

## ***You've Got to be Kidding!***

December 11, 2011

Candle lighting- reading Scripture: 2 Samuel 7:8-9, 16

*Now therefore thus you shall say to my servant David: Thus says the Lord of hosts: I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep to be prince over my people Israel; and I have been with you wherever you went, ... and I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. ... Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever.*

*Prayer:* Ever faithful God, through prophets and angels, you promised to raise up a holy child who would establish a household of peace and justice.

Open our hearts to receive your Son, that we may open our doors to welcome all people as sisters and brothers, and establish your household in our time. Amen.

### **Luke 1:26-38**

1:26 In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth,  
1:27 to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary.

1:28 And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you."

1:29 But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be.

1:30 The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.

1:31 And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus.

1:32 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 ancestor David.

1:33 He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

1:34 Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?"

1:35 The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God.

1:36 And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren.

1:37 For nothing will be impossible with God."

1:38 Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

### Proclamation of the Word

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The Bible does not tell us much about Mary. She is mostly a quiet person. We do not hear much directly from Mary. She could seem like a "bit player" - a minor role just to birth Jesus.

And if you think about it, Protestant Christians are not real sure what to do with Mary. She has a front and center spot in the middle of our nativity scenes. We take her out of the attic at Thanksgiving and she's back in her box by Epiphany when Christmas is over. In my experience with Christmas nativities, like our Angel Vespers this Wednesday, most little girls jump at a chance to be an angel, not so many want to be Mary. And why would they not prefer being the angel? Angels are bedazzled in gold and silver garland. They get to wear halos that shine. And...they get to speak. "Greetings favored one. The Lord is with you!" They bring tidings of great joy! They sing "Gloria in excelsis deo!"

Mary, on the other hand, strolls in uncomfortably pregnant, with the help of Joseph, or has to sit upon a smelly donkey. She wears simple clothes of blue, no crown or halo. And she sits

mute while holding a baby doll from the Sunday School classroom manger swaddled in burlap, to appear authentic. Who wouldn't want to be an angel, the bearer of Good News and glad tidings? Donkey rides, pregnancy out of wedlock, and giving birth; Mary's role is messy and not very glamorous. This is sort of like church, it is easier to get people to show up on Sunday, than to find people willing to clean out the basement or teach youth Sunday School, not very glamorous.

At least, Mary seems to know her part in the salvation history of God. She is glad to sit back, passively and let things take its course.

But if we read our Bible again, Mary keeps does nothing of the sorts. Remember when Mary and Joseph lose Jesus on the way back from Jerusalem for the Feast of Passover. She is the frantic mother of a budding teenager. When they ask Jesus what he was thinking staying behind. He responds, "Like, duh, Mom and Dad, I was in the Temple being about my Father's business." And then we know, as parents do, that this child is becoming someone out of their control- a young man coming into his own.

Mary shows up later. When Jesus starts preaching in the Temple, the townsfolk ask, "Isn't he the son of Joseph?" Son of Mary is implied. Another time we learn that she likes a good party and shows up at the Wedding at Cana. Then she suffers with her son at the foot of the cross. And after the resurrection she is present with the disciples in Acts 1:14 as they devote themselves to prayer. If we really consider Mary, hers was a lifetime of faithfulness, and her discipleship begins in Luke 1. Mary, may seem mute, and without much of a speaking role, but her life speaks volumes.

Just as Mary, our call to follow God's plan, may start with one memorable point, but means nothing without the witness of discipleship that follows. Maybe we can learn something from Mary. Let's consider the day she receives the big news.

Mary, probably washing dishes in the kitchen, receives the announcement of a lifetime- a surprise pregnancy- the least thing she ever expected! At first she is in shock and stuck- This is unbelievable....impossible...This can't happen. Her mind is racing. Luke tells us that Mary was perplexed and pondered this greeting. Doesn't "ponder" sound so erudite - like Scarlet O'Hara in *Gone with the Wind* sitting around in her velvet gown pondering? When Rhett approaches, she says, "I'm just sitting around thinking how rich we are." Pondering, my foot. Her reaction to the news of being pregnant with the Son of God, the messiah, the Christ, is usually said this way in the church nativity, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?"

I think Mary sounded more like this:

"That's impossible!!! You've got to be kidding."

This is not at all how she planned her life. "This is out of order, out of sequence. And even worse, she could be stoned according to the law. Joseph will be shamed by all their neighbors. How can this be? You've got to be kidding, God! Impossible." Mary says.

What do you truly believe is impossible?

