

Untitled (36)

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Date: 20 December 2020

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[0:00] I'm ready. So, fourth Sunday of Advent. In a few clicks, we're going to be at Christmas! This Sunday is traditionally called Mary Sunday.

! Raise your hand.

There you go. Okay. Alright. This movie was produced in 1946. It had an all-star cast, and it was a financial flop.

They all thought they had made a mistake. The writers blamed the actors. The actors blamed the writers. It was just a fiasco.

That movie sat there for years. Finally, in the 1980s, it began to grow. And it slowly became an annual tradition with people.

[1:08] In fact, in 2006, the American Film Institute named it the most inspiring film of all time. People who had been there in 1946 would have fallen on their backs in surprise.

You know, some things just take a little while, don't they? It's curious that today, the fourth Sunday of Advent, we look at Mary nine months before a little teenager who's visited by an angel.

Nine months before this miraculous birth. It took nine months. And then it took 33 years for this miraculous birth to produce the miracle that saved us.

Some things take a while. So the sermon title is, can I like Mary, let it all be according to God's will. It's one of the toughest things we do in life. Just let it flow with God. So let's check out that lesson. It's Luke chapter one.

[2:21] And if you turn in your few Bibles to page 1016, 1016, you can follow along with this saga.

All right. We're going to first talk about the context, of course. Now, we believe Luke wrote the gospel of Luke. That makes sense, doesn't it? Luke, a physician who also was a historian.

Luke, it's known, went to the original sources to write his book. It was not just a beautiful penned piece of work. He had talked to the people.

And you can bet he talked to Mary. He either talked to her down in the Jerusalem territory, or he talked to her up in Ephesus where she probably spent her old age.

He got the goods and he wrote it down. So his purpose in this portion of his gospel is to just show the incredible nature of Jesus.

[3:27] Truly God, truly human. Everything in our salvation story hinges on this tremendous event.

So now we look at content. Verse 26. In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth.

All right. What's the sixth month? Well, six months prior to this, this same angel, Gabriel, has visited a priest named Zechariah, who was married to Elizabeth.

You don't need to keep all these names straight. And Elizabeth was made pregnant by Zechariah. A couple of problems. She was old. She had been barren.

God was doing something. So this youngster in the womb of Elizabeth would become John the Baptist. So in the sixth month of her pregnancy, the angel Gabriel was sent from God.

[4:36] Okay. A messenger from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth. Now Nazareth would be kind of like the village of Poland to those in Syracuse.

Have you ever been through Poland? Yeah. It takes about a minute and a half to go through Poland. Well, it would be kind of like Syracuse in the eyes of a New York City person.

Do we see a lot of New York City people coming to Syracuse as tourists? I have not noticed any. So that's how Nazareth would be considered from the heart of Judaism, Jerusalem.

Gabriel is not sent to a palace. He's not sent to some famous person. He's sent to a little teenager in a backwater village.

It says something about how God does business. He doesn't do it the way we think he ought to do it. All right. So then 27, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph of the house of David and the virgin's name was Mary.

[5:51] A couple of big things here. House of David. So King David, we read about him in the Old Testament today. King David was named by God to be the king of an empire that would go on forever.

Now, David blew it. His sons blew it. Grandsons. They all kind of blew it. They were kind of, I hate to say this, they were a little bit like some of the people in Washington today that we elected to go there.

Okay. They don't always do what they say they're going to do when they're trying to get elected. Well, David's kingdom was influenced by corruption.

Just a fact of life. Over and over, corruption got this kingdom. But there was the hope that someday a king would come forth that was not corrupted.

It took a thousand years. So we should keep hoping for America. America. An uncorrupted leader.

Okay. And so Joseph was of this house.

[7:07] He was of royalty. And so was Mary, by the way, in the Gospel of Matthew. Now, that doesn't mean they were kissing cousins.

You see, David was like a thousand years before this time. And the family tree went like this. So Joseph and Mary were not cousins.

But they were of the same line, which is important to God's story. Okay. And the virgin's name was Mary. Mariam.

Mary. Okay. Now, 28. Gabriel came to her and said, Greetings, O favored one. The Lord is with you. Wouldn't you love to have an angel say that to you?

I mean, I'd like him to say it to me. He hasn't said it yet. Not specifically. But in a sense, he says that to every one of us when he calls us to salvation.

