

The Characters of Christmas -
Mary: The Handmaiden of the Lord
Dec 14, 2008

READ – Luke 1:26-38

Mary was young, poor, and female.

All characteristics, that to the people of her day, would make her seemingly unusable by God for any task, let alone a major task.

She lives in a nowhere town – Nazareth.

I mean it wasn't like it was Jerusalem, the center of Jewish life and worship. It would be like some big, political event taking place in Tipp City instead of Washington D.C.. – just not going to happen is it?

And on top of a nobody in a nowhere town giving birth to the Son of God,
Mary is engaged to be married.

We read this story usually only at Christmas time.

And of course our focus is on what a blessed event it is and how lucky Mary was.

But to be engaged to be married back in Mary's day, and then to turn up pregnant was not what Mary would have considered to be favored or lucky. Mary could have been forced out to live in the streets – begging for her livelihood.

Or she could have had to turn to prostitution.

She could have even been stoned to death if her fiancé wanted her to.

She had to, at the very least, know that most people, maybe all people, would not believe her story of a virgin birth, her peers would ridicule her.

And to say she was having the Son of God, well that was just crazy talk.

The honor of being the mother of the Messiah would bring Mary much pain.

But you see, Mary was a good Jewish girl.

She knew the Scriptures, even though she hadn't been taught in the temple like the boys were.

She knew that the Scriptures told of a virgin giving birth to the Messiah.

She, herself, had been waiting on the Messiah to deliver her and her people.

And she trusted God.

So without knowing how all of this was going to take place, without knowing what the future held, without any promises or assurances made, Mary willingly obeyed.

Sometimes when you read the scriptures, it is hard to put yourself back in that time frame isn't it?

Because we think of the way things are today because that is what we are familiar with.

So one of the things that I find amazing, is that Mary noticed the angel. I am not so sure if an angel came to a young, teenage girl today that she would notice him.

I mean in this day and age when everyone is so busy, never slowing down long enough to hear ourselves, how can we hear the voice of an angel. We are constantly on the run, doing 10 different tasks at once, talking on the phone, typing on the computer, listening to the ipod.

I don't know if an angel came to talk to me that I would notice.

But I will tell you one thing that does get our attention today.....the cell phone.

Everywhere you go and almost everyone you see has one of these hanging onto their ear.

For Gabriel to talk to a young, teenage, female today, it might have to look more like this.....(ASHLEY'S SKIT- MARY AS A TEENAGER ON THE PHONE).....

Perhaps we can understand a phone conversation easier than an angel's appearance, but the ending is still the same.

Mary willingly obeyed God without knowing how things would turn out, without any guarantees.

The birth of Mary's child radically altered the course of human history. In fact people around the world divide history into two parts – B.C. and A. D. – before the birth of Christ and after the birth of Christ.

This morning I want to use the letters A.D. to share with you a little of the impact Mary can have on our lives here today.

First of all Mary was AVAILABLE.

Look at verse 30 again.

“Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God.”

Gabriel tells Mary that she has found favor with God.

This phrase does not describe Mary’s character so much as it describes how God’s grace is going to affect Mary and work through her to impact all of human history.

Gabriel is telling Mary that she has found grace by the side of God, in fellowship with God.

Gabriel goes on in verses 31-33 – READ

He talks about the son she will give birth to.

The emphasis is on the baby, not Mary.

Gabriel is using beautiful, poetic language to actually recount Messianic prophecy from the Old Testament.

I believe Mary recognized the scripture connection.

He tells her she will become pregnant, a fulfillment of **Isaiah 7:14**.

The baby’s name will be Jesus which means Jehovah-salvation.

Matthew 1:21, in the New Testament, explains the name by saying, “for he will save his people from their sins.”

Jesus is the great fulfillment of **Isaiah 9:6** – **“Unto us a child is born.....he will be called.....mighty God...Son of the Most High.”**

Fulfilled in 2 Samuel 7 – He will be given the throne of his father David.

He will reign forever, not an earthly kingdom, but rather the rule of grace and truth established in the hearts and lives of all those who have the God of Jacob as their refuge.

In essence Gabriel is saying, “Mary, your boy will incarnate all of the godly Messianic prophecy foretold for hundreds of years. He is the one! He is the Savior of the world, the Lord of life, our Hope!!!”

With all of these bold declarations made, Mary could have responded in so many different ways, couldn’t she?

Yet all she asks is a logical, technical question since she has never been with a man – “How can this be since I am a virgin.”

Gabriel answers Mary question in verse 35.

First he explains the biological implication by saying that the power of the Holy Spirit will come over Mary and through divine activity she will become pregnant.

Then he goes on to answer something that Mary did not specifically ask.

“The holy one born will be called the Son of God.”

There are two important truths held in tension in verse 35.

1. It was necessary for the Savior of the World to be born of a woman, so that he would be of the same nature as those whom he came to save.
2. It was just as imperative that he should be holy, sinless, and blameless.

In this one verse Gabriel is making clear the glorious fact that both of these requirements are fulfilled in the life of Jesus.

He is fully man, yet fully God.