- Impossible- Decent paying jobs with health benefits for our hurting economy. How can this be? **You've got to be kidding, God!**
- It's impossible to know healing after the death of a loved one. Help me out here- **You've got to be kidding!**
- Impossible- decent, affordable housing for the working poor. **You've got to be kidding!**
- Impossible to forgive the one who has wronged and hurt me. **You've got to be kidding!**

- Impossible- God is calling, me? Me? To right wrongs and speak for those without rights.  
**You've got to be kidding!**  
**Impossible-** the powerful on their thrones, the corporate fat cats will fall. **You've got to be kidding!**
- That's Impossible.

Do we ponder the promises of God? And more than ponder them, do we believe them?

Do we really believe that God's dream for his world can be born through us?

Do we live out God's dream for the world or are we too busy making our own dreams happen?

Mary did. Her pondering, her exclamation, "You've got to be kidding!" Turns into her Big YES for God. The angel Gabriel explains these things that shall come to pass and that nothing, nothing will be impossible for God.

Mary says, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word."

II. God takes on the impossible and makes it possible. God is turning the world around, upside down. Lions lie down with lambs. Streams burst forth in a drought-filled desert. God wipes away all tears, for the dawn draws near, and the world is about to turn.

And God turns the world around, and turns human hearts in some unconventional ways.

The Son of the Most High God, will sit on the throne of David. He will reign forever. The power of the MOST HIGH God comes, not to a princess in a palace, or to the most successful family in the city, but to a barefoot, pregnant peasant girl from Nazareth. And you know what they say about Nazareth, "Nothing good could come from Nazareth." It was the arm pit of the ancient world. It was the hood, a no place going nowhere.

God goes into the least likely places of all- a womb of a woman- the most unclean place. Women not allowed to be involved in the community because of what happens in the womb. God goes there! This is not the way we think it should happen. Just like I am sure that this is not how Mary and Joseph expected their first year of marriage to look like.

Mary realizes that is not about Mary. It is about God who makes the impossible, possible.

III. **But** Mary and Joseph, Elizabeth and Zechariah have an important part to play, just as Abraham and Sarah, Moses and Miriam, Hannah and Eli, Samuel and David did. They all surrender, yield to God's plan. Each of them at some point joined the chorus of voices throughout history who with Mary said, "Here I am the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." They are co-creators with God who births good news and salvation through Jesus, our Savior. God has always used human vessels, disciples to turn the world around. So God calls on the Jakes and Jordans, the Gails and Garys, the Bettys and the Bobs to birth the good news into the world for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord.

At some point, something clicks with Mary. She is UNSTUCK. She is ready to follow even if she is not sure of the consequences, the "how tos", and in spite of her what if's. She will be an instrument in God's deliverance for her people. She chooses to be a servant of the Lord- to respond to the promise with commitment. Her role is important in the big, big plan and dreams God has for us.

But this is only possible by the grace of God. Mary is greeted by an angel, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." The impossible becomes possible by the grace of God. Favor here means grace in the original Greek. God's favor, God's grace makes all the difference. The birth of Jesus, our Savior, is all about the grace of God.

We could never climb to heaven, but by God's grace and favor, Christ climbs down and into our lives to bring good news to the poor, to set the captives free, to bring hope to the hopeless, and light to the darkness. Christ climbs down so that the lowly can be lifted up, the hungry fed, the mourning comforted, the addicted and unwell set free. Christ climbs down so that salvation, mercy and justice is possible. And it is God's grace, God's favor that makes us a part of that salvation.

Ultimately, this isn't about really Mary at all. Mary may have been in shock at first, "You've got to be kidding!" But she realizes that she is a part of God's big, big plan for all people. She sings all about it. And in a moment, we will sing her song which is called the *Magnificat* for it means magnify, PRAISE! all praise to God who works in and through her, in and through you and me, to break into the corruption and sin of our world and bring good tidings of great joy especially to those the world calls the left out and the nobodies from nowhere in particular.

For unto us a child is born, a son is given...that is the best miracle of Christmas.

But let us not forget that without Mary, a human vessel; it would not have been possible. Maybe another great miracle of Christmas is the willingness of ordinary people to obey God's claim on their lives.

Are you ready to be a Mary and allow God's grace to be born in you and through you?  
If so, I bet you'll discover why she sings!

Let us pray. O Holy Child of Bethlehem, descend to us we pray, cast out our sin and enter in, be born in us this day. Born anew again and again we pray in your Holy name. Amen.

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