
Narrative Lectionary

Year 3 | The Year of Luke

Scripture Readings December 20, 2020

*The Fourth Sunday
of Advent*

About the text

ADMIT IT. THIS STORY of a surprise in Mary's life is exactly what you were *not* taught in school.

Our cultural values over the past centuries tell us that the appropriate responses to Mary's news are:

- Deliver her to the edge of the village and stone her.
- Spirit her away to a distant relative's home for a year and pretend it never happened.
- Let her stick around but remind her at every turn what a low human being she is.

The greeting we don't expect is, "You're beautiful." The response we don't expect from Elizabeth is, "You're the tops!"

The age-old squabbling about "virgin birth" is hard. What we could learn about accepting God's gifts is priceless.



Luke 1:26-45[, 46-56]

26 In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth,²⁷ to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary.²⁸ And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you."²⁹ But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be.³⁰ The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.³¹ And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus.³² He 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 ancestor David.³³ He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."³⁴ Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?"³⁵ The angel said to her, "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 holy; he will be called Son of God.³⁶ And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren.³⁷ For nothing will be impossible with God."³⁸ Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

26 In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to the Galilean village of Nazareth²⁷ to a virgin engaged to be married to a man descended from David. His name was Joseph, and the virgin's name, Mary.²⁸ Upon entering, Gabriel greeted her: "Good morning! · You're beautiful with God's beauty, · Beautiful inside and out! · God be with you."

29 She was thoroughly shaken, wondering what was behind a greeting like that.³⁰ But the angel assured her, "Mary, you have nothing to fear. God has a surprise for you:³¹ You will become pregnant and give birth to a son and call his name Jesus.

32 He will be great, be called 'Son of the Highest.' · The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David; ·³³ He will rule Jacob's house forever—no end, ever, to his kingdom."

34 Mary said to the angel, "But how? I've never slept with a man."

35 The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, the power of the Highest hover over you; · Therefore, the child you bring to birth will be called Holy, Son of God.

36 "And did you know that your cousin Elizabeth conceived a son, old as she is? Everyone called her barren, and here she is six months' pregnant!³⁷ Nothing, you see, is impossible with God."

38 And Mary said, "Yes, I see it all

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39 In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, ⁴⁰ where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹ When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit ⁴² and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. ⁴³ And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? ⁴⁴ For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. ⁴⁵ And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord."

46 And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, ⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, ⁴⁸ for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;

49 for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name.

50 His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.

51 He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.

52 He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly;

53 he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty.

54 He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy,

55 according to the promise he made

The Message

now: I'm the Lord's maid, ready to serve. · Let it be with me just as you say." Then the angel left her.

39 Mary didn't waste a minute. She got up and traveled to a town in Judah in the hill country, ⁴⁰ straight to Zechariah's house, and greeted Elizabeth.

⁴¹ When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby in her womb leaped. She was filled with the Holy Spirit, ⁴² and sang out exuberantly,

"You're so blessed among women, and the babe in your womb, also blessed! · ⁴³ And why am I so blessed that the mother of my Lord visits me? · ⁴⁴ The moment the sound of your greeting entered my ears, · The babe in my womb skipped like a lamb for sheer joy. · ⁴⁵ Blessed woman, who believed what God said, believed every word would come true!"

Luke 1:⁴⁶ And Mary said, · I'm bursting with God-news; ⁴⁷ I'm dancing the song of my Savior God. · ⁴⁸ God took one good look at me, and look what happened—I'm the most fortunate woman on earth! · What God has done for me will never be forgotten, ⁴⁹ the God whose very name is holy, set apart from all others.

50 His mercy flows in wave after wave on those who are in awe before him. · ⁵¹ He bared his arm and showed his strength, scattered the bluffing braggarts. · ⁵² He knocked tyrants off their high horses, pulled victims out of the mud.

53 The starving poor sat down to a

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to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever.”

56 And Mary remained with her about three months and then returned to her home.

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banquet; the callous rich were left out in the cold. · ⁵⁴ He embraced his chosen child, Israel; he remembered and piled on the mercies, piled them high.

55 It's exactly what he promised, beginning with Abraham and right up to now.

56 Mary stayed with Elizabeth for three months and then went back to her own home.

Psalm 113

1 Praise the LORD! · Praise, O servants of the LORD; praise the name of the LORD.

2 Blessed be the name of the LORD from this time on and forevermore.

3 From the rising of the sun to its setting the name of the LORD is to be praised.

4 The LORD is high above all nations, and his glory above the heavens.

5 Who is like the LORD our God, who is seated on high,

6 who looks far down on the heavens and the earth?

7 He raises the poor from the dust, and lifts the needy from the ash heap,

8 to make them sit with princes, with the princes of his people.

9 He gives the barren woman a home, making her the joyous mother of children.

Praise the LORD!

1 Hallelujah! · You who serve GOD, praise GOD! Just to speak his name is praise! · ² Just to remember GOD is a blessing—now and tomorrow and always. · ³ From east to west, from dawn to dusk, keep lifting all your praises to GOD!

4 GOD is higher than anything and anyone, outshining everything you can see in the skies.

5 Who can compare with GOD, our God, so majestically enthroned, · ⁶ surveying his magnificent heavens and earth?

7 He picks up the poor from out of the dirt, rescues the wretched who've been thrown out with the trash, · ⁸ Seats them among the honored guests, a place of honor among the brightest and best. · ⁹ He gives childless couples a family, gives them joy as the parents of children. · Hallelujah!

The Narrative Lectionary presents the story of God's work in humanity through a single Gospel each year. This is Year 3: The Year of Luke.