1. CONTEXT

Luke 1:26-38, known as the Annunciation, is a pivotal passage within Luke's Gospel, located in the infancy narratives (Lk. 1-2). Following the announcement of John's conception to Zechariah, the narrative transitions to the angelic visit to Mary. This highlights the continuity of divine intervention, linking the two accounts.[1]

The passage reflects key Lukan themes, including God's preference for the lowly, exemplified by Mary's humble social status[2] and the insignificance of Nazareth, which contrasts the prominence of Jerusalem in Zechariah's announcement[3]. Through this, Luke underscores God's choice of the marginalised to fulfil His divine purposes.

Structurally, the Annunciation mirrors Old Testament birth announcements (Genesis 18; Judges 13), employing a pattern that culminates with a description of the child's destiny[4]. By adapting this literary framework, Luke sets the stage for Jesus' birth as the fulfilment of divine promises and the realisation of God's salvific plan. The passage thus weaves together themes of divine initiative, fulfilment of prophecy, and the exaltation of the humble, establishing Jesus as the Messiah.

2. FINDING FAVOUR (vv.26-30)

The favour bestowed upon Mary is encapsulated in the term *κεχαριτωμένη* (favoured one), a perfect passive participle indicating a completed action with ongoing effects. This grammatical construction underscores that the favour is not of Mary's own doing, but a divine initiative rooted in God's grace. The usage of *ὁ Κύριος μετὰ σοῦ* (the Lord is with you) moves God from an assumed background entity to an agent active in Mary's

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[1] Juraj Feník and Róbert Lapko, 'Annunciations to Mary in Luke 1–2', *Biblica*, 96.4 (2015), p. 499.
[2] Telesia Musili, 'Re-Reading the Annunciation (Luke 1:26–38): Towards Comprehensive Sexuality Education', *Cross Currents*, 73.3 (2023), p. 258.
[3] Hans Mol, 'The Virgin Birth: Luke 1:35', in *Calvin for the Third Millennium* (Canberra: ANU Press, 2008), p. 167.
[4] Dwight M. Smith, 'Exposition of Luke 1:26–38', *Interpretation*, 29.4 (1975), p. 412.

life.[5] The salutation reflects the divine-human relationship central to Luke's narrative, where God's grace transforms and empowers individuals for His purposes.[6]

The reiteration of favour (v.30) further confirms Mary's unique role. This repetition underlines the significance of divine election and parallels Old Testament instances of individuals chosen for pivotal roles in salvation history, such as Gideon (Judg. 6:12) and Moses (Exod. 3:11-12)[7]. Wenell highlights that such expressions of divine favour often serve to establish both reassurance and authority, preparing the recipient for their extraordinary calling.[8]

However, this extraordinary calling has led to attempts to reimagine Mary's status. Jerome's Vulgate translation renders *κεχαριτωμένη* as *gratia plena* (full of grace), introducing a theological dimension that elevates Mary's status beyond that of a recipient.[9] Levering's examination of the noun *χάρις* (grace) in the New Testament and Elizabeth's proclamation (1:42) enable him to conclude that Mary is more than a 'physical conduit' and rather the spiritual bearer of her creator and redeemer.[10] However, Mary's response, initially of confusion[11], where she views herself as 'uniquely unworthy', desires to place all attention on God and eradicates any sense from herself that she is anything more than a vessel to be utilised.[12]

Moreover, the role of the Holy Spirit (v. 35) serves to reemphasise the role of God as the source of grace and salvation whilst reinforcing that Mary is the recipient of God's

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[5] Bart B. Bruehler, 'Representing Social Actors in the Annunciation (Luke 1:26–38)', *Neotestamentica*, 56.1 (2022), p. 39.
[6] Huub Welzen, 'Exegetical Analyses and Spiritual Readings of the Story of the Annunciation (Luke 1:26–38)', *Acta Theologica*, Supplementum 15 (2011), p. 30.
[7] Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke* (New International Commentary on the New Testament), (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing), p. 87.
[8] Karen Wenell, 'Worship Resources: Luke 1:26–38', *Expository Times*, 117.2 (2005), p. 73.
[9] Gary Waller, 'The Annunciation from Luke to the Enlightenment: A Cultural History', in *The Oxford Handbook of Mary*, ed. by Chris Maunder (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), p. 393.
[10] Matthew Levering, 'Mary and Grace', in *The Oxford Handbook of Mary*, ed. by Chris Maunder (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), p. 289.
[11] Karl Allen Kuhn, *The Kingdom According to Luke and Acts: A Social, Literary and Theological Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015), p. 96.
[12] Peter A. Hendrickson, Bradley C. Jenson, and Randi H. Lundell, *Luther and Bach on the Magnificat: For Advent and Christmas* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2015), p. 33.

favour, much like Old Testament characters bestowed with extraordinary missions, and not the bestower of it.[13]

3. VIRGINAL CONCEPTION (VV. 31-37)

Does Luke support a supernatural conception of the Messiah involving a virgin? The presence of παρθένος (v.27) to describe Mary and her self-declaration (v.34) seems to affirm this interpretation. However, a closer examination raises important considerations. The usage of παρθένος primarily identifies the fact Mary was a young woman of appropriate age who had not yet birthed a child.[14] While this term aligns with the cultural and social context of the time, it does not establish the miraculous nature of the conception.

