

Magnifying the Savior

Luke 1:26-56

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December 15-16, 2018

Choir: “I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day”

Sermon Part 1

This song comes from a poem written by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. Two years before writing it, Longfellow’s personal peace was pulverized when his wife was tragically burned in a fire. Then, during the Civil War, his oldest son joined the army without his father’s blessing and ended up severely wounded.

He writes about hearing Christmas bells that speak of peace but he doesn’t have any peace in his heart – *“And in despair I bowed my head: ‘There is no peace on earth,’ I said, ‘For hate is strong and mocks the song of peace on earth, good will to men.’”*

As the bells ring louder, the words go deeper into his soul until finally he says, *“God is not dead, nor does He sleep...the wrong shall fail, the right prevail...with peace on earth, good will to men.”*

I especially like this line, *“Like the angels singing, open your heart and hear them.”*

I pray we would open our hearts so we can hear what God is saying.

Pray

The kids sure did a great job presenting the musical “Crazy, Busy, Peaceful, Holy Night” last weekend! Thanks again to Patty Steele, Cheryl Williams, Sabrina Blackburn, Marie Guyton and Sheila Kuriscak.

We learned from Luke 1:1-4 that our faith must be built on facts, not feelings. It’s not a fable that Jesus was born in the stable. In this time of fake news, horrible hoaxes, and mixed up misunderstandings, we can trust what the Bible says because it’s historical, verifiable, orderly and certain.

If we want to have a Merry Christmas, we must first understand Mary's Christmas. Please turn to Luke 1. We'll see how God moves Mary through a process to help her make progress.

Here's what we'll learn today: *God moves us through a specific process so we can make spiritual progress.*

1. The facts of Mary's life. Look at verses 26-27: ***"In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary."***

"In the sixth month..." refers to Elizabeth being six months pregnant with John the Baptist. Gabriel was a "big gun" angel, sent by God to make life-changing announcements. Nazareth was a surprising choice because it was a bit backward and filled with corruption and immorality. In John 1:46, Nathaniel summed up its reputation: ***"Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?"***

The town of Nazareth was small and the womb carrying the greatest treasure of all was not that of a princess but of a young peasant virgin. Verse 27 mentions that Mary is a virgin twice. She was betrothed to Joseph, who was in the legal family line of David.

Those are the facts of Mary's life. What's the setting for your situation? God is working in you right where you are. He works His way and His will for His glory and for your good.

2. The fear in Mary's heart. As we continue the narrative in verses 28-30, Mary receives a birth announcement that will rock her peaceful plans and change the trajectory of human history: ***"And he came to her and said, 'Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!' But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. And the angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.'"***

This greeting is beautiful, powerful, and personal. The word for "favored" is used one other time in the New Testament in Ephesians 1:6, where it means the free bestowal of grace.

This salutation does not mean that Mary is so full of grace she can forever bestow grace on others. The context here is that because the Lord is with her, she is favored. While she has received grace, she is not the dispenser of grace. No matter how many times someone may pray, “*Hail Mary, full of grace,*” she cannot give grace to anyone.

We must resist giving Mary titles that she herself would reject. She is not our “co-redeemer” or “Mediatix” (mediator) or “The Queen of Heaven.” By the way, if you hear someone mention the “Immaculate Conception,” it is not referring to the conception of Jesus but to the unbiblical belief that Mary herself was sinless from the moment of *her* conception.

If you drop down to verse 47 you will notice Mary knows she is a sinner in need of saving when she refers to God as “*my Savior.*” I’m reminded of the lyrics from “Mary Did You Know?” – “*This child that you’ve delivered will soon deliver you.*”

Mary was unsettled because she did not think of herself as highly favored. The phrase, “**greatly troubled**” means she was “*confused, perplexed and alarmingly agitated.*” She, more than anyone, knew all about her shortcomings. She was also alarmed and “**afraid,**” which is the word *phobeo*, from which we get phobia. It means, “*to be apprehensive and frightened.*” Mary was afraid because none of this was in her plans. This was all new and strange. When faced with change, she responded with fear.

