

James Barnett Mary the Mother of Jesus

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[0 : 0 0] Now this might sound strange, but I wish I was more like a teenage girl. No, I don't wish I was more in love with Justin Bieber or spent all my money on my hair and clothes or whatever teenage girls spend their money on.

But I wish I was more like a teenage girl and you should too. This week as we consider how to be prepared for Christmas, after last week we're going to be considering a particular teenage girl.

Not just any teenage girls or teenage girls in general, but one in particular, Mary the mother of Jesus. Last week we looked at the start of this chapter of Luke and we saw what God had in store for an old couple, Elizabeth and Zechariah.

They were going to have a baby John and he would prepare the way for Jesus. And in this first chapter, there's a deliberate comparison between Zechariah who doubts and Mary who believes.

And this comparison is going to show us this morning that Mary is someone worth modelling, even if she is an unlikely prospect. So please open your Bibles, keep them open at Luke chapter 1 verse 26 with me.

[1 : 2 0] From verse 26. 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. God sends his messenger from a priest, from Zechariah in the temple, the very heart of Israel, to speak to Mary, a humble girl from Nazareth.

Nazareth is a know-nothing backwater hick town, not even mentioned in the entire Old Testament. It's nothing. It's this town we know not much about.

Later on, Nathaniel, one of Jesus' straight-talking disciples, he questions Jesus' origins and says, can anything good come out of Nazareth?

This is all about all we know of Nazareth. It's not a great place. But it's here that God sends his angel next. And he sends him to speak to Mary, likely to be very young, probably between the age of 12 and 16.

[2 : 4 2] Girls like her were unlikely to have any education. They would marry humbly, give birth to poor children, not travel far from their home, and die like many others before them in a nothing town.

But it is this girl that was chosen by God to carry his son. The greatest news ever in human history that God was going to come as a man came first to this girl in the middle of nowhere.

Later in the song that she sings in praise of God, she says, God's message of hope and salvation came to this needy and humble girl, not to the powerful and rich, not to the center of the city.

And this angel that has come approaches her and speaks to her in verse 28. Have a look. Greetings, you who are highly favored. The Lord is with you.

Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. It's a peculiar greeting, isn't it? One which has baffled many, not just Mary, but many scholars as well.

[4 : 08] An over-translation from the Latin led some people to think that the comment, you who are highly favored, was instead a comment you may have heard before, hail Mary full of grace.

These are from the same verse. One is an over-translation. And so some who believe in this line, hail Mary full of grace, they think it's saying that Mary, well, she's actually something more than human.

She's actually full of grace. She can actually dispense grace like Jesus. And that's why we should pray to her, because she has grace herself.

It's totally inaccurate and inappropriate in keeping with the rest of the Bible. But that does not mean that we should lower Mary.

Hey, mate. Just because some people have considered Mary to be greater than she was doesn't mean that we should reduce her. The angel described her as highly favored.

[5 : 13] And in her song, she said that all nations would call her blessed. Is it right to call Mary blessed? Well, I think it is. She is the only woman in human history to ever carry God's son.

She's the only one who ever nursed him, fed him, changed him, the only one who was ever called mother by Jesus. She is indeed a woman blessed.

And Mary responds to this peculiar greeting by the angel. And it shows how we should act. She was troubled and she wondered at his words.

When Zechariah, that we saw last week, when he was confronted by the angel, he was gripped with fear. He doubted the words of the angel and he asked for a sign. Mary did not respond like a flighty young girl would.

But she reflected on his words. And she kept pondering the meaning of this greeting. What is our response to the message of the birth of the Savior?

[6 : 22] Is it to consider it briefly? Or do we weigh the words? Do we plumb the depth of this message? Are we so used to information being disposable?

Short articles in newspapers. Tabloid journalism. Twitter, which has so few characters. Are we used to news and television that is just exciting and short to catch our attention?

Because we no longer have attention spans that can process any kind of information. What would it look like for you to stop and truly process this message?

When Sam read the passage before, it would mean, well, not just flicking your eyes over the passage as he read it. Actually considering each verse.

Instead of saying, ah, yes, I've heard this story before. It's the one with Mary and the angel. Yep, I know how this goes. I'll just tune out and think about the week ahead. What would it actually look like to sit and reflect and ponder each word and each line?

[7 : 30] Let's do that now as we listen to what the angel said in response. In verse 31. You will be with child and give birth to a son.

And you are to give him the name Jesus. Nothing particularly unusual here. Jesus is a fairly common name. It means salvation. But then have a look at verse 32.

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.

His kingdom will never end. This is special. This is very, very unique. This child of Mary's will be the expected son of God mentioned in the book of Samuel.

He will be God's son. He is going to reign and his kingdom will have no end. This humble virgin girl who lives in a hick town in the middle of nowhere is going to give birth to the son of God.

[8 : 33] A claim which no one else could ever make. And to this amazing message from the angel that this small town girl hears, how does she respond?

Does she respond like Zechariah with doubt and say, I want proof? Have a look at verse 34. How will this be? Mary asked the angel.

Since I am a virgin. Now this is not a question from doubt. It's more of a mechanical, biological type of question.

It's a question, God, how is this going to happen? She's not doubting God. She's not saying, God, this is impossible. I'm a virgin. No, no, no, it's more of a biological question.

A believing question. God, I believe you can do anything. But let me know. Just give me a bit more information. I'd like to know how you're going to bring about this.

[9 : 34] Questions like this acknowledge that God is all powerful. But at the same time, God is approachable. He is not a God who does not care for our plight.

