

God's Plan – in Jesus! – Is Perfect
Sermon on Luke 1:26-38
Saint Mark's, Watertown, WI
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Introduction: Sometimes Things Don't Go according to Plan

God promised Mary on our behalf: *You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.* Amen.

Dear fellow Christians—listening to your last Sunday sermon before Christmas:

Sometimes things just don't go according to plan. And it's not just the little things—like getting to school or to work on time, or like getting a meal prepared. Sometimes also the big things in life don't go according to plan.

You prepare yourself for one career, but end up in an entirely different one. You expect not to get married, but you do get married—or you expect to get married, and you don't. You planned to have many children and it didn't end up that way, or you planned to have few children and had many. You wanted to retire at a certain age, but you didn't have the money to do so—or you did manage to retire, but you don't have the cash to travel. Sometimes things just don't go according to plan.

Don't you think it must have felt that way for Mary? I suppose she must have thought, "Joseph and I will get married. We'll have a number of children. They won't always behave, but God will bless us. Joseph will be a carpenter. I'll be a carpenter's wife. And we'll grow old together...."

Theme: God's Plan – in Jesus! – Is Perfect

Boy, did those plans change!—but not, finally, for the worse. In fact, you and I can thank God they changed, because it meant our salvation....

This morning we'll learn with Mary: **GOD'S PLAN – IN JESUS! – IS PERFECT.** According to God's plan: **JESUS IS SAVIOR AND KING.** And according to God's plan: **JESUS IS GOD AND MAN.**

Part One: Jesus Is Savior & King

You heard the message: *In the sixth month* – that would have been the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy with John the Baptist – *God sent the angel Gabriel* – one of only two angels named in the Bible, the other is Michael, and Gabriel's name means "Warrior of God" – *God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee* – a Jewish town up north, about seventy miles to the north of either Jerusalem or Bethlehem.

Gabriel went at God's behest *to a virgin* – sexually pure, but engaged – *pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David* – so that the line of the Savior might pass through his family. *The virgin's name was Mary* – one of at least six *Marys* in the New Testament, but for obvious reasons the most important one.

The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! – actually, literally: grace to you who have been graced – The Lord is with you." Naturally: *Mary was greatly troubled at his words* – it's not every day that a holy angel pronounces a blessing on a humble handmaiden – *and Mary wondered what kind of greeting this might be.* It really puzzled her.

But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. And here's the shocker: You will be with child – although that's impossible – and you will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus – Savior! because Jesus means Savior. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David – as we heard in the Old Testament reading – and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever – as promised in Genesis forty-nine, ten – his kingdom will never end" – as we read from Revelation.

Mary had her plans for her life. But God's plans – in Jesus! – were perfect. And God's plans – also for Mary – were that Jesus be both Savior (that's what his name meant) and King (that's what you heard God promise just now).

Jesus came to earth as our Savior. What an amazing plan! Every man, woman, and child in the universe enters the world wicked, lives wickedly, and exits the world wicked, according to their sinful nature. So, if you or I invented a religion, we would either simply have God punish people, or we'd have them try to do something to make God happier with them. But only God himself – the true God – could come up with a rescue plan like Jesus: to suffer for our wickedness, and to supply to us his own excellent goodness.

Jesus came to earth as our Savior, and Jesus came to earth as our King. What an amazing plan! Every one of us, in our sinfulness, has said, "I'm my own boss; I call my own shots"—and finally: I'm going to mess this up, without remedy, all on my own. So, if you or I invented a religion, we'd keep ourselves as kings and queens, but then we'd go to hell. Only God himself – the true God – could supply to us a King to choose the critical battle, to triumph on our behalf, to share with us his victory, and to rule us forever with wisdom and love.

It's as if God the Holy Spirit is tapping us on the shoulder right now and saying, "See, Christianity is truth, and Jesus is Savior, because only God could have come up with such a perfect plan as this."

Part Two: Jesus Is God & Man

But Mary ... was still confused. And very understandably so—even righteously so: ***"How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"*** Mary had done what was right. She had reserved herself for her husband in marriage. She had a genuine and righteous concern in regard to this pregnancy.

But: ***The angel answered it all, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High God will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.*** "Mary, this isn't you and Joseph, or you and any other man. God himself is going to place this baby in your womb."

How about some collateral evidence to help Mary believe this apparently impossible message? ***Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month.*** You'll recall that Mary soon hurried off to see her. ***For finally: nothing is impossible with God.*** And that, of course, answers any question a Christian has.

It answered Mary's question: ***"I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May it be to me as you have said." Then the angel left her.***

Now, you and I wouldn't be caught dead worshipping Mary or praying to her. That's idolatry. Only God – the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit – is worth our prayers and worship. Mary herself would later acknowledge – and we often sing it – *my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.* Mary was a sinner who needed a Savior.

But what a great example Mary was, eh? I mean: She knew people would talk. She knew her reputation would be forever tarnished—as would Joseph her husband’s good name. More than that, she was facing the daunting task of raising and rearing God himself, a child who would finally know all her sins. But Mary responds: *I am the Lord’s servant; may it be to me as he has said.* God grant that that’s always our attitude, too.

So, Mary had her plans for her life. But God’s plans – in Jesus! – were perfect. And the Father’s plans – also for Mary – were that Jesus be both entirely God (since God was his Father) and entirely man (because a human being was his mother).

What an astoundingly good plan! You and I could never have come up with it. Only God could have ordained it that the Savior be both man – capable of fitting in our place as our Substitute – and also God – so that his substitution could avail for a whole world of sinners. Only God could have planned it that the Savior be both man – capable of suffering, bleeding, and dying – and also God – so that every drop of his blood was precious enough to purchase eternal liberty for a world full of people.

It means that God the Holy Spirit is whispering in our ears right now and saying, “See, Christ is Savior, and the Bible is truth. You don’t think mortal man could come up with this amazing design, do you?!”

Conclusion: For Us, All Things Go according to God’s Gracious Plan

It wasn’t the way Mary had planned it. But in the end, she had to agree that God’s gracious plan was exceedingly good. And for us it meant salvation.

That also helps us bow to God’s plans in our own lives, when they differ from our plans for our lives. And that’s not just when we are late to our class or meeting, or when we burn the soufflé (!). It also means we trust that the school or career in which God puts us will finally be the right one. It means that the marriage and family in which God puts us is the best possible for our souls. It means that our health or sickness, our life or death, are finally in God’s hands.

And as we found out today: those plans of God – in Jesus! – are perfect. Amen.

God promised Mary on our behalf: *The Holy Spirit will come upon 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.... For nothing is impossible with God.* Amen.