Similarly, Mary's response to the angel (v.34) serves a narrative function within Luke's theological framework. Rather than focusing on Mary's virginity, this exchange appears to as a 'Lukan stage-prop', directing the reader's attention towards the significance of the child, rather than Mary's specific circumstances.[15]

Luke's engagement with Old Testament motifs further complicates the interpretation. The Gospel frequently alludes to the narratives of barren women granted children by God. This is reflected in the genealogy of Jesus (Lk. 3:34), which evokes the patriarchal lineage, and in the Magnificat (Lk. 1:46–55), which resounds the prayer of Hannah prayer (1 Samuel 2).[16] Unlike Matthew, who cites Isaiah 7:14 to connect the virgin conception to prophecy, Luke refrains from doing so.[17] Instead, his reliance on barren-woman typology places Mary within the broader biblical tradition of miraculous births, further diverting emphasis from virginity as the primary theological point. As such, Fitzmyer

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[13] Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 1:1–9:50* (Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament), (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), p. 109.
[14] Andrew T. Lincoln, 'Luke and Jesus' Conception: A Case of Double Paternity?', *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 132.3 (2013), p. 642.
[15] Joseph A. Fitzmyer, 'The Virginal Conception of Jesus in the New Testament', *Theological Studies*, 34.4 (1973), p. 569.
[16] Gerald O'Collins, 'The Virginal Conception and Its Meanings', *New Blackfriars*, 89.1022 (2008), p. 437.
[17] Michael Wolter, *The Gospel According to Luke, Volume I (Luke 1–9:50)* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016), p. 78.

states that without the overlay of the Matthean annunciation, Luke does not explicitly rule out natural human conception.[18]

Regardless of the means of conception, he is the Son, connected to the Davidic line via Joseph and designated as King who will reign.[19] The depth of this declaration is linked to the role of the Spirit. While Pope argues Luke's usage of *πνεύμα* (pneuma) and *δύναμις* (dynamis) indicates conception via the Spirit[20], what is clear is the strength with which the Spirit is undertaking for Mary. The arrival of the Spirit and the subsequent overshadowing (v.35) reflects the filling received at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4) and a demonstration of the presence of God akin to that experienced by Moses outside the Tabernacle (Ex. 40:35).[21] Luke's language regarding the Spirit's role in Mary's conception contains no sexual connotation. Instead, the imagery of *ἐπισκιάσει* (overshadowing) conveys divine protection and the initiation of a new act of God in salvation history.

4. FAITHFUL SUBMISSION (V. 38)

In light of all that is spoken to Mary, her response unreservedly embraces the purposes of God without much consideration.[22] In contrast to Zechariah's doubt, there is nothing other than faith and acceptance present in her. Luke designates her as someone who presents her status as a δούλη (servant) of God. The wording aligns with men addressing their superiors and especially those addressing God.[23] As such, her response leads her to become the first disciple as someone who has had the identity of the Messiah revealed and responds in faith with a willingness to serve.[24]

Mary's response to the offer of God's grace and favour brings her firmly into a place of

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[18] Joseph A. Fitzmyer, 'The Virginal Conception of Jesus in the New Testament', p. 567.
[19] Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke I–IX*, vol. 28 (New York: Doubleday, 1981), p. 348.
[20] Michael Pope, 'Luke's Seminal Annunciation: An Embryological Reading of Mary's Conception', *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 138.4 (2019), p. 798.
[21] Wolter, The Gospel According to Luke, p. 83.
[22] Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke* (New International Commentary on the New Testament), p. 92.
[23] I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2017), p. 111.
[24] Raymond E. Brown, 'The Annunciation to Mary, the Visitation, and the Magnificat (Luke 1:26-56)', *Worship,* p. 258.

new identity with God. The supernatural encounter with the angel Gabriel and the promise of the power and presence of the Spirit moves her from fear into acceptance and worship (Lk. 1:46-55).

5. CONCLUSION

The Annunciation narrative offers a profound exploration of divine initiative, human response, and the unfolding of salvation history. Mary is presented as a central figure who embodies God's grace and favour, chosen not for her merit but by divine election. The passage highlights key Lukan themes, such as God's preference for the humble and marginalised, as seen in Mary's social status and the obscure setting of Nazareth.

While the virgin conception signifies divine intervention, the emphasis of the narrative lies in the identity of the child to be born. Jesus is revealed as the Son of God, the fulfilment of messianic promises, and the one who will reign eternally. The role of the Holy Spirit underscores God's power and the miraculous nature of the Incarnation.

Mary's faithful submission stands as the narrative's theological climax. Her self-identification as the 'servant of the Lord' demonstrates a profound act of trust and obedience. By embracing God's will, Mary becomes the first disciple, providing a model of faith and surrender for all believers.

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