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An exegetical study of the annunciation of Luke 1:26-38 through text and art

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Chapter III: Exegesis of the Text

Historical Criticism of Luke 1:26-38: World of the Text

Historical Period

In the opening of his gospel, the Lukan author chooses a significant historical marker to establish the historicity of Jesus' birth by chronologically associating the reign of King Herod the Great with the arrival of the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a small town in Galilee (Lk 1:5, 26). Herod was a client ruler of the Roman Empire, a satellite king of Judea¹ who had none of David's royal blood and was not a Jew but an Edomite.²

Characterisation of Gabriel

Gabriel (or in Hebrew גַּבְרִיאֵל, gavri'el) is not called an archangel in the Bible and is one of three named good angels in the Bible. Gabriel appears in both the Old and New Testaments and in accordance with his name meaning the Power of God is described as "great", "might", "power", and "strength." He is regarded by the Jews as the angel of judgement but in the Christian tradition, he is regarded as the angel of mercy, and the angel of the Incarnation.³

In Jewish tradition the angel Gabriel represents fire and as such he was commissioned to rescue Hananiah, Azariah, and Mishael from the fiery furnace (Pes. 118a; Ex. R. xviii and 4 Macc 16:20-22). By virtue of his title as the Prince of Fire, Gabriel is also prince of the ripening of fruits and as an angel representing an element of nature he is also associated with the metals: Gabriel is gold (the colour of fire) and when depicted girded like a metal-worker, he shows Moses how to make the candlestick.⁴ Among his many skills is his ability to fly, but while Michael reaches the earth in one flight, Gabriel requires two.⁵ Gabriel often works together with Michael who is considered

¹ Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, and Roland E. Murphy, *The Jerome Biblical Commentary* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc, 1968), 67,121,694.

² Willis C. Newman, *Luke, John, and Acts: Background, Outline and Commentary* (Tacoma WA, USA: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2010), 27.

³ Hugh Pope, "St Gabriel the Archangel," in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, ed. Kevin Knight (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1909).

⁴ Solomon Schechter, Ludwig Blau, and Emil G. Hirsch, "Gabriel (Γαβριήλ, "Man of God");" in *JewishEncyclopedia.com* (New York; London: Funk and Wagnalls Company, 1901), 540-43.

⁵ Cf. Wojciech Kosior, "The Angel in the Hebrew Bible from the Statistic and Hermeneutic Perspectives. Some Remarks on the Interpolation Theory," *The Polish Journal of Biblical Research* 12, no. June (2013): 56.

greater than Gabriel. Together, Michael and Gabriel defend Israel against its accusers, and for its deliverance from captivity as well as pray for the human race in general. Michael, as the guardian angel of Israel and high priest of heaven, is more occupied in heaven. Gabriel is set over the serpents, over paradise and the cherubim in heaven. Gabriel executes God's will on earth and is the messenger of God.⁶ In the Old Testament Gabriel communicates a prophecy regarding “Messiah the Prince” to Daniel (Dan 9:26). He tells Zechariah that John the Baptist will be a forerunner before the Lord (Lk 1:17). Most eminently, he tells Mary that her son will be called “the Son of the Most High” (Lk 1:32). Gabriel first appears in Daniel 8:16 when “a man’s voice” commands Daniel to explain a vision to the prophet.⁷ In Luke 1:26-38 there is no physical description of Gabriel other than being identified as an angel. In popular art and culture Gabriel is depicted with wings which probably refers to Daniel 9:21 which describes Gabriel’s “flight.” Nevertheless, there is no mention in Scripture of the presence or absence of wings. Gabriel’s appearance instils fear for when Daniel meets Gabriel, he is frightened and falls on his face (Dan 8:18). When he greets Zechariah, his first words are, “Do not be afraid” (Lk 1:13).⁸ However, his greeting to Mary, “Greetings, favoured one! The Lord is with you.” (Χαῖρε, κεχαριτωμένη ὁ κύριος μετὰ σοῦ) (Lk 1:28) is more celebratory, but Gabriel still follows on, telling her not to fear (Lk 1:30).⁹ Jerome however, translated this expression from Greek into Latin as “*Ave, gratia plena*” which in English translates from the Latin as “full of grace”. This translation was the basis of both dogma and devotion prior to the Reformation and remains as the devotional preference for modern-day Catholics, despite it being superseded when translated from the Greek to English by such alternatives as “rejoice,

⁶ Schechter, Blau, and Hirsch, "Gabriel."

⁷ Cf. When I, Daniel, had seen the vision, I tried to understand it. Then someone appeared standing before me, having the appearance of a man, and I heard a human voice by the Ulai, calling, “Gabriel, help this man understand the vision” (Dan 8:16).

⁸ In the phrase “... ‘Do not be afraid, Zechariah’ [εἶπεν δὲ πρὸς αὐτὸν ὁ ἄγγελος· Μὴ φοβοῦ, Ζαχαρία] - the Lukan author uses the verb φθόβῃ φοβοῦ, which means to be alarmed; or to be in awe of, i.e. revere: - be afraid; be cowardly. The word for fear in this context has a different meaning as the one used in this line of the pericope. It can mean also “awe; to be filled with awe.” James Strong, *A Concise Dictionary of the Words of the Hebrew Bible and the Greek Testament*, (Also available at Logos Bible Software, 2009).

⁹ The word χαίρω translates as either (a) I rejoice, c. cognate acc. or c. dat., I rejoice exceedingly; (b) in the imperative, χαῖρε, χαίρετε a greeting, farewell, Christianised in Phil. 3:1, 4:4, by the addition ἐν κυρίῳ (and generally mistranslated), cf. χαίρειν, imperatival infin., e.g. Ac. 15:23 (cf. 2 John 10); also hail! in Mk. 15:18, Mt. 27:29; Alexander Souter, *A Pocket Lexicon to the Greek New Testament*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press. Also available at Logos Bible Software, 1917). electronic resource; also “#5463 χαίρω chairō, khah’ee-ro; a prim. verb; to be “cheer” ful, i.e. calmly happy or well-off; impersonal, impersonally. especially as salutation (on meeting or parting), be well: —farewell, be glad, God speed, greeting, hail, joy (-fully), rejoice.” James Strong, *A Concise Dictionary of the Words of the Hebrew Bible and the Greek Testament*.

you who enjoys God's favour!"¹⁰ The word *chaíro* χαίρω translates as either (a) *I rejoice, I rejoice exceedingly* or (b) in the imperative, *chaíre* χαῖρε, *chaírete* χαίρετε. In Zechariah 9:9¹¹ and Zephaniah 3:14¹² the Hebrew word for rejoice¹³ is used. This word translates into Koine Greek as *chaíro* χαίρω. In these contexts, Israel's prophets talk about the joy that would be brought by the promised Messiah to the people of Israel. It is also a greeting or "farewell."¹⁴ In the Septuagint, it is used as an announcement of messianic joy (Zeph 3:14; Joel 2:21; Zech 9:9; Lam 4:21). In other Gospels, it is used as "hail"¹⁵ (Mk 15:18; and Mt 27:29) when saluting someone of higher social status or rank than the one proposing the greeting. For example: "And they began saluting him, "Hail, King of the Jews!" (Mk 15:18) and "... and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on his head. They put a reed in his right hand and knelt before him and mocked him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" (Mt. 27:29). Gabriel's use of this word indicates his acknowledgement of, and reverence for, Mary's royal status: Mary becomes the Davidic Queen-Mother because Jesus, as

¹⁰ Waller, *A Cultural Study of Mary and the Annunciation: From Luke to the Enlightenment*. 39.

¹¹ "Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion!"

¹² "Sing aloud, O daughter Zion, shout, O Israel! Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter Jerusalem!" (Zech 9:9)

¹³ ["לָּ] vb. rejoice — Qal 1. *rejoice* — Qal 1. rejoice. a. abs.; b. c. ָ; c. with 2 לָּ. tremble." Richard Whitaker et al., *The Abridged Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew-English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, (Houghton Mifflin Company. Also available at Logos Bible Software, 1906).

¹⁴ Souter, *A Pocket Lexicon to the Greek New Testament*; also see Phil 3:1 "Finally, my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord."

¹⁵ Christianised in Phil. 3:1, 4:4 by the addition ἐν κυρίῳ cf. χαίρειν, imperatival infin., e.g. Ac. 15:23 (cf. 2 John 10). Strong's Concise Dictionary of the Words of the Hebrew Bible and the Greek Testament #5399. However, Green suggests that it is an invitation to rejoice and when combined with 'favoured one' form an alliteration in Greek. The conjoining of the two motifs of God acting graciously and people responding with praise and joy are interwoven throughout the gospel. Joel B Green, "The Purpose and Theology of the Gospel of Luke," in *The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1997), 86.

the son of David (Lk 1:26, 1:31), becomes the Davidic King.¹⁶ Because Mary is the mother of the Son of God, the mother of the Word Incarnate, her position is elevated to Gabriel's position within the heavenly hierarchy. Mary is therefore, Queen-Mother of Israel,¹⁷ of the Church and of Heaven.¹⁸ Using this form of greeting,¹⁹ Gabriel delivers his message with reverence and humility and acknowledges Mary as his superior.²⁰

Thus, it makes sense if the word *χαίρω* is used, and in this context, it would mean to be in awe or reverence. Therefore, the angel's salutation could be translated as, "Hail [you] who are favoured by being filled with grace! ... Do not be in awe [of me], for it is *you*²¹ who have found favour with God."

