

# Characters of Christmas: Mary

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Preacher: Kent Dixon

- [ 0 : 00 ]     Good morning, Braemar Baptists. My name is Kent Dixon, and it's my privilege to be the lead pastor here. And this morning, as we continue in the season of Advent, you see the wreath and candles up at the front again.
- And each candle, as I talked about last week, has a significance to it. And on each Sunday of this Advent season, we'll recognize one of the four virtues that Jesus brings to us.
- It's hope, peace, joy, and love. This morning, I'm lighting the second candle. And if you want to get technical and the first, Leah was giving me a hard time.
- She said, the order doesn't really matter. Just move the holder around. And I said, but it matters to me. I've got to have it right. So there you go. There's the second candle.
- And the second candle symbolizes peace. In John 14, 27, Jesus said, Peace I leave with you.
- [ 1 : 05 ]     My peace I give to you. I do not give as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled. Hear that. Do not let your hearts be troubled. And do not let them be afraid. Our second candle represents peace.
- So by show of hands, who is looking forward to Christmas? I'm taking note of the people who aren't. Who's got all their shopping done?
- Ish. There's a lot of ish people in the congregation this morning. Who just in the last 10 minutes went, Christmas? All right. Christmas is only two and a half weeks away, Len.
- Two and a half weeks away, Christmas. Wow. It's sneaking up on us. And it's not even sneaking that carefully. As I've been preparing for this sermon series over the past few weeks, I've also been reflecting on the fact that today is almost a year ago to the day that I was invited to come to Braemar to candidate for the position of lead pastor.
- [ 2 : 24 ]     Off by one day. Does anybody remember what I preached about that Sunday? And just saying Christmas doesn't really cover it? I preached on the fundamental human quality that we all share.
- And that some of us, I think, are better at hiding than others. And that is the next thing. I believe it's during the Christmas season when we're surrounded by messages of consumption and consumerism that we tend to feel that longing the most.
- We're hardwired to want what we don't have. To be jealous of what other people have.
- To have a tendency to never be satisfied and to be looking for more in life. And if I had you feeling guilty there, remember, as I said before, this is how we were made.
- Not to feel guilty, but to want more. God made us to seek more out of life. And he wired us for a longing for contentment and fulfillment that cannot be met by anything else but him.
- [ 3 : 48 ]     Last week, we started our sermon series called Characters of Christmas. Noel always chuckles when I look over my shoulder to make sure the slide is there. It's because I don't trust this, not that I don't trust you guys.

In our sermon series called The Characters of Christmas, we're looking at the circumstances of the birth of Jesus from the perspective of some of the key people who were directly involved.

And as we continue our series this morning, we'll be looking at the life of a young woman and seeing how her life can be a powerful example of being content in ourselves and in our circumstances, as well as putting our full trust and confidence in God.

through her, we'll also gain a helpful perspective on life that can serve us well. Not just at Christmas, but every day of our lives.

Guess what I'm talking about? Mary, Mary shows us that trusting God doesn't mean that we can't be afraid. Trusting God doesn't mean that we can't ask questions.

[ 5 : 02 ] And we'll also get a sense that, again, what God values is often, this has been a theme that we've been exploring, what God values is often very different from what the world values.

And this morning, we're talking about Mary. As a historical figure, Mary, the real Mary, may be a challenging person to really get an accurate picture of.

The Roman Catholic Church venerates Mary. It's a big word. And they have a very clear understanding and expectations for how Catholics should understand who she was and is and how they relate to her.

And also how her role in the birth of Jesus relates to their lives. And I think I can safely say that as Protestants, we don't hold the same understanding of Mary.

For many of us, not even close. And we certainly don't follow the same strict guidelines for how we think about her. But I have a question for you.

[ 6 : 20 ] Do we think about her at all? Or at least, do we think about her enough? Is Mary a central figure of your manger scene at home that comes out mid-December and gets put away in the box again?

Is Mary only the highlight at Christmastime? And as we considered when we talked about Joseph last week, is Mary just a character in the story of Jesus' birth?

Is that all she is to us? Do we think much about her at all beyond the fact that she was specifically chosen by God to give birth to the Son of God in human form?

The baby in the manger. Jesus. I want to be clear because as Protestants, we do not single Mary out somehow.

as being holy or sinless or having some of the other qualities that Catholics tend to ascribe to her. But I believe that we must recognize that Mary was special in the fact that she was chosen by God to be the woman who would give birth to His Son.

[ 7 : 38 ] And there are two accounts of the birth of Jesus. I don't know if you've ever thought about that. But there's one in the Gospel of Matthew and the other one in the Gospel of Luke.

The Gospel of Mark does not mention the Nativity at all. Scholars have debated these two accounts, as scholars do, and they've tried to reconcile them with one another, tried to figure out how they work together.

And I believe that one of the easiest ways to consider them is from the perspective that Matthew tells Joseph's story and Luke tells Mary's story.

You ever thought of that before? If that perspective strikes you as odd, I encourage you, especially at this time of year, to read those two accounts again yourself, and you'll see what I'm talking about.