Here the mystery of the incarnation and the virgin birth are held in tension. As C.S. Lewis has said with penetrating insight, **“The Son of God became a man to enable men to become sons of God.”**

Mary does not doubt the angel’s words, though they must have sounded incredible.

Instead she believed the impossible, she trusted God even when the facts argued against it, and she made herself **available** to the Lord.

She recognized that she belonged to the Lord, she was his property to do with as He wished.

She said yes to the impossible, yes to the plan of God, yes I am the Lord’s servant.

Do you wonder if her heart skipped a beat, if her hands trembled, if her voice wavered when she said YES?

You can believe it did, Mary was every bit as human as you or I, but she said YES anyway.

Mary was questioning but not afraid, wondering but not terrified, unsure but not uncertain.

When the angel said, “**Nothing is impossible with God,**” Mary took a deep breath and said, “**May it be to me as you have said.**”
And with those words Christmas came to the world!

How about you this morning? Are you **available** to God this Christmas? Are you ready to say “YES” to him or are you holding back? Do you think you are too young, or too unqualified, or too unacceptable? Believe me, I understand.

When God called me into the ministry, I was pretty sure he had made a mistake.

I even told him that. I pointed out that I was not very worthy and there were others much more qualified.

But God patiently kept calling me.

So I answered YES.

With my heart skipping a beat, with my hands trembling and my voice wavering – I said YES.

I didn’t fully understand it, I am not sure I ever will, I didn’t know what the future would hold for me and I don’t know what it still holds out for me, but I know who holds my future.

I willingly obeyed God and believed that nothing is impossible for Him.

I trust that God understands what He is doing and called me to do
and like Mary, I trust God.

Don’t be afraid to make yourself available to God this morning – your life will never be the same again!

Mine hasn’t been and neither was Mary’s.

However, don’t underestimate the cost of becoming **available** to God either. Saying Yes doesn’t mean that the road is now paved in gold and troubles are far from you.

For Mary saying Yes meant public humiliation and misunderstanding.

Gone was her pure reputation.

Gone was the dream of a happy, quiet life.

Don’t get me wrong, I am sure her life at times would be happy, but no longer quiet.

She would endure heartache, opposition, slander, confusion, anguish and eventually she would watch her son die an agonizing death on a cross.

God asked Mary if she was **available** and willing to believe the impossible and she answered, “**Yes I am,**”

God asked Mary because He knew he could trust her.

He knew she would believe the impossible and she would be willing to pay the price for that belief.

He knew she would bear a child out of wedlock in order to bring God's Son into the world.

He knew that not only was she Available but that she would become a Disciple of Jesus.

Disciple is the D of A.D. – it means a follower of Jesus.

And Mary was a model for all of us to follow because she modeled what being a disciple of Christ is all about, even before she gave birth to him.

1) Mary is a model disciple in her faith in the word of God, and in her submission to the will of God.

2) Mary is a model disciple in the depth of her familiarity with the Word of God, with Scripture.

3) Mary is a model disciple in her grasp of the grace of God, and in her gratitude toward God for bestowing grace on her.

4) Mary is a model disciple in her grasp of the purposes and promises of God.

5) Mary is a model disciple in her evident reflection and meditation on the things of God.

6) Mary is a model disciple in her praise of God which you see so clearly a little further in this chapter in Luke in vs 46-55.

What a miracle of God.

God used a pregnant virgin to bring the Messiah into this world and instead of running scared she praised God.

Are you willing to allow God to use you no matter the cost to your reputation or the comfort of your life?

Mary was and I praise God that she was.

“Nothing is impossible with God.”

That is as true today as it was 2,000 years ago.

In order for the impossible to happen however, you have to make yourself available and you have to be a follower or disciple of Jesus.

That my friends is good news this Christmas.

Because some of you are carrying heavy burdens today.
 For some, Christmas will be lonely this year.
 Some of you are facing a financial crisis that looks hopeless to you right now.
 Some of you are out of work and don't have a single lead on a good job.
 Perhaps your marriage seems worse than hopeless today.
 Some of you are estranged from members of your own family.
 Some of you may have children who are far away from God.
 Some of you may feel empty and far away from God yourselves.

The list could go on but you get the idea.
 All of these things seem impossible to solve by any human means.
 And for the most part they are.
 After all, if human means could have solved your problems, they would have been solved long ago.

I want you to remember today that Christmas is all about miracles.
 They happened 2,000 years ago and they can still happen today.

Is God calling you:

- To give your heart to him before another day goes by
- To serve him in some ministry
- To share His Good News with a friend or loved one
- To spend time in prayer talking with Him

Are you looking for an insight into the future first, a guarantee, some assurances?

Make yourself **Available** to the Lord for whatever he is calling you to.
 Be a **Disciple** of Jesus.

I doubt if Mary knew what would lie ahead for her by becoming the mother of the Son of God.
 But I believe that even if she had – her response would have been the same.

As you make your way to the manger this Christmas, I pray your response will be the same as Mary's – **“I am the Lord's servant, may it be to me as you have said.”**