

Questioning Expectations: Mary, the Mother of Jesus

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[0 : 00] Let's pray. Heavenly Father, would you open our hearts to hear your word this morning. In Christ's name, Amen. Please be seated. Oh, good morning, everybody. It's so nice to see you all.

If you are new with us in the last little while, you might not have met me before. My name is Aaron, and I'm one of the ministers on staff here. I typically look after the evening service. So, we are in a series leading up to Christmas, our Advent series.

And what we're doing is we're looking at all of the characters involved in the Nativity story. And through these characters, we learn two things.

One, we learn more about who Jesus is, and two, how to respond to him. More about who Jesus is and how to respond to him. And so far, we've looked at Joseph, Herod, we've looked at the Pharisees, the scribes, and the wise men.

And this week, we're looking at Mary. It's her right. Mary. The church, historically and worldwide, has made, I think, two mistakes when thinking about Mary.

[1 : 11] And the first mistake is to overstate who she was. Overstate her importance. And the second mistake is to understate her importance. The overstating looks like this.

It looks like sort of bolstering her holiness in a way that the Bible actually doesn't support. I mean, she was an amazing woman, this is true. But during the medieval period, her story was kind of embellished.

It was taught that she was sinless. It was taught that she remained a virgin her whole life. It was taught that she didn't actually die. Just sort of at the end of her life, she was just called up into heaven.

And it was taught that her conception was immaculate. Now, none of these ideas are actually in the Bible. They're embellishments that arose.

What were they? They were just a wrong-headed approach to trying to protect the deity of Christ. Now, we don't want people doubting the sinlessness or deity of Christ.

[2 : 15] So, let's make Mary sort of superhuman. And what it did, though, is it sort of created this cult of Mary, which is unhelpful. It's unbiblical. That's our first mistake.

It's overstating Mary. Now, the second mistake at the other end of the spectrum is understating her importance. The second mistake is a lack of interest in Mary.

A lack of study. Many Protestants, that's us, Protestants, when asked about Mary, all we do is state what we don't believe about her.

We tend not to think of it too much. And that's a problem as well. I mean, she was the mother of our Lord Jesus Christ, after all. She's fairly important. So, let's put those two mistakes aside.

And we'll look at what Luke actually tells us about Mary. And here's what we'll learn. We'll learn that she was amazing. She was an amazing woman.

[3 : 15] She was the first person to hear that God would enter the world a baby. She was the first person to hear that he would be called Jesus. She was chosen by God for this unprecedented, unrepeatable, gigantic task to carry this God child.

She's amazing for those reasons. But also, she's amazing for her faith. There's a lot of people in the Bible whose faith we should emulate. That we should be really encouraged by.

And Mary is right up there. I mean, her faith is one we should emulate. So, let's spend a few minutes looking at her faith from Luke 1. Let me give you an overview first.

You remember the story. She's visited by an angel. She's told about Jesus and her task. Then she goes to see her cousin, who's also miraculously pregnant. Her cousin Elizabeth reaffirms Mary's call.

And then Mary sings the song of praise for what's happening. That's the big picture. Let's dig a little bit deeper here. So, what you'll notice in the story, as you heard, there's a lot of details in the passage about how she responded.

[4 : 18] We have to ask ourselves, why are there so many details? It's because Luke is trying to hold her up as a model. And what do we see in her response? We see three things.

We see faith, we see surrender, and we see wonder. We see faith, we see surrender, we see wonder. That's what I'm going to talk about. Faith, surrender, wonder.

Let's talk about faith. Now, do you notice that her faith is a questioning faith? And do you notice her faith is a thoughtful faith?

The angel appears to Mary and says, Greetings, favoured one, the Lord is with you. And her response is not. Well, she didn't go, ah, yes, of course. Yes, I've heard about this kind of thing. No.

Verse 29 says, she tried to discern what sort of greeting this is. So her mind is turning it over. She's thinking, what's going on here? I'm this teenage girl from this backwater town.

[5 : 17] Why is an angel speaking to me? The word there, discern, it's a Greek word used in accounting. She's literally taking an audit of her situation.

And then the angel tells her what's going on, that she'll conceive a child. The child is the Messiah. Her response, how will this be since I'm a virgin? Which is a very reasonable question. To which the angel says, nothing is impossible with God.

Now, some of you might say, well, this is a transition from lack of faith to proper faith. But that would be a misunderstanding of what faith is. Some people say this. They go, well, I'm a skeptic.

