

Questioning Expectations: Mary, the Mother of Jesus

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[0 : 00] Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we ask that you would give us hunger for your word this morning. The humility to hear it, to read it, to mark it, to learn it, and inwardly to digest it.

This we ask in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen. Luke 1, 26 to 55. It will be very helpful for you to have your Bible open.

You find it there on page 855. I'm thinking that this is a very familiar story for many of us.

And if it's not familiar to you, I'm envious. I'm envious because it's absolutely shocking, really, this story that we just heard read.

And I fear that when we read it every Christmas, that it actually begins to lose some of that punchiness, some of that shock value that Luke wants it to have for us.

[1 : 02] And I think there may be some here, someone here, who has in fact experienced an unexpected pregnancy outside of marriage.

There may be someone here who's had a son or a daughter come to them with the news of an unexpected pregnancy outside of marriage. You know, unplanned pregnancies are not really the first thing that we think of when we think of celebrating Christmas.

But here we are in Luke 1, and we discover that at the very center of the whole Christmas story is a birth announcement. A baby boy who will arrive as a complete surprise to a young, unmarried girl in a small town in the middle of nowhere.

And this, we discover, is the very best news that any angel has ever delivered. In fact, the very best news that's ever been delivered.

But I mean, how would you even begin to respond if you were the one in Mary's shoes? What could you even say? What would you do?

[2 : 19] Well, during the Advent season, we've been reading narratives from Jesus' birth.

Narratives that declare who Jesus is, and then demonstrate or show how individuals respond to Jesus.

Who Jesus is, and how people respond. And these verses from Luke 1 this morning, well, they declare again who Jesus is, and they offer to us Mary's response as an example.

And so the question for us becomes, how will we respond to Jesus? How will we respond to Jesus?

Let's take a closer look. You can see how verses 26 to 38, that first half of the passage that was read, it's structured as a conversation between the angel Gabriel and Mary.

And the angel Gabriel gives three titles for Jesus, telling us who he is. And Mary responds three times to Gabriel. So three titles, three responses.

I want to begin by looking at those three titles. Gabriel declares that Jesus is the Savior, the Son, and the Sovereign.

[3 : 33] Very simple, really. Savior, Son, and Sovereign. And look with me at verse 31. Behold, Gabriel says, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus.

The key here is in the name. Did you know that Mary would have, in that stable, she would have called Jesus Joshua? That's the Hebrew, which the Greek is Jesus, but the Hebrew, in fact, is Joshua, that Old Testament name.

And it means, Joshua means, the Lord saves. So Gabriel declares that this child will be the one that rescues the world from sin. And then secondly, he says in verse 32, Jesus is going to be his son.

He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him. We'll stop there. He'll be called the Son of the Most High. And actually, Gabriel elaborates on this in verse 35.

If you look at verse 35, 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.

[4 : 44] So a son. Who is Jesus? He is totally God and totally man. Fully God and fully man. So he's son of God by his heavenly Father, and he's fully human by his mother Mary.

It's what Christians, I mean, it's what we call the incarnation. And the miracle of the incarnation is God taking on human flesh and then dwelling with his creation in order to rescue the humanity whom he loves.

So Jesus is secondly God's Son. And then finally, he's the sovereign. That's the continuation of verse 32 going into verse 33. Have a look.

Beginning with and. And the Lord God will give to Jesus 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.

He'll be a sovereign. The king. Now, he's not just going to be a normal king who reigns for a while and then he dies. He is the forever king.

[5 : 50] You actually, we're going to say this in the Lord's Prayer this morning. Christians say, For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever and ever.

We're declaring that Jesus is the forever king. Well, Savior, Son, and Sovereign, that's a lot for a young girl to swallow, right?

Mary, hey, you're going to have a baby before your wedding day. And not only that, he's going to be extraordinary. He's going to be utterly unique, in fact. So how is Mary going to respond?

