the wages of sin for us—it was not for his own sin or guilt, for he had none. He died, paying the penalty for our sin and our guilt. God made him who knew no sin to be a sin offering for us in order that by faith in him we might be credited with the righteousness of God. That's why Gabriel told Mary to name the child "Jesus" because his name comes from the Hebrew "Joshua," which tells us that "The Lord is salvation." His name tells us that he is the savior. Thus, we can say that Jesus is our sinless savior. He is the one who saves us from our sins. And, finally, he is the Son of God.

Jesus is the Son of God (God the Son)

The reason I put “God the Son” in parentheses is because I want it to be clear that by saying that Jesus is the Son of God, I mean he is God. He the second person of the Trinity—God the Son. I’ll show you in a second why I think this text affirms that, but first note that the text explicitly affirms that Jesus is the Son of God. First, we see it when Gabriel tells Mary, “He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High” (v. 32). “The Most High” is a reference to God in the Scripture, and thus he is affirming Jesus will be called the “Son of God.” Second, when Gabriel is explaining to Mary that Jesus will be conceived by the work of the Holy Spirit, he says, “The child to be born will be called holy—*the Son of God*” (v. 35).

However, that phrase alone is not conclusive. After all, only two chapters later in Luke’s gospel, he’ll refer to Adam as “the son of God.” Not only that, but throughout the Old Testament, Israel is referred to as God’s son (see, for example, Exodus 4:22-23). Moreover, when God made that promise to David to raise up someone from his flesh, he explicitly noted, “I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son” (1 Chron 17:13). Therefore, the expectation is that the human Messiah would be God’s son in that he would resemble God in who he is and represent God in his reign over all. And, if we combine all of this with the fact that Gabriel immediately follows the announcement that Jesus will be called “Son of the Most High” with a reference to “his father David” (v. 32), then it would be very easy to argue that to bear the title “Son of God” doesn’t necessarily mean he is God. He could simply be the human king who was promised and descended from David’s line—a king that’s meant to resemble God in his behavior and reflect God in his rule. And that’s fair.

However, to make that argument would be to miss an important detail in the Old Testament. The book of Isaiah holds up this glorious promise of the coming Messiah. I’ve already made reference to Isaiah 11 where the Davidic dynasty would be cut down to a stump and then a shoot would grow out of that stump—referring to the coming of the Messiah when it looked like all hope was lost.

Not only that, but four chapters earlier in Isaiah 7:14, Isaiah actually prophesied of the virgin birth, noting that when the Messiah would come, though he would have rightful claim to Israel’s throne, there would be no throne on which to reign. Rather, the people would be under tyranny, and he’d eat the food of poverty—curds and honey. But right in the middle of those two references in Isaiah 7 and 11 comes Isaiah 9, where the prophet continues to speak about this coming son of David. And note what he says: “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, *Mighty God*, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore” (Is 9:6-7).

You see, even when God was promising and telling us about the coming of the Messiah—David’s son—in the Old Testament, he was making clear that through he would be a man (from David’s

line), he would be no mere man. He would be God. But Isaiah 9 is not alone in testifying that the Christ would be God. Remember when Jesus made reference to Psalm 110:1 where David says, “The Lord said to my Lord”? Jesus asked the Pharisees, “What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?” They answered, “The Son of David.” And then Jesus asked them, “How is it then that David, in the Spirit, call him Lord?” quoting Psalm 110:1. And they were silent, but Jesus’ point, of course, is that the Messiah is not simply David’s son but David’s Lord. He is God. That’s why we rightly refer to Jesus as the God-man. He is fully God and fully man.

And this is crucial for us and for our salvation because only a man could serve as our representative before God and offer himself up as a sacrifice for sin, and yet only God can save us. Therefore, it is our sinless savior, the Davidic King and Son of God—the God-man—who was conceived in Mary’s womb, lived a sinless life, died to pay for our sins, was raised from the dead on the third day, reigns at God’s right hand, and will day come back to get us and rule and reign forever. And until he does, we’ll proclaim our faith in him as we come to the table. Amen.