

Sermon Outline

THE YEAR IN OUR LORD, 2013-2014

THE SALVATION OF GOD (LUKE 1:26-31)

I. Introduction

II. When Jesus Was Born

- A. Our Lord Jesus was born in a far different world than ours.
 - 1. Caesar Augustus, son of the late Gaius Julius Caesar, was emperor of the Roman world (Lk 2:1).
 - 2. Herod was his king over Judea.
- B. For Israel—the civilization of the Lord God—being ruled by a king who exalted himself as a god was a sign that all was not well with the universe.—From Israel’s perspective, it was a sign that God’s judgment of his people, the judgment that led them into exile, was not yet over.
- C. So it was in this context that the first Christmas takes place.
 - 1. The Gospel is an event that plays out against the backdrop of cosmic spiritual darkness.
 - 2. This spiritual darkness has much more to do than just a sense of personal guilt.
- D. It manifested itself in the cultural, national, and political affairs of the world.
- E. The arrival of the Lord Jesus is much more than just saving the spirits of people so they can go to heaven when they die.—The arrival of the Lord Jesus is the arrival of God’s true king who would free mankind from the punishment of sin and restore the world to wholeness.
- F. Thus, the Gospel is much more than personal salvation. It is also about the renewal of the entire creation—the liberation of the world from the curse (cf. Rom 8:20-23).

***Questions for reflection:** (1) What was the spiritual and political situation of Jesus’ day? (2) What is the significance of Jesus in that day and age?

III. God Sends Gabriel to Nazareth (Luke 1:26)

- A. And so, returning to our text, we read those familiar words in Luke 1:26: “In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth [.]”
- B. People today continue to have a fascination with angels (and demons).
- C. Our curiosity is aroused because of the appearance of an angel. And this angel is called *Gabriel*, meaning “Strength of God.”
- D. In case we are tempted to be overly fascinated with Gabriel, we read that Gabriel himself is sent by a higher authority: “In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from *God*...”
1. Angels are *not* the main characters in the story.
 2. Angels serve the will of God.
- E. The word “angel” comes from the Greek *aggelos* and the Hebrew *malak*, both mean “messenger.”
- F. But there may be some significance to the fact that it is Gabriel who appears.
1. Gabriel is the angel associated with news of great earth-shaking events.
 2. Consider Daniel 8.
 - a. The prophet Daniel sees a vision of a goat rushing over the earth and slamming into a ram, destroying it.
 - b. To help Daniel understand the meaning of this vision, God sends the angel Gabriel to give him the interpretation (Dan 8:16).
 - c. The ram is a symbol of the Persian empire, while the goat represents the Greek empire that would eventually overcome the Persian (Dan 8:20-21).
 - d. So Gabriel was the angel whom God sent to teach Daniel the meaning of the vision. Gabriel was the angel associated with news of great geo-political and even cosmic importance.
 3. Consider Luke.
 - a. Gabriel appears to the priest Zechariah to announce that he will be the father of the forerunner of the Messiah.
 - b. Zechariah announces his doubts.
 - c. Gabriel makes clear to Zechariah that he is one of the preeminent angels who stands in the very presence of God himself: “I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I was sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news...” (1:19)
 4. Gabriel is possibly one of the highest ranking angels of heaven, perhaps even one of the chief princes of the angelic host.

- G. Given this background to Gabriel, the fact that he appears now is a sign that something earth-shaking is about to happen.
1. The fact that God sends one of his highest ranking angels indicates that an event of massive cosmic, geo-political importance is about to take place.
 2. Interestingly, God sends Gabriel, of all places, “to a city of Galilee named Nazareth [.]”
 3. The significance of Galilee can be found in Isaiah 9:1-2 reads:

¹ But there will be no gloom for her who was in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he has made glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations.

*² The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light;
those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness,
on them has light shone.*

4. Galilee, the land east of the Jordan, is where the light of God’s new age would begin to dawn.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) What is the significance of Gabriel based on Daniel 8 and Luke 1? (2) Given what Scripture has revealed about Gabriel, how does his appearance here impact us? (3) What is the significance of Galilee according to Isaiah 9:1-2?

IV. Mary and Joseph (Luke 1:27)

- A. Gabriel was sent “to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin’s name was Mary.”
- B. Mary:
1. A virgin, presumably a young woman.
 2. The name Mary was a common name for Jewish girls.
—Mary or Miriam was the name of Moses’ sister (Ex 15:20).
- C. Joseph:
1. The man to whom Mary was betrothed.
 2. Joseph was...
 - a. a carpenter (cf. Mt 13:55)
 - b. a descendant of King David, the king to whom God had made the promise of an everlasting kingdom.

—The House of David was the royal line that God had chosen to rule over his people Israel and care for them.

3. Here we may have a subtle reference to the great promises of God.
 - a. Where Mary and Joseph lived—the context of Roman occupation, the larger context of judgment on Israel’s sin—the reference to David brings with it a glimmer of hope.
 - b. The fact that Joseph descended from King David will prove very important soon enough (cf. Lk 1:32, 33).
- D. Aside from the connection to King David, this is a very ordinary Jewish family.
- E. What makes them extraordinary was precisely the fact that *God* had chosen them to play an important role in his work of redemption. *God* had bestowed significance on them by his choice.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) Who were Mary and Joseph? (2) What made Mary and Joseph extraordinary?

