



There are three things mentioned in this passage: Mary, Jesus, the first mention of his name in this gospel and the immaculate conception. The birth is the end of the process and the conception which is described for us is the beginning of the process. I've just had a holiday in Sicily where Mary is very prominent in people's believing. We know very little about Mary but what we do know is very important. Lots of people were called Mary. It is a derivative of Miriam and she lived in a little town called Nazareth out in the countryside far from Jerusalem where Elizabeth, her relative, was six months pregnant with John. Mary was a virgin (v 27) in regards to her marital status; a young woman who was celibate, chaste and unmarried. We do not know her age but we know that she was not sexually active. She was pledged to be married, what we call an engagement. This culture is so very different from ours where couples live together before they are married. Also by some extraordinary providence of God she is related to Elizabeth. The key thing about Mary is what she says about herself. "I am the Lord's servant" (v38) Throughout the Bible all sorts of people, prophets, kings, and very lowly people who had given themselves in obedience to God are called God's servants. Mary is a believer. She loves the Lord. She is living in the anticipation of the coming of the Messiah so in that sense she is a Christian. She is a believer who is ready to do God's will.

When Gabrielle visits Zechariah he is firm with Zechariah and strikes him dumb because he stumbles at God's word to him. Mary too has questions. As a Christian today we all have questions. The angel was gentle towards Mary because she is tender and her questions are reasonable. She is not an old grey beard who has been in the scriptures all his life and perhaps should know better. The Lord deals with each individual believer in a unique and particular way to help us grow and mature and continue on in our faith. There is nothing especially inherently good in Mary, God has chosen her as a favour to her to do this particular thing. It's about a special God who chooses to do special things in ordinary people's lives. As Gabrielle was gentle towards Mary so we should be gentle and respectful towards one another. It is not a loving thing to put people on a pedestal. That is an unreal relationship. There should be love. Mary is involved in the events of this gospel. She appears to be the source of the information Luke uses to write his gospel. Mary bore witness and testified to many of the private things God did. She bears witness to the Lord Jesus Christ. Even so, there are examples where Mary gets it wrong. She accuses Jesus of bringing trouble on her when he got lost in the Temple. It was her fault. Again her imperfections surface when she and her other children accuse Jesus of madness when he started preaching and healing. Like all believers we get things wrong. We are not perfect. Mary is not perfect but that doesn't mean she is not a saint. It does not mean you are not a saint if you get things wrong. The critical thing is that you believe. You discover you have got things wrong and you set things right. Mary is described as Jesus' mum. When Jesus talks to Mary he calls her 'woman' a term of respect in his culture. It's an honourable title. Women are made in the image of God. We are called to believe yet that call to faith may leave all sorts of questions but if there is the 'yes of faith you are open to say, 'Yes Lord, here I am'.

This is the first time Jesus gets mentioned in Luke's gospel. Mary will give birth to a boy with a very ordinary name of Jesus with no explanation of what it means. It's all very ordinary and yet this boy will be great. (v32) The Holy Spirit is a master of understatement. Just how great is Jesus?!! His glory fills the heavens! He is loved by angels and worshiped by the church. He will be called the Son of the Most High. The phrase the Most High is used in Genesis in connection with Melchizedek. Something of God's power and presence is at work here in the arrival of this boy when the throne is empty but occupied by unworthy people like Herod in dark and difficult days. But this boy will grow and sit on that throne to rule and reign. Jacob (all the people of Israel and all who believe) will be called to serve him forever. Great things are afoot! Here comes the rightful and true king. The emperor of Rome, Augustus gave the title Divi Filius (a son of a god/a deified ancestor) to Julius Caesar but here is the true Son of God who will rule over Jacob, over the world. We are called to be obedient and love the king, to be loyal and do their bidding. Choose which king you will serve. Implicit in these verse is a call, "Who is your Lord?" Jesus is God's eternal Lord over all the earth. Are you the servant of the Lord, the Lord Jesus?

Then we are given these details about the Immaculate conception. When Mary asked the question, "How will this be?" it is a reasonable question. She knows enough biology to know she is not sufficient in and of herself to conceive and bear a child. She is asking, "Who is the Father going to be?" She may have expected him to be Joseph, but no, the angel says, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. (v35) We are told who the Father is going to be. It is because we know who the Father is and that the Son will be called holy. As the Father is holy so will be the Son. He is the Son of God, not by title but by biology and organically. This truth is essential to the Christian faith. God is truly and absolutely the Father of Jesus and therefore Jesus is holy. He is fully a man as the son of Mary as we are all born of our mothers. And we are born of our fathers as Jesus was born of his Father, his divine Father.

We could say this is all about miracles brought about by supernatural power but it's not just about the power of the Father but the name of the Father. The key detail is who the Father is, it matters. God really is the Father of Jesus. This is not parthenogenesis as recorded in some species but never in humans. God did it and he is the Father. This is so significant, "sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned" (Romans 5:12) Every father here knows we are all sinners and we pass this on to our children. We do not desire it, but, we are bound to this but not so in Christ. The chain is broken and Christ is a sinless man fully God and fully man and only he can save you. The Lord has come in power to save; to break the chains of sin from off our lives that we might be adopted and taken into his family; that we might be called the children of God too, born of the Spirit. It matters who the Father is. It matters who your Father is, "Our Father in Heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in Heaven". He is the provider of our daily bread. He is the one who leads us and guides us. Praise be to God! Through Jesus Christ! Rise and bless your maker.