¹⁶ "In the Old Testament the *"gebirah,"* or Queen-Mother enjoyed a pre-eminent position in the kingdom due to the practical difficulties created by the monarch's practice of polygamy. Thus, the mother of the royal son held great prestige and influence and examples include Queen-Mother Bathsheba, mother of King Solomon (I Kgs 2:19) and the Queen-Mother of Balthasar (Dan. 5:10-12)." George F. Kirwin, "Queenship of Mary - Queen-Mother," *Marian Library Studies* 28, no. Article 6 (2007): 64; Elizabeth confirms Mary's royal status in her greeting, "... that the mother of my Lord comes to me?" Cf. Luke 1:43b "*Lord*" used in this context refers to the Lord of Israel; see A Concise Dictionary of the Words in Greek - # 2961 *κυριεύω* *kuriēuō*, *koo-ree-yoo'-o*; from 2962; to rule: — have dominion over, lord, be lord of, exercise lordship over. 2962. *κύριος* *kuriōs*, *koo'-ree-os*; from *κύρος* *kurōs* (supremacy); supreme in authority, i.e. (as noun) controller; by impl. Mr. (as a respectful title):—God, Lord, master, Sir 2963. *κυριότης* *kuriōtēs*, *koo-ree-ot'-ace*; from 2962; mastery, i.e. (concr. and coll.) rulers: —dominion, government; also, in *A Pocket Lexicon of the Greek New Testament* - *κύριος* (*dominus*), (a) an owner of property, particularly of slaves (*δοῦλοι*), a lord, master (cf. 1 Pet 3:6): plur. *οἱ κύριοι* (*domini*), master and mistress, Mt 15:27, Lk 19:33, Acts 16:16, 19, and perhaps elsewhere; (b) weaker sense, in the vocative, as a polite address, *κύριε*, sir! *κύριοι*, gentlemen, sirs, Acts 16:30, cf. *κυρία*; (c) of Divine beings, *κύριος*, Lord, without article, generally refers to God, whereas *ὁ κύριος*, the Lord, generally refers to Jesus, the Messiah (cf. Ac. 2:34). In this sense the word connotes that these Divine Beings are absolute rulers (kings) of the whole world, and that we are their slaves (subjects). As the term was also applied to oriental sovereigns and to the Roman Emperors (particularly frequently in Nero's case) in the same sense, it focussed the deadly rivalry between the two powers (cf. Acts 25:26). Souter, *A Pocket Lexicon to the Greek New Testament*.

¹⁷ Edward P. Sri, *Queen Mother: A Biblical Theology of Mary's Queenship*, (Steubenville, Ohio: Emmaus Road Publishing, 2005). electronic resource.

¹⁸ CCC 964 Mary's role in the Church is inseparable from her union with Christ and flows directly from it. "This union of the mother with the Son in the work of salvation is made manifest from the time of Christ's virginal conception up to his death"

¹⁹ Byrne makes the observation in Luke 1:12 that, "Where Zechariah had been troubled by the angelic apparition, what troubles Mary is the content of this greeting." Brendan Byrne, *The Hospitality of God: A Reading of Luke's Gospel* (Strathfield, NSW: St Pauls Publications, 2015), 33.

²⁰ Byrne discusses the fact that the way Gabriel explains how the conception is to come about makes clear who the child's father will be. Byrne, *The Hospitality of God: A Reading of Luke's Gospel*, 34.

²¹ Italics used for emphasis only.

Was she disturbed and embarrassed by the extravagance of the salutation “full of grace”?²² If this was the case it would explain why Mary was described as being ‘perplexed’²³ and ‘pondering’ [ἡ δὲ ἐπὶ τῷ λόγῳ διεταράχθη καὶ διελογίζετο ποταπὸς εἶη ὁ ἀσπασμὸς οὗτος] (Lk 1:29).

In the Book of Daniel, the significance of the angel Gabriel's appearance is prefigured (Dan 8:15-16) and the angel's announcement to Zechariah (Lk 1:19) closely parallels his announcements to Daniel. The name Gabriel in Luke 1:19, 26 would be enough to alert any reader familiar with the Jewish Scriptures because Gabriel's name only occurs twice in them (Dan 8:16; 9: 21) and on both occasions Gabriel's mission is to explain the importance of the understanding of a prophecy about the liberation of Israel and the dawning of a new age. The Lukan author's use of many and varied literary devices, such as the epigraphs used in the close verbal similarities between the opening of the Lukan gospel (Lk 1:1) and these chapters of Daniel, leave no doubt that Luke is deliberately making reference to the Book of Daniel in which Gabriel interprets and explains the vision that Daniel had for Israel.²⁴ Congruently, the proclamations of the angel to Gideon in Judges 6:11-24 closely parallels the angel Gabriel's proclamations to Mary in Luke 1:26-38.

Judges 6:12: “The angel of the LORD appeared to him and said to him, “The LORD is with you”

Luke 1:28: “And he came to her and said, “Greetings, favoured one! The Lord is with you.”

²² Thomas Weinandy notes “Gabriel does not address Mary by name. Rather, his greeting is by way of a declaration— she is hailed as, and so decreed to be, the one “full of grace.” Being full of grace entails a reciprocal relational causality. Because Mary is full of grace, “the Lord is with” her, and because the Lord is with her, she is full of grace. The act by which Mary is full of grace, the indwelling presence of the Lord within her, is the same act by which the Lord is with her. The Lord is not simply present “to” Mary, as two persons are present to one another, but the Lord resides fully within her, for she interiorly possesses the fullness of grace, which is the full interior presence of God. Although “Mary” is her name, who she actually is, as declared by Gabriel, is the one who possesses the fullness of grace, the one in whom resides the fullness of the Lord's presence. Thus being full of grace assumes the status of a title or even a name and so entails the defining characteristic of who Mary is. The woman called “Mary” can rightly and simply be addressed as ‘full of grace.’” Thomas G. Weinandy, *Jesus Becoming Jesus: A Theological Interpretation of the Synoptic Gospels* (Washington, D. C: Catholic University of America Press, 2018), 7-8.

²³ Luke Timothy Johnson, however understands the word perplexed to mean “utterly confused” and is tempted to translate it mean “terrified.” Luke Timothy Johnson, “Translations, Notes, Interpretation: The Prophecy of Jesus' Birth (1:26-38),” in *The Gospel of Luke*, ed. Daniel J. Harrington SJ (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1991).

²⁴ John McHugh, *The Mother of Jesus in the New Testament* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1975), online resource, 31-52.

Judges 6:17: "If now I have found favour with you, then show me a sign that it is you who speak with me.

Luke 1:34: "Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?"

Furthermore, Gabriel's announcement to Mary alludes to Nathan's proclamations as demonstrated in the following:

2 Samuel 7:12: "I will preserve the offspring of your body after you, and make his sovereignty secure. I will be a father to him and he a son to me."

Luke 1:32 ff: "He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High."

2 Samuel 7:16b: "Your throne will be established forever:"

Luke 1:32 ff: "The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David."

2 Samuel 7:16a: "Your house and your sovereignty will always stand secure before me.

Luke 1:32-33a: "He will rule forever over the house of Jacob."

2 Samuel 7:13: "I will make his royal throne secure forever."

Luke 1:33b: "And his reign will have no end."

The use of Gabriel's name is significant for he is known for bearing good news of the much-awaited Messiah.²⁵

Characterisation of Mary

In the Lukan account of the Annunciation there are no details of what Mary was doing at the time of the appearance of Gabriel and the announcement that she was to become the mother of the Messiah. Nor are there any details of Mary's age or circumstances. It has culturally and traditionally been assumed that she would have been a young girl/woman of marriageable age, which was just before puberty but usually between twelve or thirteen years old.²⁶

In the chosen pericope, the announcement to Mary by the angel Gabriel occurred in Nazareth. The timing of which is taken from Luke 1:5 that mentioned Herod King of

²⁵ The following verses illustrate Gabriel's role as a messenger Dan 2:31-45; Lk 1:15-17, 26-38.

²⁶ Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Dangerous Memories: A Mosaic of Mary in Scripture: Drawn from Truly Our Sister* (New York; London: Continuum, 2006), online resource, 14.

Judea, which historically places the event during the Roman occupation of Israel. It is presumed by many scholars, that Mary was a Jewish woman of low social and economic standing, because of where she lived, Nazareth.²⁷ Nazareth was a small out of the way farming town in Galilee situated off the main road of commercial travel.²⁸ Just behind Nazareth ran the great high road across a plain, known in the days of Isaiah as “the way of the sea” which stretched from the port in Acre (Ptolemais) to Damascus. Caravans travelled from Damascus to Judea and Egypt and passed through Israel not far from the base of the Nazareth hill. Levi Khamor states that the Roman roads along the coast linked Berytus, Sidon, Tyre and Acre through Sepphoris past the hills surrounding Nazareth, then to Samaria, Jerusalem and on to the south. Not far away were caravans travelling with Syrians, Phoenicians, Egyptians, Jews, Gileadites, Idumeans and Roman legions. Amidst these roadways and byways and about fifteen gently rounded hills was Nazareth, nestled on top of the highest hill with the most scenic vantage point.²⁹ Nazareth’s location was poetically likened by Quaresimus to a rose, “... and like a rose it has the same rounded form, enclosed by mountains as the flower by its leaves.”³⁰ The surrounding hills kept Nazareth secluded and protected from the military and commercial traffic below.³¹ It could be therefore concluded that the environment in which Mary lived was relatively safe albeit poor.³²

²⁷ John T. Carroll notes that “ironically, while she is waiting to gain in (ascribed) honor by marriage into a household that stands in David’s line, she learns from a divine messenger that her status reversal will come instead from the identity of her son—and from God’s choice and initiative.” John T. Carroll, *Luke: A Commentary*, First ed. (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012), 39.; Johnson, *Dangerous Memories*, 13; Elizabeth A Johnson, "Mary of Nazareth: Friend of God and Prophet," *America-New York* 182, no. 21 (2000): 335, 39; also James D. Tabor, *The Jesus Dynasty: The Hidden History of Jesus, His Royal Family, and the Birth of Christianity*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006). electronic resource. 87.

