

A Conquest of Love

Thomas Robinson, *Certain Hope, Wondrous Love 3*, December 22, 2013

Luke 1:26-38

²⁶ In the sixth month the angel **Gabriel** was sent from God to a city of Galilee named **Nazareth**, ²⁷ to a **virgin** betrothed to a man whose name was **Joseph**, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was **Mary**. ²⁸ And he came to her and said, "*Greetings, O favored (graced) one, the Lord is with you!*"

²⁹ But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰ And the angel said to her,

"Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor (grace) with God.

³¹ *And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name 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 father David,*

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

³⁴ And Mary said to the angel, "*How will this be, since I am a virgin?*"

³⁵ And the angel answered 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 called holy – the Son of God.

³⁶ *And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren.* ³⁷ *For nothing will be impossible with God."*

³⁸ And Mary said, "*Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.*" And the angel departed from her.

Isaiah 9:6-7

⁶ 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.

⁷ 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.
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

Daniel 7:13-14

¹³ "I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. ¹⁴ And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed."

John 3:16

¹⁶ "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."

Galatians 2:19-20

²⁰ "I have been crucified with the Messiah. It is no longer I who live, but Messiah who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by the faithfulness of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."

Expecting God's Power to Break In

The narrative of Jesus' birth is very rich, but it's not new. We can't go back and experience it as it happened. We know the 'end' of the story. It's very hard to imagine ourselves back into a world that felt so old, wrong, incomplete, and expectant. The narrative of Hebrew scriptures was a story in search of an ending. Could oppression end? Could the promises be fulfilled? Would the Messiah, the 'Anointed King,' finally come to renew and save the nation? Would God's power really break into our broken, oppressive world?

The Romans were celebrating Roman Peace (through conquest, domination). But surely God's anointed king would rally God's people: New government, temple, justice, power.

A Long and Varied Story Takes Particular Shape

The Gospels are the story of the long history of God and Israel coming to a very distinct climax. The expectations were there, but what did they mean? Isaiah? Daniel? So many others! What kind of king? Better! But how? Us, not them! Justice! Not temporary!

The Gabriel who spoke to Daniel comes to a girl in Nazareth. Nowhere, no one. But God's "grace" is there. The grace that had empowered Moses (Ex 33:13), touches here. A new, unexpected turn (as surprising as Moses or David) begins, revealing more of God.

Those who think they can predict God's next move are flummoxed. God is 'doing a new thing' (Is 43:19). God's kingdom and king are here, but you have to look in a feed trough.

Seeing the Kingdom of God through the Lens of Jesus

It's easy to empathize with those who were/are unimpressed. Listen to Gabriel's words. Is that what happened? No! – Yes! God's king and kingdom are described. We start from the word we think we know – 'kingdom' – power, conquest, rule, control, majestic king. Then we place God into our vision of a kingdom and envision the super-powerful king.

With Jesus, however, it works the opposite way. First you find out who God is by looking at what he has done/been in Jesus from Gabriel to empty tomb. That's where we learn what is crucial. When we see who this God is – in Jesus – then we may begin to understand the kind of Kingdom that is truly his. We learn God through his unique self-revelation in Jesus. That's what is beginning when God's grace breaks into Nazareth. God is saying, you haven't really yet seen my face. Look in the feed trough. Look at me!

Jesus will indeed fulfill all the promises and prophecies. But in God's own distinct way. But we know how the world works. Grace, *hesed*, Love, *agape*, won't really work. It's not real power. We can't really trust it. We want the kind of kingdom we know and hate. God breaks in with a love and grace that is his own true power and glory. The conquest and victory of his love are on a scale unimagined by our ideas of kingdom. The promises of Gabriel about this child are just minimal. God is accomplishing far more, far greater!

The Grace of a Servant Who Changes the World

The girl – Mary. We know nothing of her before this moment. We discover that she is one of the expectant ones – like Simeon and Anna. When we read her song, we begin to understand God's choice. She is ready with her whole soul and body to participate in God's work. She asks about the next step. The answer is astonishing! A new/old sign.

The Grace/Love of God finds expression in Mary: She understands the revolution involved in saying, 'I am the Lord's servant.' Let me be fully that servant, embody the Grace/Love!