I ask questions. That's the difference between me and a Christian. Questions aren't allowed to ask questions where I am. Religion is just a rational, blind faith. Folks, faith doesn't mean we don't question.

And faith doesn't mean turning your brain off. Mary has questions. And do you notice she's not rebuked by the angel for her questions? Questions. Questioning is not the opposite of faith.

[6 : 23] Questioning is not an unfaithful response. And doubt is not this awful thing that we should try and ignore and push to the back of our minds. In fact, that, doing that, that's the path to spiritual weakness, folks.

Because if you go through life without dealing with doubts, without questioning your faith, you'll find yourself, you'll find your faith defenseless in the face of tragedy.

And you'll find your faith defenseless against articulate skeptics. And your faith will collapse quickly because you have not wrestled with doubt and you have not questioned.

So we learn from Mary. Don't hide your questions. Don't hide your doubt. Wrestle. Think. Talk. Work through them. This is what healthy faith looks like.

So, her faith was thoughtful. It was questioning. And I also want to comment on something about her faith that is implicit rather than explicit in the text. Her faith was costly.

[7 : 24] She says in verse 38, I am a servant of the Lord. Let it be to me according to your word. I love that line. She knew that moving forward, life was going to get very, very messy.

She was poor. Well, she was about to become an unwed pregnant teenager in a very small, ultra-conservative religious town.

And at this point, she had absolutely no idea how Joseph was going to respond to all this. Most likely divorce. Yet despite this, she embraces the purposes of God.

She knows what people will think of her. But she embraces God's will. What an example to us. She was willing to be shamed, to be misunderstood, to be misrepresented, to be stigmatized.

And in our society, being publicly a Christian can mean all of those things will happen to you. But what an encouragement we have in Mary, this teenage girl, the bottom of the rung in society, willing to follow her convictions despite the cost.

[8 : 29] Willing to look foolish in the eyes of others. We need this girl's courage, I think. Okay, so at the start I said there are three responses of Mary's we should look at.

First was faith. A faith that was questioning. A faith that was thoughtful. A faith that wrestled. Now let's move to willing surrender.

That was the second part of her response which was so wonderful. I'll read it again because I love her response. Behold, I am the servant of the Lord. Let it be to me according to your word.

And the angel departed from her. Now why does she respond like this? What is, what's the logic of her response? What's the logic of her response? Well, it's not this. She didn't say, well, I don't have much of a choice here.

You know, you hold all the cards, angel. So I guess I don't get to decide. I guess I'll just kind of roll with it. That's not what she says. She grounds her decision to obey on the reality of who God is and the reality of who she is.

[9 : 35] Do you hear what she says? I'll read it again. I am a servant of the Lord. So, let it be to me according to your word.

The logic is this. If God is real and the creator, he deserves our service. If God is real and the creator, he deserves our service.

Do you notice right at the end there, verse 55, she links her situation to Abraham. I'll read it to you. As he spoke to her fathers, to Abraham, and to his offspring forever. So you remember the words that God spoke to Abraham.

He said, go out from your country and from your kindred and come into the land that I will show you. God said, go. I'll tell you how it's going to pan out later on. I just want you to go. So Mary links her situation to that.

Mary had dreams of the future. And they were all completely thrown up in the air by this situation. She doesn't know what her future looks like. But she's willing to walk into it.

[10 : 39] Because if God is real and he is the creator, if he is the Lord, he deserves my trust and he deserves my service. That's her logic.

Now let's look at the third response of Mary's. We've looked at thoughtful, questioning faith to surrender. And now to wonder. Look at the beginning of her song of praise there, Magnificat.

Verse 46. And Mary says, My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior. For he's looked upon on the humble estate of a servant.

For behold, now all generations will call me blessed. For he who is mighty has done great things for me. And his name is holy. And holy is his name. Spirit and soul in the Bible are sort of synonyms.

They're not different things. What she's saying is that she's moved to the depths of her being. She is absolutely astonished that this is happening to her, this poor teenage girl.

[11 : 45] She's overwhelmed by the goodness of God. That God would choose her. And you might think, good for her. Of course she should be pleased. It's a pretty amazing thing to happen to her.

But I want you to remember that whilst her task was unique and special, all Christians should have wonder. We should all have wonder.

Because all of us here were chosen by God. Ephesians 2 says, You, me, you were dead in your trespasses and sins.