²⁸ Johnson, *Dangerous Memories*, 12.

²⁹ Levi Khamor, *The Revelation of the Son of Man*, (Petersham, Massachusetts: St. Bede's, 1992). electronic resource; also, the significance of Nazareth being likened to a flower is discussed in Robert J. Karris and Cindy J. Ventrice, *Commentary of the Gospel of Luke : Chapters 1-8* (St. Bonaventure: Franciscan Institute Publications, 2001), 52-53.

³⁰ Francis H. Dunwell, *A Commentary on the Authorized English Version of the Gospel According to St John*, (London: J. T. Hayes, 1872), <https://books.google.com.au/books?id=jWX7bhkrxOMC>. electronic resource. 34.

³¹ Khamor, *The Revelation of the Son of Man*. Loc 2268-77.

³² Johnson states that “To date, nothing that indicates wealth has been uncovered in Nazareth: no public paved roads or civic buildings, no inscriptions, no decorative frescoes or mosaics, no luxury items such as perfume bottles or even simple glass.” Johnson, "Mary of Nazareth," 331. Furthermore, “During the period of Roman occupation, Galilean villagers were triply taxed. They had to pay the traditional tithe for the Temple in Jerusalem, tribute to the Roman emperor, and a third tax to the local Jewish client-king through whom Rome ruled by proxy.” Johnson, "Mary of Nazareth," 334.

In the Mediterranean culture of the New Testament, it is the value of *being* that dominates the value of *doing*.³³ Mary's virginity – her physical integrity – was also utmost in terms of the value of being in Palestine (which was also under Roman rule). In the pericope of the Lukan Annunciation, Mary is identified as *being* a virgin and declared “full of grace.”³⁴ In this state of *being* Mary is told that she “will conceive in her womb and give birth to a son.”³⁵ Thus, the narrative instead either focuses on or alludes to, *who* and *what* Mary is, which is “a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David” (Lk 1:27) rather than her socio-economic status.

At the angel Gabriel's salutation, Mary does not become alarmed or terrified as others in Scripture often do when they personally encounter these celestial beings. Instead, her response to Gabriel's statement was that she was “... much perplexed by his words” and that she pondered “what sort of greeting this might be” (Lk 1:26). Scholars interpret this perplexed state and pondering in many ways but most often as either evidence of her great piety and humility and therefore faith seeking understanding.³⁶ Or Mary's response could be caution or hesitation as she seeks clarification because she is wary of the celestial visitor. Thus, her question, “How can this be, since I am a

³³ John J. Pilch, *Biblical Social Values and Their Meaning: A Handbook*, ed. Bruce J. Malina (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1993), 3.

³⁴ The word “*kecharitomene*” (κεχαριτωμένη) means “full of grace.” “Because the verb is also a participle, Mary is shown to be chosen for a long time past; God's full flow of favour has already been concentrating upon her.” Stuhlmüller, “According to Luke,” 44:31.

³⁵ Regarding the verb relating to Mary being “full of grace” H. W. Smyth defines the perfect tense as “completed action with a permanent result.” Herbert W. Smyth, *Greek Grammar* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1984), 413. Origen notes, “Again I turn the matter over in my mind and ask why, when God had decided that the Savior should be born of a virgin, he chose not a girl who was not betrothed, but precisely one who was already betrothed. Unless I am mistaken, this is the reason. The Savior ought to have been born of a virgin who was not only betrothed but, as Matthew writes, had already been given to her husband, although he had not yet had relations with her. Otherwise, if the Virgin were seen growing big with a child, the state of virginity itself would be a cause of disgrace.” Smyth, *Greek Grammar*, 24; Origen and Joseph T. Lienhard, *Homilies on Luke: Fragments on Luke*, vol. 94, Series: The Fathers of the Church (Washington, D.C: Catholic University of America Press, 1996).

³⁶ Cf. Stuhlmüller, “According to Luke,” 44:31.

virgin?" (Lk 1:34)³⁷ could be understood as testing the angel to see what kind of spirit³⁸ it is, if it is from God, by asking such a question.³⁹

Alternatively, the question may be asked, "Why was she concerned about conceiving a child?" Was she infertile? She was not old. In fact, it seems Mary was in prime condition and age to conceive a son. She was not unwed, because she was already betrothed to Joseph, a bond of betrothal so strong that she was already called the "wife" of Joseph (Mt 1:20).⁴⁰ Surely, she was not so naïve, at least for ancient times, to not understand that marriage was directed to the bearing of children. She does not refer to the past, but by using the present tense implies her present and persevering intention. One possible explanation is that Mary did not enter into a natural marriage with Joseph. In the apocryphal Protoevangelium of James, Anna offers her child Mary, to the Lord and because Mary's virginity has already been consecrated to God, she asks this question as she is apprehensive that she would be expected to somehow break this vow.⁴¹ This vow that Joseph must have known about before he agreed to the betrothal,

³⁷ Joseph A. Fitzmyer proposes the purpose of Mary's question to the angel "is to give the Evangelist an opening for the further angelic communication about the real character of the child to be born: He will not only be the Davidic Messiah to rule over the house of Jacob, but He "will be called holy, the Son of God" (1:35). The main affirmation in the angelic declaration to Mary is thus wholly Christological." Joseph A. Fitzmyer, "The Virginal Conception of Jesus in the New Testament," *Theological Studies* 34, no. 4 (1973).

³⁸ God sent "evil spirits" in Judges 9:23; 1 Samuel 16:14-16; 16-23, 18:10 and 19:9; see also Raphael in the Book of Tobit, who was an angel disguised as a young man. Tobit 5:4.

³⁹ Gerd Ludemann rationalizes that this question can only be reconciled with v27 when "a fiancée can hardly be surprised at the promise of a child even if she has as yet had no sexual intercourse with her fiancé." Gerd Ludemann, *Virgin Birth? The Real Story of Mary and Her Son Jesus*, trans. John Bowden (Harrisburg, PA Trinity Press International, 1998), 102. Rudolf Bultmann admits that "Mary's question" is "an absurd one for a bride." Rudolf Bultmann, *History of the Synoptic Tradition*, trans. John Marsh, Revised ed. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1963), 295.

⁴⁰ Byrne offers the idea that perhaps Mary would be expected to "bring forward the time of her marriage to Joseph – something which in that culture would hardly be within her power?" Byrne, *The Hospitality of God: A Reading of Luke's Gospel*, 34. Furthermore, McKnight points this out in, *The Real Mary*, that a betrothed woman was legally married, and it is for this reason, relations between her and another man were considered adultery (Deuteronomy 22: 25–27). Scot McKnight, *The Real Mary: Why Evangelical Christians Can Embrace the Mother of Jesus* (Brewster MA: Paraclete Press, 2007). This idea is reiterated by Fitzmyer in Fitzmyer, "The Virginal Conception of Jesus in the New Testament," 343-44.

⁴¹ In the "Protoevangelium of James," in *The Infancy Gospel of James* (Arizona State University). Chapter 4 (2) it states that Anna consecrated her child to the service of God, "And Anna said, 'As the Lord God lives, whether I give birth to either a male or a female child, I will bring it as an offering to the Lord my God and it will be a servant to him all the days of its life.' Just as Samuel's mother Hannah vowed his life in service of God (1 Sam 1:11) Anna gave her longed for child to God too. This is the idea behind the apologetics expressed by some of the Church Fathers such as St Augustine (*Holy Virginity* 4:4 CE 401). For the biblical laws for vows of abstinence for married women see Numbers 30: 13–16.

knowing and accepting that he was expected to live with Mary under a vow of continence himself and theirs would be a chaste marital union.⁴²

The pattern with which the Lukan account of the Annunciation is told alludes to the Marian typology of other women of the Old Testament, especially those who were favoured with miraculous births, those who were ancestors of the Messiah, and those who contributed to the triumph and salvation of Israel.⁴³ However, all these women were considered barren and non-virgins. All these women conceived in the normal way, yet Mary was to conceive as a virgin and through the agency of God. In the Septuagint of the Old Testament, which is consistent with Luke 1:26-38, and the Hebrew version of Isaiah 7:14, which was translated into Greek three hundred years before Christ, *almah* always means a young girl and by implication sexually inexperienced and therefore a virgin. The Hebrew Bible principally uses two words to speak of a woman's sexual virginity: *betulah* בְּתוּלָה and refers to "a female who had begun to menstruate and was therefore marriageable" although sexually inexperienced and *almah* אַלְמָה.⁴⁴ In the Old Testament, *betulah* occurs fifty times yet *almah* occurs only rarely.⁴⁵ The word "*almah*" אַלְמָה which is a point of scholarly contention is used in Isaiah 7:14 and reads: "Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look! the virgin (*almah*) is with child ..." It becomes an interpretive issue for Christian theology as it is the latter that is used in Isaiah 7:14, and the passage referenced in Matthew 1:23 to describe the virgin birth of Jesus.

⁴² The evidence for the unusual abstinence of Joseph and Mary on their wedding night and during her pregnancy can be seen in Matthew 1: 25. The following authors note and discuss that there was no possibility for Joseph to be mistaken for having fathered Mary's child because he refrained from marital relations with her whilst she was pregnant: Ulrich Luz and Helmut Koester, *Matthew 21-28: A Commentary*, Hermeneia: A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 1:97; also Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Mich; Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2009), 90. Raymond E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke*, New updated ed. (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 132.