V. “The Lord Is With You” (Luke 1:28, 29)

- A. Upon appearing to Mary, Gabriel greets her: “Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!”
- B. Since Mary wasn’t sure quite what to make of this greeting, she was “greatly troubled” and “tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be.”
- C. If an angel shows up at your doorstep one day, this would probably be the response that you would give.
- D. Oftentimes, when angels appear to humans in history, the response is not one of sentimental feelings of warmth but of fear.
- E. Mary’s response was perfectly in line with what we see in other instances in the Bible.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) Why was Mary troubled by the angel’s greeting? (2) How would you have responded if an angel appeared to you?

VI. “You Have Found Favor with God” (Luke 1:30)

- A. Sensing her perplexity, Gabriel follows up his greeting with the words: “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.”
- B. We shouldn’t read into this phrase the idea that Mary was sinless, which is what the Roman Catholic Church has done.
- C. These words simply mean that God was pleased with Mary.

1. Scripture teaches that the only sinless man was Jesus Christ, whose righteousness justifies us all (Rom 5).
2. But when sinful human beings seek to do the will of God, they too can please God in a lesser sense.
3. Consider the following Scriptures:
 - a. Genesis 6:8: “But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD.”
 - b. Job 1:8: “And the LORD said to Satan, ‘Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil?’”
4. This is probably how we should understand Gabriel’s words to Mary:
 - a. Mary wasn’t sinless; but she was very likely a very pious Jewish woman.
 - b. As such, Mary is representative of all the faithful in Israel longing for the appearance of the great salvation of God.
 - c. Simply consider Mary’s hymn in Luke 1:51-55:

*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 mighty from their thrones
 and exalted those of humble estate;
⁵³ he has filled the hungry with good things,
 and the rich he has sent away empty.
⁵⁴ He has helped his servant Israel,
 in remembrance of his mercy,
⁵⁵ as he spoke to our fathers,
 to Abraham and to his offspring forever.*

- D. While Mary was a sinful human being, she, like all faithful Israelites of her day, trusted in the Lord God and looked forward to the great salvation of the Lord.
- E. Again, we might also add that it was God’s grace that made Mary what she was.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) How are we to understand the fact that Mary found favor with God? Was she perfectly sinless? (2) How do Genesis 6:8 and Job 1:8 shed light on the meaning of the statement, “you have found favor with God”?

VII. The Great Blessing of God’s Favor (Luke 1:31)

- A. What will God do for his faithful handmaid who has found favor with him?
What will God do for all his faithful servants who seek after him?
 1. As James 4:8 teaches, God draws near to those who seek him.
 2. In spite of the remaining sin that taints our best works, God still stoops to bless his highly imperfect people.
- B. In Mary's case, God blesses her in an unusual and awesome way.
- C. Gabriel says in verse 31: "And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus."
- D. God blesses this daughter of Israel with the gift of a *son*.
- E. In those days, children were especially precious (Ps 127:3-5).
- F. In the case of Mary and Joseph, their first son would not be named by them but by the Lord God himself.
- G. The Lord defines the destiny and mission of Mary's Son by the name he gives him: "Jesus"; or in Hebrew, "Yeshua," which means "YHWH Is Salvation."

***Questions for reflection:** (1) Why is it significant that God directly names Mary's son? (2) What does the name *Yeshua* mean?

VIII. The Salvation of God Has Come

- A. By naming of Mary's Son *Yeshua*, God shows that the light of salvation has dawned upon the world.
- B. The promise of salvation is in Isaiah 52:7-10:

⁷How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation [yeshuah], who says to Zion, "Your God reigns." ⁸The voice of your watchmen—they lift up their voice; together they sing for joy; for eye to eye they see the return of the LORD to Zion. ⁹Break forth together into singing, you waste places of Jerusalem, for the LORD has comforted his people; he has redeemed Jerusalem. ¹⁰The LORD has bared his holy arm before the eyes of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation [yeshuat] of our God.

- 1. Isaiah is speaking about the great Day when the Lord God returns to save his people and establish his Kingdom in the midst.
- 2. On that day, God will bring salvation to his people.
- 3. The Hebrew word for "salvation" is *yeshuah*.
- C. So the name "Yeshua" or "Jesus" is a highly auspicious name.
- D. Somehow, Mary's Child Yeshua will be the promised Salvation of God.

1. Somehow, Mary's Child will be the baring of the Lord's holy arm of strength.
2. Somehow, Mary's Son will bring with him happiness and peace to Israel and to the world.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) How does Isaiah 52:7-10 describe the return of the Lord? (2) What is the Hebrew word for "salvation"? (3) Why is Yeshua/Jesus such an auspicious name?

IX. God's Salvation Is in Jesus

By sending Gabriel to Mary, God is announcing that he is coming for all those who await his great salvation, his great *yeshuah*. The arrival of Mary's Son, Yeshua or Jesus, will thus have earth-shaking consequences for nations everywhere, because God's salvation will also bring God's rule into the world. This is the true meaning of Christmas. This is the Gospel of God—that salvation has come to the world in human flesh, in Jesus Christ. Let earth receive her King.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) What is the deeper meaning of the arrival of Jesus into the world? How does Jesus relate to God's promised *yeshuah*? (2) Has it occurred to you that Jesus' coming would have such great repercussions on the world? (3) How are we to respond to the arrival of Jesus?