What's your attitude towards God? What kind of questions do you ask him? Do you firmly believe that God works for the good of those who love him?

Do you ask questions of him, believing that he will listen and respond? This young girl's response to God's message is radical.

She believed that God would do the impossible and shows how we, we who think we are often mature Christians, still lack faith. And again, to this question, the angel responds, have a look in verse 35.

The angel answered, the Holy Spirit will come upon you. And the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the Holy One to be born will be called the Son of God.

[10 : 39] Even Elizabeth, your relative, is going to have a child in her old age. And she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month. For nothing is impossible with God.

Firstly, it's important to note there are no sexual overtones here. This is not a God mating with a human, like in Greek mythology, to produce a half human, half divine, you know, some kind of demigod.

That is not what is on view here. This is an act of the God who was first characterized in the Bible as a creator. And here again, he is creating life, this time directly in a womb, by the power of the Spirit.

And the word overshadow here, it's used of the transfiguration. When Jesus, with Peter, James and John, climb a mountain, they meet with Moses and Elijah, and God in his presence comes upon the mountain in a cloud, and he overshadows the mountain.

And he speaks and says, This is my Son whom I love. Listen to him. This word overshadow here shows that God is going to be present with Mary as he creates this life.

[11 : 52] It truly will be a virginal conception. When Gabriel came to Zechariah, Zechariah didn't believe, and he asked for a sign, and he got a negative sign.

He was cast blind. Here, Mary does not disbelieve like Zechariah. She does not ask for a sign, but she is given one anyway. She can see God's power to do the impossible through Elizabeth.

Gabriel points to Elizabeth's pregnancy that God can do the impossible. And finally, Mary responds to the angel's explanation of how things would happen.

Have a look at verse 38. I am the Lord's servant, Mary answered. May it be to me as you have said. Who here could say that they have responded to God in this way?

I am the Lord's servant. May it be to me as you have said. Her obedience to the message from God makes her both the mother and a disciple of Jesus.

[13 : 02] She totally submits to God and his will. Even though she will probably have a tough time of this. You know, a virgin betrothed to be married winds up pregnant.

She's going to definitely have to answer some questions. But Mary here is a model disciple. She obeys and submits to the Lord.

Jesus would later teach his disciples to pray, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. For us, obedience and submission to God should look like Mary's, not only in words, but in attitude.

It's very easy to get frustrated with God and go, Fine, God, whatever you want, I'll do things your way. Or to try a number of options and then to get angry with God and go, Okay, I'll do it your way, but only because I've tried everything else myself.

But Mary's attitude to obedience is radical. It's shocking for such a young woman. What does she say?

[14 : 09] I am the Lord's servant. May it be to me as you have said. Will we joyfully exclaim this? I am your servant. Do we believe that God works for the good of those who love him?

Mary obviously wasn't perfect. She might be a model disciple, but she is still one of the members of Jesus' family, who in Mark 3 wanted to take charge of him because they thought he was out of his mind.

She found it hard to believe Jesus when he began his public ministry. But she is still a helpful example for us today. So as we prepare in these last few days before Christmas, why should we be like a teenage girl?

Firstly, Mary had humble beginnings. She was not self-sufficient. She was totally dependent upon God. So that when this message was spoken to her, she was ready to listen to it.

Just like our core values, we should be valuing humility. Imagine with me for a minute what it would look like if you acted a little bit more like this teenage girl.

[15 : 34] What would it look like if you had her humility? That you didn't rely on the amount of money you can earn at work to survive for the next couple of weeks?

Your ability to do everything that you want to do today. What would it look like to not have to rely upon yourself, but instead to humbly rely upon God?

Secondly, Mary reflected on the words from God. She turned them over. She tried to understand them.

She did not superficially accept them. Again, our core value of Christ-centered Bible saturation for our church, it doesn't mean that we should just be reading the Bible all the time, but that we would read it deeply and we would know it to our very core, meditating on God's Word day and night.

If we were to do this, what would this look like? Would we read the Bible differently? Would we continue to read the Bible just to tick a box, to say I've spent time with God today?

[16 : 45] Or would we read each line and each verse, mulling them over, committing them to memory, singing them to ourselves as we work, so that at times of trouble or tribulation, they would come back to us and the Lord would speak to us through them?

Thirdly, Mary believed God at His Word. We must cultivate a heart that believes in the promises of God. Again, if we were to do this this week, if we were to actually believe the promises of God, what would this look like?

What would it look like to believe that God will send His Son to take His people home?
What would it look like to believe that there is more to this life than physical pleasure and the accumulation of stuff?

Especially at Christmas. Would you act like you believed it? Lastly, like Mary, we must be obedient and submissive to God.

Imagine what it would look like to obey just one of God's commandments. To just love your neighbor as yourself. Okay, that can get a bit hard.

[18 : 06] Imagine what it would look like just to love your family as yourself. Maybe that's even harder for some. I'm not sure what your family is like. You'll be reminded of them over Christmas.

But imagine, let's just narrow it down further. What would it look like to love your husband or your wife as yourself? We must be obedient and submissive to God.

Let's thank God for the model of His mother, for Jesus' mother, and the encouragement to be shaped by her son like she was even before He was born.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, thank you for the message that Gabriel brought to Mary. That she would have a son who would be a king, whose name was Jesus, which is salvation.

Lord, thank you for the model of the disciple that Mary was. Help us to be like her. That we would obey you.

[19 : 15] That we would believe in you. That we would listen and read your word with such a heart to understand it. That you would constantly change us to be more like your son.

In whose name we pray. Amen.