⁴³ "Typology indicates the dynamic movement toward the fulfillment of the divine plan when "God [will] be everything to everyone." CCC 130. Sarah, Abraham's wife mother of Isaac (Gen 11:30); Rebekah, Isaac's wife mother of Jacob and Esau (Gen 25:21); Rachel, Jacob's wife gave birth to Joseph (Gen 29:31); the un-named mother of Samson, wife of Manoah (Judg. 13:2); Hannah gave birth to Samuel when she was barren (1 Sam 1:5) and the aged and barren wife of Zechariah, Elizabeth, who gave birth to John the Baptist (Luke 1:7).

⁴⁴ Justin M. Glessner, "Virgin, Virginitly in the Hebrew Bible and Early Judaism," ed. John D. Barry, et al., *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, Washington: Lexham Press. Also available at Logos Bible Software, 2012).

⁴⁵ Justin M. Glessner, electronic resource "Virgin, Virginitly in the New Testament and Early Christianity," ed. John D. Barry, et al., *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, Washington: Lexham Press. Also available at Logos Bible Software, 2012).

Whilst *betulah* most clearly expresses the idea that a woman has never been sexually active, *almah* is more ambiguous. The ambiguity of *almah* is used to argue that Matthew misunderstood Isaiah 7:14 and Jesus was not actually born of a virgin by those critical of the virgin birth.⁴⁶ However, closer scrutiny reveals that *betulah* clearly denotes a woman who has never had sexual relations as the following examples demonstrate: Leviticus 21:3: "... his sister, a virgin (*betulah*), who is closest to him, who has not had a husband ...". In Judges 21:12: "And they found among the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead four hundred young virgins (*betulah*) who had not had sex with a man ..." and Genesis 24:16 (speaking of Rebekah): "Now the girl was very pleasing in appearance. She was a virgin (*betulah*); no man had known her."⁴⁷ To "know" a woman is a common biblical Hebrew euphemism for "having sexual relations" (e.g., Gen 4:1, 17, 25; 1 Kgs 1:4). It is obvious that men intellectually knew Rebekah (e.g., her brother and Abraham's servant in the passage). The text is making the explicit claim that she had never had sexual relations with a man. The uses of *almah*, by way of comparison, do not provide clear clues regarding the sexual connotations associated with the term. In Genesis 24:43: "Behold, I am standing by the spring of water. Let it be that the young woman (*almah*) who comes out to draw water and to whom I shall say, 'Please give me a little water to drink from your jar' ..." Also, in Exodus 2:8 "And the daughter of Pharaoh said to her, 'Go.' And the girl (*almah*) went, and she called the mother of the boy." Likewise, in Proverbs 30:18–19: "Three of these are too wonderful for me, and four, I do not understand them: the way of the eagle in the sky, the way of a snake on a rock, the way of a ship in the heart of the sea, and the way of a man with a young woman (*almah*).". However, New Testament scholars, such as Brown, Lüdemann and Schaberg view

the messianic interpretation of Isa 7:14 found in Matt 1:23 is based on the connection with the name Immanuel, which expressed so well early Christian belief in the identity of the Christ, and the translation of the MT's עַלְמָה (*almah*) by παρθένος (*parthenos*) in the LXX. While the traditions of the Gospels of Matthew and Luke emphasize differently that the mother of Jesus conceived him while she was still a virgin, analysis of pre-Lukan and pre-Matthean tradition on the matter is inconclusive.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Glessner, "Virgin, Virginitly in the New Testament."

⁴⁷ Glessner, "Virgin, Virginitly in the Hebrew Bible."

⁴⁸ Glessner, "Virgin, Virginitly in the New Testament."

Gabriel's salutation to Mary is unique in Scripture.⁴⁹ The verb used by the Lukan author *charitou* χάριω is extremely rare in Greek and is present only two times in the New Testament: in the text of Luke on the Annunciation (Luke 1:28) *kecharitomene* κεχαριτωμένη, and in the Epistle to the Ephesians (Eph 1:6), *echaritosen* ἐχαρίτωσεν. The perfect passive participle used by Luke indicates that the transformation by grace has already taken place in Mary, well before the moment of the Annunciation. The fundamental meaning of the verb *charitoo* being *charitos* χάριτος (grace), the idea which is expressed is that of a change brought about by grace. Furthermore, the verb used by the Lukan author is in the past participial form. *Kecharitomene* κεχαριτωμένη means then, in the person to whom the verb relates, that is, Mary, that the action of the grace of God has already brought about a change.⁵⁰

Gabriel's greeting in Luke 1:28-33 to Mary also echoes the language of Zephaniah 3:14-17. Just as in the Koine Greek of the Lukan gospel mentioned earlier, the word "*Chaire*" in the Septuagint, is also translated into English as "Rejoice!" and always appears in a context where Zion is invited to the messianic joy from the perspective of the future (cf Joel 2:21-23; Zeph 3:14; Zech 9:9; and Lam. 4:21). In his announcement to Mary, Gabriel uses the formula which the prophets use to invite the eschatological Zion to rejoice in the salvation which God accords her.⁵¹ In the prophet Zephaniah 3:14-15: "Shout for joy, daughter of Zion!" the Daughter of Zion (meaning the People of Israel, and Mary is the embodiment of nation Israel) was the place where Yahweh rested, and Luke thus alludes to Mary as the new Ark of the Covenant.⁵² Luke's biblical interpretation of Mary sees her as truly representing both the people of Israel and the future Church.

⁴⁹ "It is a *hapax legomena* (or *hapax*). In ancient Greek *hapax legomena* means "uttered only once". It is a term used in linguistics to refer to words that are found only once in a text." Cf.

http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_AIUTO.HTM#hapax

⁵⁰ Ignace de La Potterie, *Mary in the Mystery of the Covenant*, trans. Bertrand Buby (New York: Alba House, c1992), 17-20.

⁵¹ La Potterie, *Mary in the Mystery*, 14-16.

⁵² Just as the Ark of the Covenant contained the Ten Commandments (the Word of God, the Law) written in stone, a pot of manna (which was the bread from Heaven that sustained the life of the Hebrews during the Exodus) and the Rod of Aaron (which budded and convicted those who were grumbling against Moses), in Mary who is the **Ark of the New Covenant**, contained Jesus (the Word of God and the Bread of Life, the new Manna from Heaven), and the Holy Spirit (who is Truth that convicts us). Joseph Ratzinger writes in his work *Daughter Zion: Meditations on the Church's Marian Belief*, "She is the true Israel in whom Old and New Covenant, Israel and Church, are indivisibly one. She is the "people of God" bearing fruit through God's gracious power." Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Daughter Zion: Meditations on the Church's Marian Belief*, trans. John M. McDermott SJ (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1983), 43.

In his work, *Mary in the Mystery of the Covenant*, Ignace de la Potterie summarises that,

In Mary are accomplished all the important aspects of the promises of the Old Testament to the Daughter of Zion, and in her real person there is an anticipation which will be realized for the new people of God, the Church. The history of revelation on the subject of the theme of the Woman Zion, realized in the person of Mary, and continued in the Church, constitutes a doctrinal bastion, an unshakable structured ensemble for the comprehension of the history of salvation, from its origin up to its eschatology.

However, it is in Mary's humble reply to Gabriel, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word" (Lk 1:38) that she reveals how she views herself, as a lowly servant, in her relationship with God. The identification of the Ark of the [New] Covenant with Mary would have been clear to Jewish readers of Luke and John.⁵³ In the Annunciation pericope of Luke 1:26-38 Mary is characterized by many of the titles that are either alluded to or referred to depending on the context: Daughter of Zion, 'Mother-Zion', and 'Ark of the Covenant.'⁵⁴

From the time of ancient Israel up until the Middle Ages Jewish marriages consisted of two ceremonies at two separate times; each with separate celebrations. First was the

⁵³ The similarities between Exodus 40:34, 35 and Luke 1:35: are highlighted by Rene Laurentin: "The divine overshadowing, designated by the characteristic word *episkiasai*, evoked the cloud which was the sign of Yahweh's presence. This cloud was seen for the first time when the Mosaic worship was established. With its shadow it covered the Ark of the Covenant, while the glory of God—that is, God himself—filled it from within. In her turn Mary is going to be the object of this double manifestation: a presence from above that signifies transcendence, and a presence of the Lord from within. That is what is implied in the comparison of the two texts: Exodus 40:34: "The cloud covered the Tent of meeting and the glory of Yahweh filled the tabernacle." Luke 1:35: "The power of the Most High will cover you with its shadow. And so the child will be holy and will be called 'Son of God.'" René Laurentin, *Queen of Heaven: A Short Treatise on the Virgin Mary*, trans. Charles Neumann (Washington, New Jersey: AMI Press, 1991), *Queen of Heaven*, 27-29.