[8:07] But the angel had something special to tell Mary. So he greeted her with great respect. This girl was probably 13 years old.

In those days when you were capable of having a baby. It was time to get married. She was probably not fully grown yet. She probably was just a little quiet teenager in a little no-count village. And God says, Hail, favored one. So what do you think Mary's going to say? She was troubled by this saying.

Tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. Yes, she saw this was an angel. But it's kind of like, Do you know who I am? It's not like the star who gets pulled over by the trooper and says, Do you know who I am?

It was, Do you know who I am? And so the angel said to her, Don't be afraid, Mary. So that gives you another indication on how Mary reacted to the angel.

[9:19] It was the typical, I'm afraid. I don't know who this is. I don't know what's happening to me. Don't be afraid, Mary. For you have found favor with God.

And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son. And you shall call his name Jesus. He'll be great. And we will call the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give 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. Mary got it. I'm going to have the Messiah.

The teaching through the generations that would be there would become a Messiah. An anointed one. A special one who would be king in David's kingdom.

And the angel said he will reign over the house of Jacob. What was Jacob's God-given name? Israel. He will reign over the house of Israel forever.

[10:29] And of his kingdom there will be no end. Mary now knew what this angel was sending. The message he was sending her. You're going to bear the Messiah.

There was just one problem. She figured this out really fast. She said to the angel, How will this be since I'm a virgin? In the Greek it says, How will this be since I have not known a man?

Hmm. That's a problem. The angel answered 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 called Holy, The Son of God. She's not going to have this child through sexual intercourse.

It's going to be a divine touch. The Holy Spirit is going to touch her womb, fertilize an egg. It's miraculous.

[11 : 34] And then the angel says, And behold, your relative Elizabeth, In her old age, Has also conceived a son, And this is the sixth month with her, Who was called barren, For nothing will be impossible with God.

Two miracles. One, a young teen, Not even married, Will get pregnant. Two, an old woman, Barren her whole life, Will get pregnant.

One miraculous touch of God, One by her husband, Who's also old. Nothing's impossible for God, The angel says.

And so Mary said, Behold, I'm the servant of the Lord. Let it be to me according to your word. And the angel departed from her.

So that's the passage. Now, how do we apply this passage? The germane question for each of us in this church is the sermon title.

[12 : 41] Can I, like Mary, Just let it all be according to God's will? She could have revolted. She could have said, This is the dumbest thing I've ever heard.

Get thee out of here. She could have been a reluctant astronaut. Said, I don't, I don't think this, This is possible. She said, Let it be according to your will.

Now, in our world, Have you noticed that our world is a little topsy-turvy these days? Have you noticed that sometimes evil is called good, And good is called evil? We try to bring justice, And justice hits us in the face.

How about angels? Another show of hints. How many of you had an angel visit them recently? Hmm. There are actually angels all around.

I watch for angels. But sometimes an angel is not one that has wings going flop, flop, flop. The Greek word for angel is messenger.

[13 : 48] Sometimes that angel is a friend. Sometimes that angel is a person we don't even know who gives us a message, Which is going to change our lives.

Miracles. There are two kinds of miracles. There are natural miracles, And there are godly miracles. There's going to be a natural miracle tomorrow night.

Astronomer, tell us what's going to happen tomorrow night. It's called a conjunction. Two planets are going to be so close That they'll virtually look like a single super bright star.

It happens not often. Rarely. Do you know what direction in the sky and what time? Oh yeah. Why don't you tell us? Well, actually, you're not going to see it.

Because it's going to be solid cloud cover in Syracuse. Lord, don't let that happen. But, if it by chance clears, It'll be in the southwest. It'll be about, I hit it, Half an hour after sunset.

[15 : 01] It will be super bright if you can see it. It's not solid. You'll say, wow. And, uh, It lasts. This kind of conjunction of those two particular planets Last happened about 800 years ago.

Which planet's great? Oh, I'm sorry. Jupiter and Saturn. Thank you. Watch. We'll be watching them get closer over the course of the last. Friday night is great, but, eh.

Now? We'll just see what happens. But watch for it. It's what we call a natural miracle. And from what I studied, The last time these two planets were this close Was in 1623.

And the pilgrims in Plymouth Rock noted it. And they called it the Christmas star. Interesting. These kind of natural miracles have, Take place a lot.