And again, we're going to look at this in three parts. Beginning at verse 29. Have a look. Verse 29.

But she was greatly troubled at the saying and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be.

It's in the previous verse, in verse 28, that Gabriel has greeted Mary with these words. Greetings, O favored one. The Lord is with you. The Lord is with you. So how would you respond?

[6 : 51] Well, it's interesting. Mary doesn't exactly jump in with both feet, does she? She's cautious. Luke tells us she's discerning. She's discerning.

Trying to figure out, both with her mind and with her eyes, what this visit could mean. That's what discernment is. And then it's Gabriel who drops the bombshell of those three titles that we just looked at.

And we get the second of Mary's responses. You know, as a sort of back and forth in this conversation, we get the second of her responses in verse 34. So first, she discerns.

And what does she do next? She questions. Look at verse 34. Mary said to the angel, how will this be since I am a virgin? You've got to give this girl credit for being bold.

She asks a good question, right? It's the elephant in the room. Okay. Literally in the Greek, she says, how will this be since I do not know a man? And I don't know if you noticed, but Luke wants us to know that Mary is a virgin.

[7 : 54] Three times in this short section, he mentions the word virgin. This is going to take a miracle, right? This is extraordinary what the angel is promising. But then also, you notice Gabriel, there's no hint of rebuke from Gabriel at this question.

He answers her question. And then he even provides evidence that the message is true. Did you see this in verse 36? Verse 36, Gabriel says, 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. And then those beautiful words, for nothing is impossible with God. If it's possible for Elizabeth, it can happen to you, Mary.

So we've seen Mary first discerning and then secondly questioning. So how is she finally going to respond to this overwhelming news? Well, we get the final response in verse 38.

She trusts. She trusts. And Mary said, Behold, I am the servant of the Lord. Let it be to me according to your word. And the angel departed from her. One of my family's favorite children's Bibles, it interprets verse 38 in this way.

[9 : 13] It says, So Mary trusted God more than her eyes could see. Isn't that beautiful? I think it's very easy for us to get this romantic picture in our mind about Mary's response.

Right? Verse 38 is the most famous of the three responses. Let it be according to your word. She's demure. She's passive. She just accepts the message. Right? You know, if we just jump to verse 38 without reading the whole three responses, we don't get a full picture.

Recently, my family, you know, we like to watch Christmas movies. We watched *Miracle on 34th Street*. And I was struck by this really silly line that gets repeated several times in the movie. Faith is believing in things when common sense tells you not to. Do you remember that line? Faith is believing in things when common sense tells you not to. We've looked closely at Mary's response in three parts.

And I hope that by now you can see that Mary's trust is nothing like that silly faith in Santa Claus in the *Miracle* movie. In other words, that Christian faith, trusting in God, is nothing like that.

[10:24] First, Mary is discerning. Then secondly, she asks the tough questions. And finally, after the full conversation with Gabriel, she puts her whole trust in the word of the Lord. You know, if you attended St. John's all this fall term, then you were with us for the sermon series in the book of Proverbs.

And Proverbs is a book about godly wisdom, the fear of the Lord. And I think that Mary's response right here in Luke 1 might just be the truest expression of godly wisdom, of trusting in the Lord with your whole heart.

It might be the truest expression of that in all of Scripture. Because Mary's not ignoring common sense, and she's not just blindly accepting God's message. She's actually not even trying to rationally understand everything about the miraculous conception before she trusts God.

She is carefully trusting in her God, who has proven himself to be faithful to his people throughout Scripture. And she therefore believes that he will fulfill what he promises through her.

If you're a Christian, you probably have already discovered that trusting the Lord, you've probably already discovered a little bit about what trusting the Lord looks like in your life.

[11:47] And nonetheless, too often we still fall into this habit of thinking that faith is just blind trust. And we don't realize that God delights also in our discerning and in our questioning.