⁵⁴ The women who were favoured with miraculous births of the Old Testament, who were ancestors of the Messiah, and who contributed to the triumph and salvation of Israel are connected to Mary in the words that echoed Sarah, "Nothing is impossible with God," (Gen 18:14 and Lk. 1:37). In this way the Lukan author gives the typology of 'Mother-Zion.' The Lukan author identifies Mary with the "Daughter of Zion" according to Zephaniah 3:14-17, an identification that is found again in John 19:25-27 and in chapter twelve of the Apocalypse. Furthermore, the Daughter of Zion was the place where Yahweh rested. Thus, the Lukan author saw in Mary the new Ark of the Covenant, the eschatological resting-place of Yahweh Saviour in the pericope of the Annunciation. John Nolland writes "Mary's experience is to be compared with the dramatic way in which God's glory and the cloud marking his presence came down upon the completed tabernacle." John Nolland, *Luke*, 2 vols., Word Biblical Commentary 35a-35b (Dallas: Word Books, 1989, 1993), 1:54; Nolland, *Luke*. Therefore, just as the Ark in the Tabernacle was the special place of God's presence in the exodus from Egypt, thus, Mary has become the special dwelling place of God's glory in the new exodus. Also see see McHugh, *The Mother of Jesus*, 58., in which the author states that the Lukan author "had to have an awareness of the associations the word 'overshadow,' would evoke in the Jewish mind. No Jewish reader could fail to think of the Divine Presence or Shekinah when reading the words"; Luke T. Johnson, *Sacra Pagina: The Gospel of Luke*, ed. Daniel J. Harrington (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1991), 38.

betrothal *kiddush* (קידוש) or *erusin* (אירוסין) when the couple were legally married and then later after an interval was the actual wedding, *nisu'in* (ניסויין) ceremony when the bride went to live with the groom and their union was consummated. Among the reasons for the interval may have been the young age of the couple. According to the contemporary Roman laws, which were comparable to the Jewish customs, the minimum age for marriage was between the ages of twelve and thirteen for the girl and fourteen for the boy.⁵⁵

A man betrothed to a woman was considered legally married to her in Torah Law. The *Oral Law of Kiddushin* (Marriages and Engagements) states; “The husband prohibits his wife to the whole world like an object which is dedicated to the Sanctuary” (*Kiddushin* 2b, Babylonian Talmud). Therefore, through betrothal (as in Lk 1:27) or marriage, a woman became the peculiar property of her husband, forbidden to others. The climax of the wedding ceremony is when the bride and groom are led by their bridal parties to the *chupo*, a wedding chamber or tent. “By entering the *chupo*-chamber the bride passed from her father’s authority to that of her husband.”⁵⁶

The Lukan author focuses on Mary just as the Matthean author focuses on Joseph in each of the infancy narratives. In the Matthean infancy account, the author identifies Joseph and relates him to the story of the patriarch Joseph (Mt 1:19-21). However, the Lukan author initially withheld Mary’s name and identifies her simply as “a virgin” (Lk 1:27) who is betrothed to a man named Joseph, who was from the house of David (Lk 1:27). Afterwards, he gives the name of the virgin “The virgin’s name was Mary” (Lk 1:27). In this way, the Lukan author emphasizes that the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a virgin.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Johnson, *Dangerous Memories*, 14; also Green, "The Purpose and Theology." Note 17 states that according to Roman law the age of marriage was 12 (for boys, 14) with the minimum age for betrothal set by Augustus at 10 (Rawson, “Roman Family.” 21) Jewish practices were similar and the marriage age for a female usually took place before she reached 12 and a half years of age.

⁵⁶ Hayyim Schauss, *The Lifetime of a Jew Throughout the Ages of Jewish History*, (New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1950),

<https://archive.org/details/lifetimeofajewth013919mbp/page/n3>. electronic resource. 135.

⁵⁷ Byrne makes the literary point of distinction between Gabriel appearing to Zechariah and being “sent by God” to Mary. He also points out that this distinction that this action of Gabriel ‘being sent by God’ highlights the fact that the other purpose of Gabriel’s annunciation to Mary is to state how the conception is to be achieved, namely through the agency, not of a human being, but by the “overshadowing” of the Holy Spirit. Byrne, *The Hospitality of God: A Reading of Luke's Gospel*, 33; Eugene LaVerdiere, *The Annunciation to Mary: A Story of Faith* (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 2004), 47.

Mary's conception of Jesus must have occurred during this interval between *kiddush* (*erusin*) and *nisu'in*. Then, according to the customs of ancient Israel, Joseph and Mary were already legally married at the time of the Annunciation having participated in the *Kiddush* and had not yet had *nisu'in*, a wedding, and come to live together. So, if this is the case, when Gabriel told Mary, "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 holy; he will be called Son of God" (Lk 1:35)⁵⁸ Mary would have still been under the authority of her father, traditionally believed to be Saint Joachim.⁵⁹ In making this announcement, Gabriel declared to Mary that God would enter into a marital relationship with her, causing her to conceive his son in her womb. For "to lay one's power (*reshuth*) over a woman" was a euphemism for "to have a marital relationship with her." This interpretation corresponds to that in the Targum to Deuteronomy 21:4. Likewise, "to overshadow" (Lk 1:35) by spreading the "wing" or "cloak" over a woman was another euphemism for marital relations. Thus, the rabbis commented (*Midrash Genesis Rabbah* 39.7; *Midrash Ruth Rabbah* 3.9) that Ruth was chaste in her wording when she asked Boaz to have marital relations with her by saying to him "I am Ruth your handmaid, spread therefore your cloak (literally, "wing" *kanaph*) over your handmaid for you are my next-of-kin" (Ruth 3:9). *Tallith*, is another Aramaic-Hebrew word for cloak, which is derived from *tellal* meaning 'shadow'. Therefore, "to spread one's cloak (*tallith*) over a woman" means to cohabit with her (*Kiddushin* 18b). The use of the word *shekinar* (glory cloud) in this pericope is clearly "an allusion to the cloud of God's presence in the Tent of Meeting – the place where God's glory dwelt,⁶⁰ and the glory of Yahweh filled the tabernacle" as stated in Exodus 40:35.⁶¹

Marriage is the model of the relationship God wants with God's people. The Lord says to his bride Israel: "I am married to you" (Jer 3:14) and "your Maker is your husband" (Isa 54:5; Jer 31:32). Likewise, even more intimate is what the Lord said to his bride: "You developed, you grew, you came to full womanhood ... I gave you My

⁵⁸ Byrne notes that Gabriel does more than give the messianic status of this child, but also makes clear that the conception will be through the agency of the Holy Spirit. Byrne, *The Hospitality of God: A Reading of Luke's Gospel*, 34.

⁵⁹ Protoevangelium of James

⁶⁰ Michael Fallon, in *The Gospel According to Saint Luke: An Introductory Commentary* (Kensington NSW: Chevalier Press, 2007), 43.

⁶¹ Johnson, *Sacra Pagina - Luke*, 38. This word is also used in the Transfiguration story (Luke 9:34).

oath, I entered into a covenant with you and you became mine, says the Lord God” (Ezek 16:7, 8).

Mary’s question, “How can this be, since I am a virgin?” (Lk 1:34) could be understood as testing the angel, to see if it is from God. Or as previously mentioned, it could be understood as faith seeking knowledge and she is seeking clarification because she had already taken a vow or promise of her virginity to God and was apprehensive that she would be expected to somehow break this vow. If, however, Mary had made the vow of virginity to God, how would her marriage to Joseph be a true marriage if it was not to be consummated? So perhaps Joseph was already aware of this vow beforehand and was accepting of its consequences and the marriage would only be one of companionship and convenience for both parties.

In Matthew’s infancy narrative (Mt 1:18-20) when Joseph discovers that Mary is pregnant, he knows the child was not his and he is anxious about the scandal it will cause.⁶² At the time, there was a variation in the local customs regarding the interval between the betrothal and the wedding. The bride and groom were strictly kept apart in Galilee and this may have been the source of Joseph’s concern for the possible scandal of Mary’s pregnancy. Also, the maiden bride was permitted a year’s time to prepare her trousseau for the wedding.⁶³ However, Joseph, at the angel’s direction, took Mary to live with him after he had discovered her pregnancy (Mt 1:20). The presumption that Mary’s child was the offspring of her betrothed Joseph, would have been very strong and thus there would have been no scandal that the child Mary bore was that of another man. In accordance with social customs of ancient Israel, the child she bore, Jesus, would be considered legitimate. Subsequently, at the time of Mary’s virginal conception of Jesus, Mary was legally married to Joseph and Jesus, therefore, would legally have a (human foster) father whom society would come to assume to be the biological father of Jesus (Mt 13:55). Furthermore, it is through the marital bond that Jesus is the Son of David because in ancient Israel legal paternity was through the father’s line. In the Gospel of Matthew 1:19 it is revealed that Joseph, the husband of Mary, was a righteous man, a devout law-abiding Jew. The Matthean author in this verse alludes to the serious sociological implication of illegitimate children because

⁶² He therefore “being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly” (Mt 1:19).

⁶³ Schauss, *The Lifetime of a Jew Throughout the Ages of Jewish History*. 154.