We just need to watch for them. But what we're talking about here is a godly miracle. An angel shows himself to a human And announces a great thing.

[16 : 11] And Mary said, Let it all happen. Now, in her mind, A lot of things were taking place. One would be, What are mom and dad going to say?

And then the third thing came right along after that. I got mom and dad. Joseph. What's Joseph going to say? Miracles are not always neat.

They don't always flow without complications. Life is complicated. Question is, Can we flow with God's will?

Can we say, Lord, I'm not sure about the consequences here, But I will follow you. Years ago, we lived in Turkey. And we had a small American congregation, Maybe 200 people.

And there was a teacher in the school, Next to the church, Next to the cathedral, Who got interested in spirituality. And he came to visit with me.

[17:22] And he accepted Christ. And at church that Sunday, He put his hand up that he wanted to follow Jesus. On Tuesday, he came by.

And said, You know what? I got to back away from this a little bit. My teachers are giving me fits. They don't believe a teacher should be religious. And I said, Well, his name.

What are you going to do about that? He said, Tell you what. I'm still going to believe in God, But you're not going to see me in church. And I thought, He gave in.

He gave up on the miracle. And he went with the flow of, This is what my friends think. I need to do what they say. It happens to us every day, doesn't it?

We cave. We cave. Day by day. We say, You know what? This is your will, God. Right. But I just can't do that. I'm going with the flow.

[18:30] That phrase today, I'm going to go along in order to get along. It happens to us. And there are so many areas of life that bring sorrow and confusion.

Most of our nuclear families are topsy-turvy. I don't know if you've noticed that. Our work environment often gets topsy-turvy.

COVID-19 protocols drive us crazy. Topsy-turvy. What is, you know, it says follow the science. What is the science?

Church relationships sometimes get topsy-turvy. Have you noticed? We sometimes sit on each other's feelings. And sometimes we do a tap dance on each other's feelings.

And it gets topsy-turvy. In fact, our own spiritual life gets topsy-turvy. I want to spend time with the Lord.

[19:33] But I can't find the time. So how do we move from an upside-down world to a right-side-up world?

This is where we have reached the denouement of the sermon. There are two basics. One is the basics of salvation. The second is the basics of sanctification.

This is how we turn a topsy-turvy world upright in accordance with God's principles. Basics of salvation.

I know you've got these memorized. Number one, God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life. Number two, I'll use my own marine vernacular.

Number two, you screwed it up. We have sinned and fall short of the glory. We have fallen out of the plan. Because we let circumstances change our lives.

[20:36] By letting stuff come into our bodies that shouldn't. By letting words come out of our bodies that shouldn't. We have sinned against that plan. Number three, God loves us so much, He comes for us to gain us back.

And He does that in Jesus Christ. By the birth, the life, the death, the resurrection, and the ascension of Jesus. God has demonstrated His love for us.

In that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. That's to get us back in the plan. And number four, He allows us, He invites us to come back into His wonderful plan for us.

We do that by acknowledging Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. That's salvation. If you have done that, you are in store for eternity.

That's what the Bible says. That's what tradition has said for many, many years. Trust Jesus. And He's got you into His life, into His plan forever.

[21:48] That's the first basic. The second basic is the basic of sanctification. That's what we're doing here today. Sanctification is a word that means making holy.

The Holy Spirit works in our life, picks us up where we are, and moves us heaven-bound. He changes things in our lives.

He changes our values. We move from loosey-goosey sexual values to holy, wonderful gift values. We move from, I'll steal it if I can, to I'll give it if I can. We move from, I resent you, to I'll care for you.

See, that's the pattern of sanctification. That's what God wants to do with us, and that's what brings the world back straight up again. It's what happened to Mary.

[22:52] Let it all be according to God's will, she said. So, I don't have wings going flip-flop. I checked. But I'm still your messenger today.

Are you ready for this? Here's the message for you. This Christmas, receive the gift. God loves you in the midst of a topsy-turvy world, and he's calling you to rest in him.

As Mary said, you need to say, let it all be according to your will, Lord God. I'm not rebelling anymore.

Which brings us to the conclusion, Thursday night, we have a wonderful opportunity, candlelight service, to offer God our best as we celebrate the birth of Jesus.

Let us together honor the Bambino. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Amen.