Because real, lasting trust is actually built on a relationship, right? It's that way in a marriage. It's that way between two best friends. Real, lasting trust is built on a relationship. And you can't have a relationship without conversation.

Without asking and discerning and responding to one another. That's the example for us here in Mary's response to the revelation of Jesus' identity as the Savior and the Son and the Sovereign.

Friends, the Word of God concerning Jesus Christ, it declares to us that he has come into our world as the Savior for all those who are unable to save themselves because of sin.

And then it declares that God's own precious Son, who alone had the perfect sinless character and steady obedience to fulfill the saving message and mission he was sent for, the mission to die and rise again to give new life to us, to all who turn and put their trust in Jesus as Lord and Savior.

[13:02] And finally, God's Word here, it declares that Jesus alone is sovereign. The true King whose second advent or coming will not be as a baby boy, but will in fact be as descending King and Judge of every man, woman, and child who ever lived.

That's what the who is of Jesus here. And as we close, I wonder for you, what would it look like if you had a little time to yourself to go for a long walk after an angel gave you a shocking message like this one in Luke 1?

Imagine yourself, you have time for a long walk to just chew on what you just heard. Because that's exactly what Mary does. You know, the angel has told her, the same things happen to your cousin Elizabeth, so what does Mary do immediately?

Firstly, verse 39, it tells us that Mary arose and went with haste to the hill country of Judah. So she goes on a speed walk, or maybe she's got a donkey or a horse. And she's got some time on her hands.

It's, you know, it's something like 100 kilometers. So she's got some time on her hands to think about this message. She has time, in fact, she has time to begin to doubt God's Word.

[14:20] She would have time for dismissing God's Word. She would have time to begin to realize that she stands to lose a great deal in this message. This pregnancy is going to cause shame for her and her community.

It's going to completely turn her life upside down. She's going to have all this responsibility of caring for a newborn child. She's going to have time to turn around and run the other way, kind of like the prophet Jonah.

But instead, when Mary finally speaks for the first time in Elizabeth's house, I love that Elizabeth gets all the first words here. She's so excited, right? Elizabeth speaks for quite a while, and then

finally Mary gets a word in.

When Mary finally gets a word in, it's verses 46 to 54. You have to turn the page over to see it. And it's Mary's song of response.

We call it the Magnificat. Mary's song of response. It's among the most beautiful portions in all of Scripture. And, you know, the church has been using it for at least 1,500 years.

[15:24] Because Mary's words, in fact, become our words. And Mary's words have been incorporated as Anglicans into the Magnificat that is said daily in the evening prayer liturgy.

So I was thinking about how to conclude this morning, and I couldn't think of a better way for us to respond to who Jesus is, as revealed by the angel Gabriel, than for us to actually join together in making Mary's song our song of response.

So, we're not going to sing it. We're going to say the Magnificat together in a moment. But as we say these words, I just want you to consider what Mary is saying here.

So have a look with me at the Magnificat. I want you to consider that at the center of her song is a great reversal. It's a reversal that says that if you are proud and strong and rich, and you come to God on your own strength, that you will be brought down.

But, if you respond with hunger and humility, trusting the Lord with your whole heart, he promises to raise you up, to fill you up, and have mercy on you according to his steadfast love.

[16:46] So why don't we stand up together, and if you have your prayer book handy, I'd like to do the prayer book version, which you'll find on page 21 in the evening prayer service. Page 21.

And once we all have it open, we'll say it together. Let's respond to the good news together, my friends.

My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Savior. For he hath regarded the lowliness of his handmaiden.

For behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. For he that is mighty hath magnified me, and holy is his name. And his mercy is on them that fear him throughout all generations.

He hath showed strength with his arm. He hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He hath put down the mighty from their seat, and hath exalted the humble and meek.

[17:53] He hath filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he hath sent empty away. He, remembering his mercy, hath hope in his servant Israel, as he promised to our forefathers, Abraham and his seed forever.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost, as it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.