Mary's situation puts her in "public disgrace" (Mt 1:19b). When Joseph learned of Mary's pregnancy and knowing that he, her betrothed, had nothing to do with it, he had decided to put her away privately rather than publicly condemning her and Mary would have been put to death for adultery (Deut 22:22-29). Having made this decision, an angel appeared to him in a dream, saying: "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife; for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit; she will bear a son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins" (Mt. 1:20-21). In the Koine Greek translation, the angel does not use the phrase for marital union: "go in unto" (as in Gen 30:3, 4, 16) or "come together" (Mt 1:18) but merely a word (*paralambano gunaika παραλαβεῖν*⁶⁴) meaning "take her," into the house but not in the conjugal sense as a wife. For when the angel revealed to him that Mary was truly the spouse of the Holy Spirit, Joseph could take Mary, his betrothed, into his house as a wife, but he would never have conjugal relations with her because according to the Law she already had a spouse, the Holy Spirit, and was thus forbidden to him for all time.⁶⁵ Therefore, it would seem that Joseph understood that the union between he and Mary would be a celibate marriage and a chaste relationship.⁶⁶ So, was the angel Gabriel's message a command, an invitation or a proposal? Nevertheless, Mary's reply, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me

⁶⁴ *paralambanō*, par-al-am-ban'-o; from #3844 and #2983; to receive near, i.e. associate with oneself (in any familiar or intimate act or relation); by anal. to assume an office; fig. to learn:—receive, take (unto, with). *James Strong, The New Strong's Concise Dictionary of the Words in the Greek Testament and the Hebrew Bible, (Online: Logos Research Systems, Inc. Also available at Logos Bible Software, 2009). electronic resource.*

⁶⁵ Living a celibate life within marriage was not unknown in Jewish tradition. Elijah and Elisha were celibate all their lives and Moses, who was married, remained continent the rest of his life after the command to abstain from sexual intercourse (Ex 19:15). Given in preparation, the seventy elders abstained thereafter from their wives after their call, and so did Eldad and Medad when the spirit of prophecy came upon them; indeed, it was said that the prophets became celibate after the Word of the Lord communicated with them (*Midrash Exodus Rabbah* 19; 46.3; *Sifre to Numbers* 99 sect. 11; *Sifre Zutta* 81-82, 203-204; *Aboth Rabbi Nathan* 9, 39; *Tanchuman* 111, 46; *Tanchumah Zaw* 13; 3 *Petiroi Moshe* 72; *Shabbath* 87a; *Pesachim* 87b, Babylonian Talmud).

⁶⁶ Jerome offers another understanding of the union of Mary and Joseph in his letter, *The Perpetual Virginité of Blessed Mary (Against Helvidius)*, item number 21: "We believe that God was born of the Virgin, because we read it. That Mary was married after she brought forth, we do not believe, because we do not read it. Nor do we say this to condemn marriage, for virginity itself is the fruit of marriage; but because when we are dealing with saints we must not judge rashly. If we adopt possibility as the standard of judgment, we might maintain that Joseph had several wives because Abraham had, and so had Jacob, and that the Lord's brethren were the issue of those wives, an invention which some hold with a rashness which springs from audacity not from piety." Jerome, "The Perpetual Virginité of Blessed Mary - against Helvidius," in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church - Jerome Letters and Selected Works*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, VI (New York, Edinburgh, Grand Rapids: T&T Clark; Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007).

according to your word” (Lk 1:38) sealed her acceptance of her part in God’s plan for the salvation of humankind.

Historical Criticism of Luke 1:26-38: World Behind the Text

Historical Period

It is estimated by many scholars that the Lukan author penned this gospel sometime during the Flavian Dynasty (69-96 CE). However, Stuhlmüller proposes between 70-85 CE⁶⁷ and places its composition in Palestine or Rome or even perhaps southern Greece, thus placing it between the major historical events of the expulsion of Jews from Palestine (70 CE) and the Roman army crossing the Rhine River to attack the Germans in 83 CE. The unstable state of affairs among the governing powers and the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 CE and the total devastation it caused would have contributed to the Lukan author’s eschatological vision portrayed in this gospel’s writing.⁶⁸ The influence of Greek philosophical and religious thought can be seen in the Lukan gospel’s binary vision of humanity (light and darkness, see Lk 6:20-26; 9:51-18:14), its cosmological speculation about truth and light, as well as its appeal to the character of the Word. There is also evidence of the influence of Palestinian Judaism.⁶⁹ Nevertheless, it is the long shadow of the Caesar Augustus’ enduring propaganda campaign of the “Emperor cult,” that is most evident in the pericope of the Annunciation (Lk 1:26-38).⁷⁰ It is what John Dominic Crossan has called a “Roman Imperial Theology,” and it can be seen in how the story of the Annunciation unfolds.⁷¹ Against this backdrop of a world created by the Roman rule, the Lukan author tries to show the new understanding of God’s purposes and its embodiment in the Christian movement. The Priene Inscription (OGIS 2. #458), which was found in Asia Minor, now modern-day Turkey, from 9 BCE describes Augustus Caesar as

⁶⁷ Stuhlmüller, "According to Luke," 44:18.

⁶⁸ Lk 21:20-24 When the destruction of Jerusalem is foretold.

⁶⁹ The first-century Jewish historian, *Josephus*, listed and identified three of the major Jewish groups and their "philosophies" or ways of life: *Pharisees*, *Sadducees*, and *Essenes*. He also describes the other political and revolutionary groups of Jews, especially during the first War against Rome, active in the first century CE. The Lukan author identifies the Pharisees in 18:10-12 and 5:33; the Sadducees in 20:27 as well as priests and high priests 1:5-23; and the Zealots in 6:15. Interestingly, one of Jesus' apostles was "Simon the Zealot".

⁷⁰ This propaganda was cultivated to ensure that the Empire was justified in its dominance throughout Rome and the conquered territories. Cf. John Dominic Crossan, "Roman Imperial Theology," in *In the Shadow of Empire: Reclaiming the Bible as a History of Faithful Resistance*, ed. Richard A Horsley (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox, 2008).

⁷¹ Crossan, "Roman Imperial Theology."

“saviour,” and “son of god.”⁷² It also states that the birthday of Caesar Augustus, who is regarded as a god, has been for the whole world the beginning of good news (*euangelion* εὐαγγέλιον).⁷³ Furthermore, figures in the ancient world, such as Asclepius⁷⁴ have origins that could be regarded as the same as Jesus. It is difficult to imagine that Luke would be unaware of the similarities. Asclepius was supposed to have the gift of healing and on occasion, bringing people back to life. However, no claims were ever made that Asclepius himself rose from the dead as was the case made for Jesus.

In the Lukan gospel, the Annunciation account is modelled on two Old Testament patterns: Firstly, a birth prophecy is used in the Old Testament to announce the conception, birth and naming of a child. This child is to play a significant role in salvation history (Judg 13:3; Gen 16:11 Gen 18:10; 1 Kgs 13:2; 2 Kgs 4:16; Isa 7:14, 9:6). Secondly, a call narrative describes the calling of leaders to a special mission (Exod 3:10; Judg 6:14; 1 Sam 3:11-14; Isa 6:8-13; Jer 1:4-5; Ezek 2:3-8a, 3:4-11, 16-21, 25-27; 1 Kgs 22:20-21). The mission of this divine child is to bring redemption for all Israel and humankind. At the time of composition, a particular focus for the Lukan author is hope. Hope that after the great upheavals of war and civil strife, in the new age of Augustus, there will be, at last, a period of peace as a new world order seems about to dawn. In the figures of the virgin and the divine child, one could say that they represent “the archetypal images of human hope, which emerge at times of crisis and expectation,” despite the fact that there are no tangible figures in view.⁷⁵ The Lukan author uses many literary devices for Jewish readers to link the promises God made to Israel in the Old Testament to Jesus and Mary whilst drawing on the literary precedents of the prevailing Greco-Roman culture to target the Gentile

⁷² For the Priene Inscription (OGIS 2. #458) details see Richard A. Horsley, *Jesus and Empire: The Kingdom of God and the New World Disorder* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 2003), 24-25. The discussion of Augustus Caesar as “saviour,” and “son of god” see Karel van der Toorn, Bob Becking, and Pieter Willem van der Horst, *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible Ddd*, ed. Penelope Van Toorn, Bob Becking, and Pieter Willem van der Horst, Second edition extensively revised ed. (Brill, Boston; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, Leiden: Brill, 1999), 735.

⁷³ James R. Harrison and Larry L. Welborn, *The First Urban Churches 1: Methodological Foundations*, ed. Ronald F. Hock (Atlanta, Georgia: SBL Press, 2015), electronic resource, 99.

⁷⁴ Asclepius, who is a Roman god of healing, had a divine father Apollo and a human mother Coronis (or Arsinoe). This god also had the power of healing and even raising people from the dead. Jan N. Bremmer and Andrew Erskine, *The Gods of Ancient Greece: Identities and Transformations* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 229.

⁷⁵ Benedict XVI and Whitmore, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 3, 55.

audience.⁷⁶ Therefore, in the characterisations of Mary and her child, God's promised messiah, Jesus, the Lukan author wants to make clear to the Roman authorities that Christians are not a threat to this hope for the future.⁷⁷

For the Christians, the Lukan author wants to clarify all that they have heard and to place it into some order and thus provide encouragement for their faith; and for the Jews he wants to proclaim the good news of God fulfilling his promises. The author also reveals that the promises made by God are so much more than the Jewish people could have ever hoped for because it was to be more than their liberation from political, social and religious oppression but the liberation from the slavery of sin.

Characterisation of Gabriel

Spirit-like beings were not unfamiliar to the ancient pagan Greco-Roman world. Aristotle argued that the motion of the heavens was the responsibility of immaterial beings and Plotinus stated that there were "guardian spirits."⁷⁸ In the pericope, it is usually presumed that Mary is alone when the angel Gabriel visits her. An unexpected (celestial) intruder would have frightened even the strongest-hearted in any culture. *Angelos* (ἄγγελος) means messenger in Koine Greek and his name would have been

⁷⁶ The literary device used by the Lukan author to engage the attention of the Jewish reader is called an "Announcement Story" which used when some important announcement such as the annunciation of the birth of a child, is made to a believer and is found mainly in the Old Testament. The typical elements are: appearance of an angel (or the Lord himself) (Lk 1:26); the person is addressed by name (Lk 1:28) and a qualifying phrase describing person (Lk 1:27); fear response of person (Lk 1:29); the person urged not to be afraid (Lk 1:30); the divine message: a woman is to have a child (Lk 1:31); the name by which child is to be called phrase interpreting the name (Lk 1:32); future accomplishments of the child (Lk 1:32-33); the objection of the person (Lk 1:34); and a sign to reassure the person (Lk 1:36-37). These following elements are not always found in this order, nor do individual stories always have all the elements. These stories are sometimes called "Commissioning Stories" and have the characteristics of confrontation where a divine representative or person on issues an authoritative commission to someone in the story. The commission which makes the recipient an agent or a higher authority; and reassurance is designed to remove any remaining resistance from the person being commissioned. Reassurance is designed to eliminate any remaining resistance from the person being commissioned.