Because Matthew seems to tell this story as a man might tell it, and Luke as a woman might. So it's in the Gospel of Luke that we really get Mary's experience and her perspective on this amazing story.

[ 8 : 50 ] Mary's side of things. Mary was young, poor, and female.

All characteristics that would have limited her value from the perspective of what her society saw as valuable. And based on what her society valued, Mary would have had little to offer anyone.

And that would have also made her seem to many people to be completely unusable by God. Mary was young, and she was unmarried.

And at that time in history, a woman of any age with no family or husband would have had very little means to provide for herself. She would have had no power or influence.

She likely had little, if any, money or possessions of her own. Mary didn't belong to a wealthy or aristocratic family.

[ 10 : 01 ] And we can imagine that Mary may have lived with her parents or with extended family members, probably both, but without a husband. So that when her parents died, particularly her father, she would likely be put out onto the street with no shelter and no food.

Mary was in a fairly vulnerable position. And we find Mary in the story as a young woman in love. And she's likely anticipating her wedding.

She's nervous about it. She's excited about it. We can assume that Mary had chores to do at home. So she may have enjoyed spending time with her friends and family as well.

And she would have been known by the people in her hometown of Bethlehem. Bethlehem, as historians say, was probably not a very large community.

So people would have known each other and probably well. Mary was a normal girl. Everyone knows I have a young adult daughter.

[ 11 : 11 ] I don't think, I think normal girl is an oxymoron of sorts. But Mary was, we can say, in context, a normal girl.

So she would have had normal concerns and worries. She would have been looking forward to how her life would change once she and Joseph were married. She would be his partner in life and in marriage.

And as his reputation and skill as a carpenter and craftsman grew, she would have had provision for the future of her family.

She and Joseph probably even discussed their plans for children. How they would have raised them. They would have had ideas for what they wanted to do. And then God stepped in.

Mary wasn't quite as lucky as Joseph in how she received the news that would change her life.

[ 12 : 21 ] At least, Joseph was lucky enough to have been asleep. But not Mary. The Bible account isn't specific about where Mary was when the angel Gabriel appeared to her.

But, the Bible says in Luke 1.26, let's read this together. In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David.

The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, greetings, you who are highly favored. The Lord is with you. So, imagine for a moment, maybe Mary was down by a stream washing clothes.

Maybe she was on her way to the market, or she was doing some other everyday task. When the angel Gabriel must have appeared to her out of thin air.

Wow. Can you even imagine that? Can you begin to imagine how terrifying that would be? And remember that scholars suggest that she may have just been 15 or 16 years old.

[ 13 : 39 ] She would have had relatively little life experience, let alone experience with the awesome power of God. I find it funny that the Bible doesn't seem to suggest that Mary was even surprised to see Gabriel.

Right? There's none of this, oh my, what's happening? Not a chance. Not even remotely, at least not in Scripture. She's more concerned about the message itself, the message that he brings to her.

She's not concerned the angel has appeared to her of all things, or that she's clearly been singled out by the almighty God. She actually seems to be relatively calm and collective, according to Scripture.

But the Bible does say that she was troubled by the message and what it might mean. Highly favored, Mary must have thought.

Me? And highly favored by God, no less? Come on. What could that mean?

[ 14 : 51 ] She was just a young girl from a small town. She wasn't anyone important. And it's interesting to me that Gabriel can likely sense the worry in her, her confusion, and likely some fear in there as well.

We see from Mary that it's okay to be afraid when you sense that God is at work in your life, that he may be calling you to do something specific, calling you to share your faith, calling you to let go of past hurt, asking you to give up your plans so that you can be used in his.

It's okay to be afraid, at least at first. And Mary was afraid. But the Bible says in Luke 1.30 that Gabriel responded with comfort and encouragement.

Let's read this together. But the angel said to her, do not be afraid, Mary. You have found favor with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus.

He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever.

[ 16 : 19 ] His kingdom will never end. God will give birth to Mary's experience. When Mary hears the news that she's going to give birth to a baby, what goes to her head?

Audience participation. What goes to her head? How? Scared? Wait a minute, I'm no biologist, but how did that happen?

I'm not even married. I'm not even pregnant. Even more than that, I am a virgin. Never known a man.

Not possible. Mary is old enough to know how babies happen. She's old enough that she gets it.

And that this usual process hasn't even begun for her. So the idea of her having a baby, as Gabriel has told her, it is impossible.

[ 17 : 32 ] Mary is exhibiting, I believe, some of the human doubts that all of us go through, whether our circumstances are good or bad. Not me.

me. But how? Or maybe even, why me? Can you relate to that? I definitely can.

When something bad happens, I believe we question God's motives. We assume he's forgotten about us. We may even assume that somehow we're being punished.

You ever felt that way? Why is this happening to me? What did I do wrong? God, why me? Have you ever thought that way? You're not alone.

And even when something good happens, when God is clearly blessing us, shaping us, and growing us in new ways, providing for us, meeting our needs in awesome and unexpected ways, our first response is often what?

[ 18 : 44 ] Disbelief? Skepticism? Do we attribute it to our own skill, our own ability, our own luck? It reveals a lot about us, how we respond, how much trust we place in God.