You were dead. It's not like you were just sort of rescued or on a lifeboat. No, you were dead at the bottom of the ocean. You were dead. And God made you alive. By his choice.

You're a walking miracle. All of us were chosen by God. Mary says, you chose me. I don't deserve this.

[12 : 44] It's incredible. We can all say that. We can all agree with Mary. We should all be able to say, me, a Christian? That's incredible.

That's unbelievable. That's miraculous. That should be a wonder to us. Now, if you don't have wonder in your life, it could be that you are merely religious.

Let me explain what I mean here. When you get paid for your job, assuming you work hard for your money, when you get paid, you don't go, Behold, you paid me?

You gave me. This money's for me? Yeah. I can buy fruit with it. Anything. This is mine. This is amazing. I don't deserve this.

No, you don't say that. Because what you think is like, of course you paid me. I worked for it. That's the attitude of the religious person. Of course God chose me.

[13 : 51] I'm pretty great. I worked for it. I did the right things. But that's not Christianity. That's the opposite of Christianity. If Christianity, if you think Christianity is something done by you, I go to church, I tithe, I'm nice to people.

If you think Christianity is something done by you, you don't have Christianity. What you have is religion. You won't have that sense of wonder.

There is no my soul magnifies the Lord when all you have is the trappings, when all you have is the formality and a few moral rules.

Because you think you can take credit for your standing with God. Now, if your faith is based on something done for you, not by you, for you, if you think God chose you, then there will be wonder.

There should be wonder. There should be surprise. There should be joy. Let me say it like this, in a different way. Sometimes, if you're weak in wonder and joy, it's because you're strong in yourself.

[15 : 03] And those who are strong in themselves prefer religion over Christianity. Those strong in themselves believe they can bring their status and their good deeds to God. And that is a spiritually dangerous place to be.

Because when you read closely the Magnificent, Mary's song, you hear that God is in the business of bringing down the proud and lifting up the weak and lifting up the humble.

So back to the big picture here. Mary's responses. She had a thoughtful and questioning faith. She knew the costs. She walked into them. She surrendered to God's will.

And there was a wonder in her life that we should all have. What an amazing woman. Now let's move from that. And just for a moment, look at what Mary was responding to.

To what the angel told Mary. We've talked about response. Now let's look at what this tells us about Jesus. I'll read verse 31 to 33 to you again to remind you. Remarkable claims here.

[16 : 25] There are three basic claims. That God will become a human baby. That the baby is the king of the universe and his kingdom will last forever. Let's look at that first claim before finishing up here. Here's the first claim.

That God who is the most high. So that's the highest, right? There's high. There's really, really high. There's the most high. So God who is the most high. You don't get higher than that.

Will become a baby. And you don't get much more vulnerable than a baby. So from the highest high to the lowest low. That's what Christianity says happened at Christmas.

No other religion makes a claim like this. That God became vulnerable. And why would God do this? Why would God become vulnerable?

Why would he become flesh and blood? So he could die for us. Dorothy Sayers was a theologian crime writer.

[17 : 26] Just Google her. She's an amazing, incredible sort of woman. Anyway, she wrote something about the incarnation. Let me read a short paragraph to you.

It's fantastic. Okay. The incarnation means that, for whatever reason, God chose to let us fall into a condition of being limited to suffer, to be subject to sorrows and death.

He nonetheless had the honesty and the courage to take his own medicine. He himself has gone through the whole human experience, from the trivial irritations of life and the cramping restrictions of hard work and a lack of money, to the worst horrors of pain and humiliation, defeat, despair and death.

He was born in poverty, suffered infinite pain, all for us, and thought it well worth his while. Isn't that cool? You see, this is why we can't just respect Jesus, isn't it?

We can't just admire Jesus from afar as like some great moral teacher, some wonderful peace activist. He's God. Higher than we can imagine.

[18 : 29] He became lower than anyone ever has. Why? So we could have peace with God. This is the gospel story. This is the story of Christmas.

And how are we going to respond to it? How do we respond to that amazing story? And we should follow Mary's example. With thoughtful faith, with willing surrender, and with wonder.

Amen. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. One was actually every song that KKF gathering, wasagle.

There are some crowdsour examples of our yelling, please. It's in-tip. Thank you so much for longing to hear listening today. There are some rigely physicians among the young people. Let us pray together. Please share how it is. Please stand, let us pray together. So I see you...

don't believers. It■■■■asis anywhere.