We do the same, don’t we? What is it you’re afraid of today? What fear is gripping your heart? *God moves us through a specific process so we can make spiritual progress.*

3. The fascination in Mary’s mind. We’ve seen the facts of Mary’s life and the fear in her heart. Instead of allowing fear to paralyze her, Mary becomes fascinated as she hears more about who her Son will be. If we want to deal with our fears we must become more and more fascinated with Jesus. Listen to verses 31-34: “***And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And 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.***”

Though she is a virgin, she will become pregnant. I wonder if she stopped breathing at this point. This is something that had never happened before. She was going to become pregnant outside the normal process of conception.

Have you noticed the name of Jesus is given to Mary even before she is pregnant? The Hebrew is *Yeshua* or “Joshua,” meaning “Jehovah-Salvation.” This was a very popular name, because many parents wanted their son to be named after the leader of Israel’s conquest over Canaan. Some parents even picked this name in hopeful expectation that their son would be the Messiah. From the very beginning, her son was set apart as the Savior, with his name chosen by God Himself.

When Gabriel later appeared to Joseph to clear up some of his confusion, the meaning of Jesus’ name and His mission is clarified in Matthew 1:21: “***She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.***” Christmas is irrevocably linked to the redemption of our sins. The incarnation happened so the crucifixion could take place. Bethlehem’s baby only makes sense in light of Calvary’s crucified Savior.

Then Mary is told what her Son will be like:

- **He will be great.** The word “*great*” means “*exceedingly mighty and extraordinary,*” and echoes back to Psalm 47:2: “***How awesome is the LORD Most High, the great King over all the earth!***” Immanuel is the awesome Lord. The one who will be held by His mother is the same one who holds everything together by the power of His word. The star leading the wise men to Jesus was hurled into the heavens by His holy hands.
- **He will be the Son of the Most High.** Here’s the mystery of the Incarnation. Jesus is the son of Mary *and* the Son of the Most High God. The title “***Most High***” in the Old Testament is *el elyon* in Hebrew and is a statement of God’s surpassing supremacy. There is no one higher than He is. He is Sovereign *and* Savior, Creator and Crucified.
- **He will be given the throne of David.** Gabriel now tells her Jesus will fulfill the prophecy given to David that someone will sit on his throne forever according to 2 Samuel 7:12-13: “***When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall***

build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.”

While Mary’s mind is fascinated by all of this, I wonder if she is beginning to realize the ramifications of all this? What will Joseph do? What will her parents think about her unplanned pregnancy? How is all this going to happen? Is her heart starting to break? When we come to verse 34, we get the sense Mary can’t process any more data and so she verbalizes a question that has now hit a crescendo: *“How will this be, since I am a virgin?”*

Choir Song: “Somewhere in Your Silent Night”

Sermon Part 2

Love found Mary on this silent night...because heaven heard her hurts, she was able to lift her head and her heart. Friend, Immanuel will meet you right where you are. He knows your questions and He knows your name. You’re the very reason He came. *God moves us through a specific process so we can make spiritual progress.*

Let’s go back to Mary’s question: *“How will this be, since I am a virgin?”* By the way, this further proves the truth of the Virgin Birth. She’s not mocking the impossible, but instead is asking a very practical question.

She could have responded with a lack of faith like Zechariah did when he was told by Gabriel he was going to be a father in Luke 1:18: *“How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years.”* Zechariah was really saying, *“I can’t believe it.”* According to verse 45, Mary *believed* but was befuddled. Her question had to do with “how,” not “whether” it was possible. Zechariah wanted proof; Mary wanted to know the process.

We’ve looked at the facts of Mary’s life, we’ve observed the fear in her heart and the fascination in her mind. All of this leads her to engage her will by demonstrating faith.

4. The faith of Mary’s will. Gabriel’s answer makes it clear that the Holy Spirit will bring about this wonder in Mary’s womb. Look at verse 35: *“The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you...”*

The word “*overshadow*” was used of the *Shekinah* glory in the Old Testament. This was a cloud of light by which God manifested His visible presence above the Ark of the Covenant.

Verse 35 continues, “...*therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God.*” This verse declares three things about the Savior, all of which are absolutely necessary for salvation to happen.

- He was Man – “*the child to be born*”
- He was Sinless – “*will be called holy*”
- He was God – “*the Son of God*”

We could say it like this:

- Because He is a man He is our substitute
- Because He is holy He is the sinless sacrifice
- Because He is the Son of God He is sovereign

He is the sovereign, sinless substitute. *Jesus became what He had never been before without losing what He had always been.*

Jesus had to be born of a woman so that He would have the same nature as those whom He came to save. He had to be free from sin in order to make sacrifice for our sins. And, He had to be God in order for the sacrifice to be accepted.