When our response to either good or bad experiences or circumstances in our lives, is why me? Doesn't that reveal a lot about us?

Returning to Mary, not only does Gabriel tell her that she will give birth, which is a miracle in itself, especially given her circumstances, but he tells her that she will give birth to not just a king of the line of David, which is astounding enough, but the king of kings, the Messiah himself.

So, of course, Mary has questions. When God calls us or asks us to give ourselves and our lives to him in a specific way, I believe it's natural for us to have questions.

And it's natural for us, God wants us to ask them. He wants us to draw close in the unknown. So, then it also makes perfect sense that Mary expresses doubt about this message.

[ 20 : 19 ] She expresses skepticism and possibly even amusement. Not a chance. Because Gabriel's declaration seems somewhat ridiculous, right?

right? I mean, wouldn't you react with disbelief, amusement? But that's the thing that we need to recognize, is that in Scripture, Mary didn't.

She didn't react any of those ways, any of the ways that we would think would be normal to react. She did, however, ask a specific question about the how of Gabriel's declaration.

And he answered her. The Bible says in Luke 135, let's read this together. And I love Mary's response to this clarification from Gabriel.

She simply says, may it be to me as you have said. That's it. She essentially responds to Gabriel's clarification by saying, Kate, got it, I'm your girl.

[ 22 : 02 ] That's impressive. We see through Mary's attitude her willingness and her faith in God. And all she was looking for was a bit of context.

But beyond that, she was right from the beginning all in. As we touched a bit on our sermon on Joseph last week, a young unmarried girl who became pregnant risked disaster.

Unless the father of the child agreed to marry her, she would probably remain unmarried for life. And if her own father rejected her as well, she'd be forced into begging or prostitution, quite likely, to earn a living.

And Mary, with her story about being made pregnant by the Holy Spirit, also would have risked being considered crazy as well.

But still, despite the possible risks, Mary obeyed. May it be to you, may it be to me, sorry, as you have said.

[ 23 : 21 ] When Mary said that, she likely had no idea of the immense scope of the opportunity that was ahead of her. She only knew that God was asking her to serve him, and she willingly obeyed.

God chose Mary for one of the most important acts of obedience that he's likely demanded or asked of anyone.

God didn't ask Mary to do anything in the situation. He didn't say, all right, go and prepare, I want you to do some training, take Lamaze classes, see you in nine months.

No. He didn't ask her to do anything or be anything more than she was. Poor, young, and female.

Exactly where and who she already was. asked her to trust him and in the process be willing to be used to change the world.

[ 24 : 34 ] At that point in history, that poor young girl from the small town of Bethlehem became the mother of the Son of God.

And I don't know if you've ever stopped to consider this, but Mary was with her Son, the Son of God, from the manger to the cross.

She was the one human being who followed the Son of God from the first day of his earthly human mission to the last.

You may feel like your ability, your experience, your education, your whatevers, some other inadequacy that you perceive in yourself somehow makes you an unlikely candidate for God's service or to be used to make a difference in how his story plays out in the world.

But my friends, my challenge for each of us is that we will not limit God's choices. God's love because he can, he will use us if we trust him, if we let him.

[ 26 : 03 ] Don't wait until you can see the finish line before you offer your life to God. Offer yourself to him no matter how risky it may seem and trust in him because the reward is worth it.

Let's pray. Father God, thank you for the example you've given us in Mary. The poor young woman.

Father, help us to see ourselves not as the world sees us, but as you see us. in our value as your children, our value as your agents in this world, the opportunity to work with you, alongside you, for you, to change the world for the better.

Father, we love you and we pray all of these things in your name. Amen. Our sending song this morning, I'm going to mess with you again, comes in the form of a video that we're going to watch in a moment.

So you may know, this is going to blow some people's minds, that's fine. You may know the acapella group, vocal group, Pentatonix. You may be familiar with the Christmas song, Mary, did you know?

[ 27 : 30 ] So I want you to reflect on the words and message of this song and the amazing way that God worked in and through Mary so long ago and the way that he can work through you right here, right now.

Mary, did Mary, did you know that your baby boy would save our sons and daughters?

daughter and did you know that your baby boy has come to make you this child that you delivered will soon deliver you?

Mary, did you know? Mary, did you know that your baby boy gave sight to a blind man? Mary, did you know that your baby boy caught the storm with his hand?

Did you know that your baby boy has walked where angels strong? When you kiss your little baby, you kiss the face of love.

[ 29 : 21 ] Mary, did you know? Mary, did you know? Mary, did you know?

Mary, did you know? Mary, did you know? Mary, did you know? Mary, did you know that your baby boy is lord of all creation?

Mary, did you know that your baby boy would one day rule the nation? Did you know that your baby boy is heaven's perfect earth?

That sleeping child you're holding holding free? Oh, I am Mary, did you baby?

Mary, did you baby? Oh, I know? Oh, I Mary, did you name? Mary, did you know? Mary, did you know? Oh, I know.

[ 30 : 56 ] Oh, I know. Oh, I know. Mary, did you know? Oh, oh oh, oh, me oh, oh, oh, oh, oh.

Oh, oh, oh, oh, oh, oh, oh,