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Luke 1:26-45
12-24-2023

The Prelude

Good Morning, church family. I am glad that we can focus on Mary this Sunday morning. Today's scripture is full of pomp, an angelic visitor, a pair of impossible births, and a baby leaping in the womb. These miraculous things are part of the magic of Christmas. But what should we make with this beginning of Jesus's story?

Please pray with me, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be pleasing to you. Our triumphant triumphant in the dark. Amen.

How would you begin Jesus's story?

Each Gospel begins the story differently. Mark begins with the baptism of Jesus by John. Matthew begins by naming Jesus as in the line of succession for David's throne. John, well, John begins at the beginning of time with Jesus, the eternal word or logic of the universe. I think the gospel of John likes being extra special. But Luke begins with two pregnant women, Elizabeth, pregnant with John, and Mary, pregnant with Jesus. Pregnant with the messenger and the message.

But I thought Jesus was supposed to be the main character. Why begin the story before his birth? We can think of this as the prelude, or overture, the introductory notes telling us what kind of piece we are about to listen to.

Some of you with your Bibles open wanted _____ to keep reading to the radical meat of Luke's first chapter, Mary's song about throwing the tyrants from their thrones and filling the hungry with good things. Unless of course, you're reading a version of the Bible commissioned by a certain King James, then it's just the mighty from their chairs. That is a prelude to Jesus's ministry that he will eat with the lowly, feed thousands at his great sermon on the mount, and be put on trial by the King and Priests.

Can you hear the overture, the introductory notes telling us what kind of piece we are about to listen to?

But no, there is enough for us to be getting on with in verses 26-45, which are the announcements of Jesus's birth by the angel Gabriel and Elizabeth. What does Mary have to teach us about Jesus here? Well, the elephant in the room is that Mary's pregnancy is improbable. Where else have we seen improbable pregnancies in the Bible?

There is Isaac born of Sarah in her old age? Isaac is the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham to be the father of a great nation. Then there is Samson. Remember that military leader in the book of Judges with long hair. If that rings no bells, perhaps you know the song Hallelujah by Leonard Cohen. Then there is today's Old Testament reading of Hannah, the mother of Samuel who will crown King David. Each time that God opens a closed womb, it's time to pay attention because this baby is going to do great things.

Can you hear the overture, the introductory notes telling us what kind of piece we are about to listen to?

Jesus is going to be like Isaac, the beginning of something new. Jesus will be like Samson, a mighty rescuer of God's people. Jesus will be like Samuel, a high priest commissioning others. Today is the beginning of the story of Jesus. Letting us know that Jesus comes to us by an act of God bringing life into the world. And that is wonderful news for us here gathered today, questioners and more traditional believers alike. The virgin birth does not need to convince you of its plausibility for it to do its work. Listen to the music, it is triumphant and joyful, it is telling you that something amazing and mysterious is happening, but most of all the music of today's passage is telling us to get ready for an amazing story of a Palestinian Jewish Prophet who is going to set the world on fire. Whose mark on the world shall have no end.