

# Lesson 4

## Fourth Sunday in Advent

### The Holy Gospel: Luke 1:26–38

Luke probably interviewed Mary, the mother of Jesus, and provided details that she shared with him, such as this account of the angel announcing that she would be the mother of the Messiah (see Luke 1:1–4). Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Luke accurately recorded that event for us here.

With “In the sixth month,” Luke connects the experience of Mary that he is about to recount with what had proceeded. It was the sixth month of the pregnancy of Elizabeth, who would be the mother of John the Baptist. The same angel, Gabriel, who had told Zechariah about that special child, was now sent to Nazareth to a virgin named Mary. Mary was betrothed to Joseph. In Jewish society of that day, the betrothal (the agreement between two families) was the legally binding act. Joseph and Mary were husband and wife legally, but their living together in consummation of the marriage awaited a scheduled time of wedding festivities. For Mary, the angel had an even more wondrous message than the one he had brought to Zechariah. She, a virgin, would conceive and carry and give birth to a son whom she was to name \_\_\_\_ and who would be called \_\_\_\_.

Matthew, as he recorded the birth of Jesus, saw it as a fulfillment of ancient prophecy (see 1:22–23).  
53. Why was Mary chosen to be this favored one?

Luke established immediately that Joseph, who would be the child’s legal father, was a descendant of David—but what Luke told about the angel’s message and Mary’s reaction to it also clearly established that Joseph was not \_\_\_\_\_. At the end of chapter 3, Luke listed a genealogy that many feel is Mary’s through her father (tradition names him “Heli”), which declares that she, too, was of David’s line. Both legally and physically, Jesus was the Son of David.

54. Why was it important for the Gospel writers to establish this fact?

Mary “was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be.” Imagine the agitation and wonder we would feel if the Lord’s messenger were suddenly to say to us, “Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!”

55. What is the significance of God’s assigning the name *Jesus* to this special child?

56. What was the angel explaining to Mary by saying, “The Lord God will give to Him the throne of His father David, and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end”? How did the angel explain the process that would be involved in this virgin’s conceiving and giving birth to a son?

57. To what validating evidence did the angel point Mary?

58. How did Mary show that God had not made a mistake in choosing her to be the mother of the Savior? What does her example encourage in us as we prepare for Christmas?

## **The Old Testament Lesson: 2 Samuel 7:1–11, 16**

1 and 2 Samuel, originally one book, are a record of the time during which Israel moved from *theocracy*, in which the guiding and ruling figure was the Lord’s prophet, to *monarchy*, rule and leadership by a king. When the people desired a king to lead them “like all the other nations,” Samuel resisted. But the Lord told him, “Obey the voice of the people in all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me from being king over them” (1 Samuel 8:7). The Lord chose Saul, a Benjaminite, to be Israel’s first king. Samuel arranged for kingship on a covenantal basis: the king would not be autonomous, but would be subject to the Word of the Lord through His prophet. Both the king and the people were to realize that the Lord was their ultimate ruler.

In time, Saul became faithless, disobeyed clear commands of the Lord, and at one time, even willfully took to himself the priestly function of offering a sacrifice to the Lord—to serve his own ends. The Lord rejected him and his line, and sent Samuel to Bethlehem to anoint young David, son of Jesse, to be Saul’s successor. When Saul and his sons died in battle, David became king. Soon all Israel united around him, and he led them to victory over their enemies and to a time of peace and prosperity and prominence. He captured Jerusalem from the Jebusites and made it his royal city and residence. He brought the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem, publicly acknowledging the Lord’s kingship over him and the nation.

David was not perfect, of course. In his adultery with Bathsheba, in his murder of her husband, and in his laxity in disciplining his sons, which finally led to civil war, he fell short of the theocratic ideal. But he remained a man after God’s heart because he was willing to acknowledge his sin and repent. He wanted relationship with the Lord above all else. The Lord was gracious to David. In general, his rule was noted for its justice, wisdom, integrity, courage, and compassion. In later history, his reign became the standard by which the reigns of the kings were measured.

59. What was it that David wanted to do for the Lord? What motivated him to want to do this?

60. Why do you think the Lord declined his offer? What was the Lord saying with His “Did I speak a word . . . saying, ‘Why have you not built Me a house of cedar?’”

61. How did the Lord turn David’s offer around and make it a blessing to Israel as a nation and to David as its king? What emphasis stands out in the rule of David and the promise that his dynasty would be established after him?

62. Who was it, in God’s will and plan, who would build “a house for [His] name”? (See vv. 12–15.)

63. What is the most dramatic aspect of the Lord’s promise to establish David’s “house” and kingdom?

David began his rule around 1009 BC. His royal line continued in the kingdom of Judah until the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC, and, for a time, his descendants ruled as vassals of Persia after the exile. Since then, no Davidic king has ruled from Jerusalem.

64. To what does this promise that David’s throne “shall be established forever” point?

65. How does this Old Testament Lesson tie in with today’s Holy Gospel?

## **The Epistle for the Day: Romans 16:25–27**

Paul began his Letter to the Romans by formally and forcefully stating his authority as “an apostle, set apart for the Gospel of God.” Here he ends with a doxology to the One “who is able to strengthen you according to my Gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ.” His readers were Christians who did not know Paul personally, except for those he greeted by name. Paul wrote as one who hoped to come to them, and formulated and explained and applied the Gospel of Jesus in greater detail in Romans than in any of his other epistles. As he took the pen into his own hand to write closing words personally, he was still concerned that they be firmly based in the Gospel. At the beginning of his letter, he had said, “I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to *strengthen* you.” In closing, he used the same Greek word to emphasize that it had been his one goal in writing his detailed and instructive letter to *strengthen* them. All of his final words are embodied in a doxology to the One who does the

strengthening through the Gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, and they invite us to join in his words of praise.

66. Why would it be so important for the Roman Christians that they be *strengthened* in faith and life?

Three Greek phrases stand out in the doxology: *chronois aiōniois*, “long ages”; *tou aiōniou Theou*, “the eternal God”; and *eis tous aiōnas*, “forevermore.” The first points back into the eons of eternity; the third points ahead into the eons of eternity; the second points to the revelation of the mystery in human history as the act of the God of the eons, the eternal God, whose will and purpose cover everything: past, present, and future.

67. What is “the mystery that was kept secret for long ages”? How has the mystery “now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations”? What is God’s purpose in making His mystery known?

68. How does this doxology, which praises God as the one who is able to establish us through His mystery revealed in Christ, enhance our Christmas observance?

In closing our study, let’s apply the doxology to ourselves and say it together:

“Now to Him who is able to strengthen [us] according to [the] Gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith—to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen.”