⁷⁷ Between 4 BCE and 66-70 CE revolts regularly occurred among scribal groups, peasants and Jerusalemites and the people of Israel were continually subjected to the repressive measures of King Herod and Roman tribute, resulting in many self-proclaimed messiahs who seized leadership of the insurgent groups only to be executed by crucifixion. A mass agrarian "strike" was organised when the Galilean peasantry refused to plant crops thus producing no tribute. Richard A. Horsley, "Jesus and Empire," in *In the Shadow of Empire: Reclaiming the Bible as a History of Faithful Resistance*, ed. Richard A. Horsley (Louisville, Kentucky; London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 82.

⁷⁸ Philip Merlan, "Aristotle's Unmoved Movers," *Traditio* 4 (1946). Also Plotinus *Enneads* 3, 4. Accessed http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/03d/0204-0270,_Plotinus,_The_Six_Enneads,_EN.pdf and Peter Kreeft and Ronald K. Tacelli SJ, "Four Problems of Cosmology," in *Handbook of Catholic Apologetics: Reasoned Answers to Questions of Faith* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2009), 123.

readily recognized by Jewish readers.⁷⁹ The fact that he tells Mary that her child will be the Son of God Most High supersedes all the other gods of the ancient Mediterranean world and emphasizes the importance of not only the messenger but also that of the message.⁸⁰ Gabriel's announcement of the title "Son of the Most High" sets Mary's unborn child in opposition to Caesar Augustus. Given the volatility of the socio-political climate among the oppressed Jewish and Gentile readers by the Roman occupation, it is a surprisingly bold declaration to make.⁸¹ However, it was a type of story that the Roman-Greco world was acquainted with, for many of the Greek gods had children to many mortal mistresses.⁸² It was the presence of an angel that was foreign to these ancient Mediterranean cultures though very familiar to the Jewish tradition. In the information communicated in the announcement by Gabriel, the Lukan author captures the attention of both Gentile and Jewish readers whilst providing an apologetic for the Christian convert.⁸³ Gabriel's prophecies about Jesus (Lk 1: 32-33) summarize the Abrahamic (Gen 12:1-3, 49:10) and Davidic (2 Sam 7:14; Ps 2:7; 89:26.27) covenant promises.⁸⁴

⁷⁹ For the literal and metaphoric meanings see Kosior, "The Angel in the Hebrew Bible."

⁸⁰ Cline has noted that "Thomas Kraabel has proposed a method to distinguish between Jewish and pagan usage of the title Theos Hypsistos on inscribed dedications, suggesting that only those dedications with the repeated definite article, as in ὁ θεός ὁ ὑψιστος (The God the Highest One) should be considered Jewish." Rangar Cline, *Ancient Angels: Conceptualizing Angeloi in the Roman Empire*, 1 ed., vol. 172 (Boston, Leiden: Brill, 2011), electronic resource. This is the phrase used in the Koine Greek translation of this particular pericope, which distinguishes the different understandings of what an "angel" is in the Judeo-Christian use of the word. In the pagan context *angelos* (ἄγγελος) "could describe a semi-divine being or a lesser god in the service of a supreme god, a manifestation of a supreme god, the soul after death, or even a guardian spirit. As such, these beings were conceived of as being different in nature than a supreme deity, or the deity they served." Cline, *Ancient Angels*, 172.

⁸¹ In 70 CE the Jews were defeated by the Romans after a siege and the Temple was burned to the ground. Josephus, wrote of Jerusalem "that it owed its ruin to civil strife, and that it was the Jewish tyrants who drew down upon the holy temple the unwilling hands of the Romans and the conflagration." Bryan, Christopher. "Israel and Empire: From the Maccabees to the War against Rome." In Christopher Bryan, electronic resource "Israel and Empire: From the Macabees to the War against Rome," *Render to Caesar: Jesus, the Early Church, and the Roman Superpower* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005). 35.

⁸² Alcmena, Antiope, Danaë, Kassiopeia were all mortal women who were impregnated by the Greek god Zeus. See Jenny R. March, *Dictionary of Classical Mythology*, Second ed. (Oxford; Philadelphia Oxbow Books, 2014), online resource.

⁸³ For further information on the idea or concept of the "angel of the Lord" see Kosior, "The Angel in the Hebrew Bible."

⁸⁴ Johnson describes the Lukan author's purpose as "not being determined by a momentary crisis or by doctrinal deviance, but by the very existence of a messianic sect in the Gentile world." Johnson, *Sacra Pagina - Luke*, 10.

Characterisation of Mary

If the primary purpose of the Lukan author's gospel is legitimation and apologetic, it is not immediately evident in the reading of this pericope to either a Jewish or Gentile reader.⁸⁵ However, the Jewish reader would recall the prophecies and signs of the Old Testament by the language of the text (especially Gen 3:15, Isa 7:10-14 and Mic 5:1-4). In the chosen pericope, the Lukan author juxtaposes the Annunciation of Gabriel to Mary to the annunciation of John the Baptist to Zechariah in the preceding scene in three distinct ways. Firstly, the Lukan author tells us that Gabriel's announcement to Zechariah took place in the epicentre of Israel's religion, in the large city of Jerusalem, in the Temple. In contrast, Gabriel's announcement to Mary occurs in the obscure little town of Nazareth and there is no mention by the Lukan author of any other details, particularly the setting, in which the Annunciation takes place. Next, the first announcement Gabriel makes is to an honourable priest, who represents the multitude of Jewish people who are engaged in the midst of the Temple liturgy. In stark contrast, Gabriel's subsequent announcement was given to an unknown woman, presumably in the midst of her ordinary daily life. Lastly, because the multitude of people perceived that their priest had had a vision (Lk 1:10), the Annunciation to Zechariah had an immediate public impact. Yet even though Mary had just received the most important angelic announcement in salvation history it seems to have escaped the notice of everyone around her, with the exception of Elizabeth.

In contrasting Mary's lowliness as a handmaid to Zechariah's high social status as a priest, the Lukan author highlights that everything in Mary derives from a sovereign grace. All that is granted to her is not due to any claim of merit, but only to God's free

⁸⁵ The Lukan author was someone erudite in Hellenistic literary and scientific culture. The Lukan author was also someone who was steeped in Hebrew Scripture, the Septuagint, and who was aware of Hellenistic literary patterns, historiographical and novelistic. The author declares in the opening lines of the gospel that "...after investigating everything carefully from the very first, to write an orderly account for you ..." (Lk 1:3). Having clarified the purpose of the writings, all readers Jews, Gentiles and converts to the new Christian beliefs could now proceed with confidence. One of the overriding themes addressed by the author of the third gospel (and Acts) is to demonstrate to that the people of the new emerging Christian religion could be good citizens of the Roman Empire. Thus, reassuring the civil authorities that the old apocalyptic imagery of a coming Messiah from heavenly coming kingdom of God, might not be considered an obvious denunciation of its king, Caesar, nor the Roman Empire itself, because the emperor and governors and the state as a whole are ordained by God and as such should be respected. The fact that the founder of this new movement, Jesus, was executed as a political criminal, and that the Christians were being associated with the destruction of Jerusalem, many of the people would have thought of them as incendiaries or as revolutionaries - in short, a threat. Simultaneously, the Lukan author communicates that the promises made by God to the Hebrews are being fulfilled. By regular reference or inference to these, the Lukan author draws the attention of the Jewish reader to these wonderful realities.

and gratuitous choice. In this way, Mary stands in the biblical tradition of God choosing the people least expected to play a crucial role in His plan of salvation.⁸⁶

The Lukan gospel was most likely written during the reign of the Roman emperor Domitian (r. 81-96 CE).⁸⁷ The Lukan author writes in a well-educated style of Greek,⁸⁸ suggesting the gospel was intended for more a genteel audience who seem to be a much more cultured literary kind in contrast to either Mark or Matthew.⁸⁹ It has different thematic concerns. Because the author is writing predominantly for Gentiles in the Greek cities of Asia Minor or Greece, the work has a different political self-consciousness. They are concerned about the way they will be perceived and the way that the church will be perceived by the Roman authorities.⁹⁰

Among the ruling classes of ancient Roman society pudicitia was publicly rewarded and celebrated in difference to its notoriously licentious cultural norms.⁹¹ Against this backdrop of double standards, the Lukan author mentions Mary's virginity twice.⁹² The concept of virginity varied according to culturally accepted norms. The Jews regarded virginity as highly prized because there was not only honour at stake but also a financial exchange that involved harsh monetary penalties on the men of the family should there be any question of the virginity of the woman; and the woman

⁸⁶ Further examples include how God chose a man named Moses who was slow of speech and unsure of his ability to lead to bring the people of Israel out of slavery in Egypt; and the youngest boy of all of Jesse's children, David, to become Israel's next king. It was not a woman from the Jewish aristocracy, or the daughter of a chief priest in Jerusalem, or the wife of a famous lawyer, scribe, or Pharisee, but an unknown virgin named Mary from the little village of Nazareth to become the mother of Israel's long-awaited Messiah-King.

⁸⁷ Karl L. Armstrong, "A New Plea for an Early Date for Acts," *Journal of Greco-Roman Christianity & Judaism* 13 (2017): 19.