After pointing Mary to the miracle of Elizabeth’s pregnancy, in verse 37 we hear a statement that each one of us should memorize: “*For nothing will be impossible with God.*” Some of you are in an impossible situation right now. Mary’s Christmas demonstrates what God can do...

- You may be in an impossible job situation
- You may be facing a pile of debt
- You may be overwhelmed by grief (mention Greg Greer dying)
- You may be single and are wondering if you’ll ever be married
- You may be worried about a child or a parent
- You may be longing for courage to face some trial
- You may be overwhelmed by life

Whatever it is, nothing is impossible with God.

- Are you afraid? *Nothing is impossible with God.*
- Do you feel lost and lonely? *Nothing is impossible with God.*
- Is your marriage melting down? *Nothing is impossible with God.*
- Are you too tired to go on? *Nothing is impossible with God.*
- Have you given up hope that your hurts, habits and hangups will ever end? *Nothing is impossible with God.*
- Do you wonder if you'll ever get over your anger? *Nothing is impossible with God.*
- Ever wish you could just be happy? *Nothing is impossible with God.*
- Do you feel unloved? *Nothing is impossible with God.*

If God can reach all the way down from the throne of Heaven to the body of a teenage virgin, if He can enter time from eternity, if the infinite can become an infant...what can He not do for you?

Mary didn't really have much she could give to God, but what she did have, she gave. Verse 38 is an incredible statement of faith: ***"Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word."*** And with this, Christmas came into the world.

Just as God worked out His plan perfectly at Christmas, He is wonderfully working out His purposes in your life right now. Since He controlled the details surrounding the birth of the Savior, can He not control the particulars in your life? Maybe your circumstances don't look very good right now. Will you trust His timing anyway? Perhaps you've been angry with God because you don't like what's happening. Are you ready to surrender to the Savior just like Mary did when she said ***"Let it be to me according to your word?"***

Mary exhibited two essential ingredients of faith.

- **Submissive servanthood.** In essence Mary is saying, *"I am yours."* The word ***"servant"*** is the word for "female slave or handmaiden." Mary is saying that she is the property of God.
- **Unconditional obedience.** Then she says, *"I will do whatever you want."* This is radical commitment. Whatever God wants her to do, she is willing to do.

Can you say to God, “*I am yours and I will do whatever you want?*” Here’s the principle: *God works within us before He works through us.*

If you think about it, Mary was the first follower of Jesus and this was her Grow Time moment. Her *faith* was about to grow, her *family* was about to grow and her *future* was about to grow. Our growth will be stunted until we demonstrate submissive servanthood and unconditional obedience.

Christmas isn’t so much what you get, but what you give. Have you ever given yourself to Jesus? That’s the only present you can offer, and it’s the only one He wants. Are you ready to serve and obey Him the rest of your life?

If so, first make sure you are saved. If you’re ready to repent, to believe and receive Jesus Christ, you could pray this prayer silently with me: “*God, I admit I’m a sinner and I’m making a mess of my life. I repent of how I’ve been living and now turn to your sovereign and sinless Son who paid the price for my sins. Thank you Jesus for coming to earth and for going to the cross. I believe you died as my substitute, your blood paying the price for my sins. I believe and now I receive so I can become your child. Please save me from my sins. I also believe you rose from the dead on the third day, proving that everything you said was true. Enable me to serve you submissively and obey you unconditionally. In Jesus’ Name I pray. Amen.*”

God moves us through a specific process so we can make spiritual progress. We’ve looked at the facts of Mary’s life, the fear in her heart, the fascination in her mind, and the faith of her will. There’s one last thing we can see in the process Mary went through...

5. The focus of Mary’s words. We won’t take the time to read all of Mary’s magnificent song in verses 46-55, but let me point out her words of worship lead her to witness: “***My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior...for He who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is His name. And His mercy is for those who fear Him...***” Mary can’t help but glorify God for all He has done and she lives on mission by offering His mercy to all who will submit and obey Him.

Just as she shouted out the Savior is born, so too must we tell the Good News from the mountain tops, over the hills and everywhere.

Choir Song: “Go Tell it On the Mountain”