

# The Beautiful Paradox

KELLY M. KAPIC

*You will conceive  
and give birth to a  
son, and you are to  
call him Jesus. He  
will be great and will  
be called the Son of  
the Most High.*

LUKE 1:31–32

**T**he abstract concept of *power* brings to mind earthquakes and thunderstorms or maybe presidents and billionaires. Raw power stops us in our tracks, causing us to give heed to whatever or whoever wields it. Few of us, however, associate power with the womb. Yet Mary’s womb carried true power, hidden in darkness, unseen, hard to imagine.

Here we encounter one of the most beautiful paradoxes of the Christian faith: The Holy Spirit brought into being a tiny baby boy in this woman’s womb, her own flesh and bone, her firstborn son; this same baby boy was none other than the Son of God, identified as the “Son of the Most High.”

So is Jesus Mary’s son or God’s Son? Human or divine? Yes! Both are true in one person, this one baby boy. We can imagine God bringing salvation, or we can picture a heroic human doing revolutionary things. But a single person



who is at the same time both fully God and fully human, without compromising the integrity of either? This is truly a beautiful paradox—a paradox at the heart of human salvation.

This power is not a bare, infinite force abstracted from all other definition but the compassion of the eternal, glorious, holy God clothed in human flesh. His power takes the form of weakness in divine solidarity with humankind, all driven by his holy love.

The angel proclaimed a glorious event to Mary—and to us. Jesus gets his full humanity from Mary, becoming like the rest of us in all ways except that he refuses sin (Heb. 4:15). Yet Mary's son existed *before* Mary, for this is the eternal Son of God who, as the Nicene Creed declares, is "very God of very God." Having the eternal nature of God, the Son comes by the Spirit from the Father, never ceasing to be the Mighty God yet truly becoming what he was

not: a humble human creature. Jesus—truly God and truly human.

As Leo I (400–461) wrote in a letter, commenting on the Son's incarnation, "What he did was to enhance humanity not diminish deity. That self-emptying of his, by which the invisible revealed himself visible and the Creator and Lord of all things elected to be reckoned among mortals, was a drawing-near in mercy not a failure in power." From the womb of Mary comes the savior-king, whose "kingdom will never end." May we, like Mary, respond as the "Lord's servant," willing to trust the Almighty God who has loved his creation enough to dwell in it by becoming this man, thus bringing new life into the world. His full divinity and full humanity proclaim his power, and he tells us, "Do not be afraid."

*Consider* Luke 1:26–38.

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What strikes you most in Gabriel's message? How do you desire to respond to Jesus and to the beautiful paradox of his incarnation?