⁸⁸ Henry Cadbury, "Literary Standard of Luke's Vocabulary," in *The Style and Literary Method of Luke*, ed. George F. Moore and James H. Ropes (London: Oxford University Press, 1920; reprint, Kraus Reprint Co), 4-38.

⁸⁹ "A sense of delicacy keeps Luke from including scenes of violence and disrespect ..." Stuhlmueller, "According to Luke," 44:17.

⁹⁰ Clyde Weber Votaw, "The Gospels and Contemporary Biographies," *The American Journal of Theology* 19, no. 1 (1915).

⁹¹ Pudicitia, a Roman goddess, was the personification of modesty and chastity who was worshiped in Rome and is represented in works of art as a matron in modest attire. This state of being was to be aspired to by both patrician men and women and was to be portrayed in every aspect of one's person and life. Rebecca Langlands, "Sexual Virtue on Display I: The Cults of Pudicitia and Honours for Women," in *Sexual Morality in Ancient Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). The fact that Mary's virginity is confirmed twice in the pericope and that she was visited by an angel, who announced that she was to become the mother of the Son of the Most High would have been considered the pinnacle of achievement in Roman society for anyone. This pericope embodies the hopes and aspirations for the Gentile reader and reveals God's promise of a Messiah to the Jewish people realized.

⁹² The Lukan author mentions Mary's virginity twice (Lk 1:27, 34) as repetition in Scripture is a literary device to emphasize the importance of a fact or idea. Firstly, the author to draws attention to her physical condition; and secondly, Mary herself confirms this condition.

herself could be stoned to death (Lev 20:1–27).⁹³ The physical integrity of the female was paramount. Not so in the Roman culture where *pudicitia*, was considered a state of being (and one need not necessarily be virginal or female to have it). Langlands explains in her book *Sexual Morality in Ancient Rome* that *pudicitia* was more than virginity, modesty and chastity.⁹⁴ It was knowing what to do and how and when to do it; and it was also about one's approach to life and its challenges, which were expected to be handled with great dignity, graciously and courageously. *Pudicitia* was much more highly prized than the virginity of a woman, for the public attention it attracted for the one who was perceived to display *pudicitia*, her husband and family and the extended social circle was very well acclaimed. So highly regarded was *pudicitia* that for a time, sacrifice and offerings to many of the gods stipulated that the one making the sacrifice or offerings must be publicly recognized as being in a state of *pudicitia*.⁹⁵ The Gentile readers would easily assume that Mary's state of being was that of *pudicitia* by her gracious behaviour recorded in the Lukan account of the Annunciation. Mary's physical reaction could be interpreted as controlled and composed because she did not fall to the ground or run away. The Jewish reader could have focused on the words of Gabriel and the unmistakable reference to Isaiah's prophecy (Isa 7:14). She is, however, surprised by the greeting and the *message* of her celestial visitor. The pericope does not clearly identify Mary's reaction to Gabriel's presence but suggests a possible self-composure by the question she asks (Lk 1:34).

The reference to the *pudicitia* which is implied in Mary's countenance would appeal to the Gentile reader, and the reference to Mary's visit from the angel Gabriel would resonate with the Jewish reader. The overall general construction of the pericope would reassure the Christian convert because it can be viewed as a way of arming these

⁹³ Simo Parpola and Robert M. Whiting, *Sex and Gender in the Ancient Near East: Proceedings of the 47th Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale, Helsinki, July 2-6, 2001* (Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, c2002).

⁹⁴ Langlands, "Sexual Virtue on Display I."

⁹⁵ Langlands, "Sexual Virtue on Display I."; John J. Pilch, *A Cultural Handbook to the Bible* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 2012), 107-08. Pilch points out that when lexicographers translate the Hebrew word *betulah* (בְּתוּלָה) "virgin," it refers to "a stage in life, or an age mainly the age of puberty or just after puberty begins." However, it came to mean "virgin in the sense of physical integrity" in the Hebrew Bible because of its particular use in certain passages: for example, Numbers 31:17-18, 31:35, Genesis 24:16; Leviticus 21:3 and Judges 21:12. Pilch highlights the fact that the Lukan author uses the root word *parthenos* to have other meanings which are best understood as marriage or entry into marriage. (Lk 2:36; Acts 21:9); in Koine Greek, *parthenos* (παρθένος) means: "a maiden; by implication an unmarried daughter: virgin. (Strong, *A Concise Dictionary of the Words of the Hebrew Bible and the Greek Testament*. #3933; Strong, *The New Strong's Concise Dictionary of the Words in the Greek Testament and the Hebrew Bible*.

Christians with the answers and the arguments that would allow them to be a part of society; and to respond to the kinds of claims and charges made against Christians by their pagan contemporaries. What this type of apologetic literature shows is how the early Christians encountered at a very vibrant intellectual level the arguments and the social life of their pagan Roman world. The angel's declaration of Mary being "full of grace" (Lk 1:30) indicates to either a Gentile or Jewish or convert reader that she is favoured by God's benevolence. In this way the Lukan author identifies that Mary is not only someone the reader can relate to but someone who is worthy of their notice, despite her presumably lowly social status. The notable absence of any other details regarding Mary, leave room for the reader to imagine and interpret for themselves in this characterisation of Mary. It also allows the reader to focus on the information that *is* there.

The careful structure of the pericope builds on the tension created by the Lukan author relying on many presumptions of and by the early reader.⁹⁶ The Lukan author's inclusion of key details, such as the reference to the Davidic king (Lk 1:32) and the ascribed honour bestowed on Mary through her betrothal to Joseph's family lineage connection with David as well as the cultural standards would resonate with those readers familiar with the Hebrew Scriptures. The Lukan author would have been cognizant that the Jewish reader would have also known that in the first-century world of Palestine, the culture commended that men (fathers, husbands, brothers) to guard, and protect the women in their care (Sir 26:10-12) lest the family honour be compromised.⁹⁷ The Jewish reader would have also recalled that it was the man who chose the wife in ancient marriages, so that when Gabriel announced that "the Spirit will come upon you" meaning to protect and "overshadow," her, the Lukan author

⁹⁶ The Lukan author considers the Hellenistic tradition and the employment of many forms of literature in order to convey a specific meaning in this pericope. See Paul L. Maier, "Luke as a Hellenistic Historian," in *Christian Origins and Greco-Roman Culture* (Brill, 2012), 424. The Lukan author's skilful use of biblical allusions to an earlier story in Judges 13:2-7 would remind the Hebrew reader a precedence and would adumbrate the Annunciation of Jesus. In the use of a literary prophecy Luke 1:32-33 the Lukan author wants to portray a positive attitude toward Gentiles and the Roman Empire. Thus, convince Gentiles of Christianity's harmlessness or to convince fellow Christians to take a less vociferously eschatological attitude toward the Roman Empire. With the joy of this announcement, the author wants to demonstrate the continuation of the biblical story not to defend the Christian movement as such but to defend God's ways in history.

⁹⁷ In Cooper's writing he stated, "Were virginity not expected and valued, it would hardly be a crime to cast doubt on a girl's maidenhood." Jerrold D. Cooper, "Virginity in Ancient Mesopotamia" (paper presented at the Sex and Gender in the Ancient Near East: Proceedings of the 47th Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale, Helsinki, July 2-6, 2001, 2002), 93.

knew that these were two duties of a Middle Eastern husband that the original readers of this pericope would recognize God's role as that of a traditional husband.⁹⁸ Therefore, in her question to Gabriel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" could be interpreted as a response that Mary was fearful of being placed in an embarrassing and potentially shameful situation if no tokens of virginity could be produced (see Deut 22:13-21) on the marriage night.⁹⁹ The Jewish reader would have been able to predict the scandalous crisis which this pregnancy would create for both families (see Deut 22:13-31, Num 5:11-31). Mary's father and brothers would be shamed for not taking proper care of her (see Sir 42:9-10) which would add further shame to the family.¹⁰⁰ For "in the Middle East, honour is not everything. It is *the only thing!*"¹⁰¹ However, Israel was accustomed to learning of individuals who were called by God to forsake all human bonds and social customs in preference to his holy will (for example the call of Abram (Gen11:31-12:9); the command to sacrifice Isaac (Gen 22:9) and the mother's sacrifice of her seven sons (4 Macc: 15-29) and the Gentile converts to either Judaism or the new movement of Christianity would have learned this from the Septuagint as part of their religious instruction.¹⁰² The Lukan gospel confirms later on in the narrative that Mary acquired even greater honour because she bore Jesus (Lk 2:6) and was obedient to God's will.

⁹⁸ John L. McKenzie, "Aspects of Old Testament Thought," in *The Jerome Biblical Commentary*, ed. Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, and Roland E. Murphy (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc, 1968), 749.

⁹⁹ Betrothal would happen most likely at the occurrence of the girl's menarche. John J. Pilch, *A Cultural Handbook to the Bible*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012), <https://books.google.com.au/books?id=FHzFvbOkYoUC>. online resource. 112.

¹⁰⁰ No mention is made of the possible impact Mary's conception of a child could have on Joseph. For if he was to claim the child as his own, he would be either a thief or a cuckold of the community and be subjected to ridicule and humiliation.

¹⁰¹ Pilch, *A Cultural Handbook to the Bible*. 133.

¹⁰² Johnson states how the Lukan author "sets out to write the continuation of the biblical story, showing how the Gentile Church of his own day emerged in continuity from a faithful and restored Israel, organizing his narrative as a whole into the pattern of the Prophet and the people." Johnson, "The Prophecy of Jesus' Birth (1:26-38)," 3, 30.