

Lectionary Gospel Commentaries

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Based on the Lectionary Pericope Covering:

SOLA-LSB (Lutheran Service Book):
RCL (Revised Common Lectionary):

Luke 1:26-38

Year B - Advent 4, Text: Luke 1:26-38
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Luke presents Jesus as the key to understanding God's purpose in universal history. He divides history into three eras:

First era: From ancient Israel to John the Baptist (note Luke 16:16): John's work marks the end of the era of the Law and the Prophets. Redemptive hopes cherished during this era were not realized.

Second era: The earthly ministry of Jesus (note Luke 4:21). This is divided into three sections:

- Jesus' nativity in Bethlehem and early ministry in Galilee (v.1:1–9:50).
- Jesus' journey from Galilee to Jerusalem and His ministry along the way (v.9:51–19:28).
- Jesus' ministry in Jerusalem: His passion, death, resurrection, and ascension (v.19:28–24:53).

Third era: From Jesus' ascension until the end of the age (see Luke 24:50-52; Acts 1:1–5, note Verses 4–5): During this period, Jesus, seated at the Father's right hand (a symbol of cosmic authority), accomplishes His purposes through the power of His Holy Spirit at work among humanity.

After his introductory prologue (Luke 1:1–4), Luke presents his readers with a series of narratives — many of which contain the spirit of surprise.

While the aged priest Zechariah is burning incense in the Holy Place in the Jerusalem Temple, the angel Gabriel appears to him and tells him that his aged wife, Elizabeth, is to conceive and bear a son. Because Elizabeth has borne no children, she is looked on as virtually an outcast (v.1:25). Childless women were often mocked! Zechariah entertains doubts about whether this prediction will come to pass and loses his power of speech. Elizabeth conceives and remains in seclusion for five months (v.1:24).

Six months after Elizabeth conceives, the angel Gabriel appears to Mary in Galilee of Nazareth, and

tells her that she is to bear a son (1:26–38). Mary, a virgin, is betrothed to Joseph — but they are not yet living together and the marriage has naturally not been consummated. Mary is to name her son Jesus. He will be a descendant of King David and will be given the throne of David.

The meeting between the angel Gabriel and Mary takes place at a time when Caesar Augustus in Rome is at the height of his power. (Augustus died in AD 14, and was succeeded by the ruthless Tiberius, who was already worshiped as a god in the eastern part of the Roman Empire.)

The announcement to Mary of the birth of Jesus reflects the announcement to Zechariah of the birth of John the Baptist (Luke 1:5–23). In both narratives, the angel Gabriel appears to a parent who is troubled by the vision (v. 11–12; 26–29), and then told by the angel not to fear (v. 13, 30). After the announcement is made (v. 14–17, 31–33), the parent objects (v. 18, 34), and a sign is given to confirm the announcement (v. 20, 36).

The focus of the announcement of the birth of Jesus is on his identity as son of David (v. 32, 33) and Son of God (v. 32, 35). In Luke 1:76, John the Baptist is referred to as “prophet of the Most High.” Luke uses the term “Most High” a number of times as a title for God (Luke 1:35; 6:35; 8:28; Acts 7:48, 16:17).

Verse 1:34: Mary's questioning response is a denial of sexual relations and is used by Luke to lead to the angel's declaration about the Spirit's role in the conception of Mary's child (Luke 1:35). According to Luke, the virginal conception of Jesus takes place through the Holy Spirit, the power of God, and therefore Jesus has a unique relation with God; He is God's Son.

Verses 1:36–37: The sign given to Mary in confirmation of the angel's announcement to her is the pregnancy of her aged relative Elizabeth. If a woman past childbearing age could become pregnant, why, the

angel implies, should there be any doubt about Mary's pregnancy? Nothing is impossible with God!

Verse 1:38: After Mary submits, the angel departs from her.

Eventually Mary visits her cousin Elizabeth, (already six months pregnant), who lives to the south of Jerusalem near Bethlehem (Luke 1:39–46). Elizabeth knows that Mary is pregnant and greets her as “the mother of my Lord.” Mary offers words of praise to God (1:46–55). After staying with Elizabeth for three months, Mary returns to Nazareth (1:56). One might ask: Did Mary remain with Elizabeth until she gave birth to John the Baptist?