

Good News

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Preacher: James Barnett

[0 : 00] Have you heard the news? Did you hear what's just happened? I can't believe it. Oh, you haven't heard? You didn't see what's been on the front of social media and the front of the newspapers?

Our ears tend to prick up at these types of things. Maybe you were actually wondering if I actually had some news to share. It's one of the things that I think social media does really well. It's constantly bombard us with new information. If you keep pulling down or hitting refresh on Facebook or Insta or Twitter, it just continues to provide us with new things for our eyes to look at because our brains really like it.

They've figured out how much we like it and how addicted we can be to just getting new information in. How would you feel if I shared the front page of the news from 2005?

Would you care? What if I, you know, it's that feeling of showing someone a picture of a meme that they've already seen. It's just kind of like, hmm, yeah, it's a good one.

[1 : 06] But I wonder if there's some pieces of news. I wonder if there's some pieces of information that are still life-changing. Some things that just stop us in our tracks.

You know, when an old friend who you've been meeting with, you've just been spending hours with them for years and years and years, when this old friend says to you, I really still like catching up with you.

It's actually really wonderful. You know, that's news you still want to hear. When a family member tells you again for the 400th time how much they love you. Some of this news that we hear, we may have heard before, but some news can still impact our hearts.

It's Christmas time. We've gathered late at night to celebrate, to hear the old, old news of Jesus coming as a baby.

I wonder what kind of news it is for you. Is it news that we've just heard before and it's not exciting and we're actually looking for something more interesting, more exciting for Christmas?

[2 : 13] Or is there still something relevant for us about this old news that can still impact our hearts this year? Tonight we're looking at how Mary, the mother of Jesus, responded to the news of Jesus.

And the challenge for us will be to be amazed and transformed at this old news. Not like it's the first time we've heard it, but because it is still meaningful for us.

So as we do this tonight, let me pray for us. Dear Heavenly Father, I ask that you would help us to encounter this news of Jesus' birth afresh tonight and that it would be life-changing again for us, Lord.

We ask this in your Son's name. Amen. We're going to see two things tonight. First of all, we're going to see Mary's response to the news and then we're going to consider how we need to respond to this old news.

We come to Mary and her response to hearing from God. She is a young lady, around the age of 15, pledged to be married to a man by the name of Joseph.

[3 : 21] And an angel appears to her with a message from God. This is the freshest of news that you could get. And she says, please have your Bibles open, have your notes open with me.

We're going to start in verse 28, where we see the angel says, greetings, you who are highly favoured. The Lord is with you. Now, I'm not sure how you would respond if you had an angel appear, let alone describe you as highly favoured.

God, at the start of this message, is saying that, Mary, you are highly favoured. I'm going to show my grace to you, unmerited favour. This is amazing, that God would show His grace, His unmerited favour to anyone, let alone a 15-year-old girl who could not have done anything to deserve it.

Mary responds to this announcement, verse 29, Mary was greatly troubled at His words, and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. She doesn't immediately respond with joy. She doesn't say, wow, I've been greatly favoured by God, I've got to go and tell everybody. She's troubled. She has an emotional response.

[4 : 36] She's trying to understand what this message is that the angelic being has brought to her. Why am I highly favoured by God? Why has God shown His grace to me?

Why would the Lord show His favour to me? But it's not about her being special. It's about God being gracious. The God who chooses to love and show His grace, even to unlikely people. The angel continues in verse 30, Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favour with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call Him Jesus. He will be great, and He 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 Jacob's descendants forever. His kingdom will never end. If she was confused and troubled about being favoured by God, imagine her now.

You're saying that I'm not only favoured by God, but that before I, and that's even before I get married, I'm going to be pregnant with a baby, and that that baby is going to be the long-expected Emmanuel, God with us, who's going to rule forever.

[5 : 47] It's no wonder Mary responds to this amazing news with surprise and with questions. Verse 34, Now, this is not a sign of doubt.

She's trying to understand God's good news to her. But even before she can get to the theological implications of the descendant of David coming, of God's Son Himself, Jesus coming, before she can get to those implications, she's asking very practical questions.

God, how is this going to work? I'm not married yet. How am I supposed to have a baby? She doesn't dismiss the good news because it's crazy, but she's asking God, help me understand your plan.

God, how is this going to work? And the angel clarifies, the Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. And the Holy One to be born will be called the Son of God.

Even Elizabeth, your relative, is going to have a child in her old age. Mary is given an explanation and a piece of proof. Elizabeth, her very old relative, will also have a miraculous birth.

[7 : 04] I think this is actually a really wonderful piece of news and a piece of proof for Mary. I think it's really wonderful. God has placed her in a situation which no one will understand.

So she's going to be pregnant. Her fiancé is not going to understand it. Her parents aren't going to understand it. The society around her is all going to be questioning why this young, unmarried woman is pregnant.

How can this be? Sure, you've said it's from God. I'm not sure we believe you. And yet God directs her to Elizabeth. She also is going to have a miraculous birth.

People also wouldn't have been able to believe that she was pregnant, and yet she was six months pregnant. God puts this into her hands because Elizabeth will understand.

She's the only person who would. And the angel calls on her to trust God's word. No word from God will fail. And Mary responds, wise beyond her years.

[8 : 08] Verse 38, I am the Lord's servant. May your word to me be fulfilled. I just think her response is wonderful. God, I'm going to trust you.

I've got questions, but I'm not going to be afraid. I am your servant, and I'm going to trust you. After this, Mary goes to visit her relative. And when she's there, she responds to all that God is doing, and she sings a song called the Magnificat, where she praises and gives glory to God.

She rejoices. She says, My soul glorifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior. She is rejoicing. She is praising God.

And Mary, just in these very short verses, has gone on this wonderful journey. She started at the good news, troubled. She was troubled, unsure of this news.

She questions the angel, and then she places her trust in God's word, and finally rejoices with praise. I remember where I was when I first heard the news about 9-11.

[9 : 21] I remember I was sitting in high school. It was year 11, and a mate of mine was listening on the radio, and he was giving me live updates of what was happening. I remember hearing for the first time the full implications of COVID.

Last year, I was camping. I was out in the middle of nowhere in a tent. I got a call from Steve, saying, things have gotten serious.

Even church is going to have to lock down. We have some parts of news that just shape our lives, and that are very memorable.

Do you remember the first time that the news of Jesus interrupted your life? How much has it shaped your life since then? Or maybe this is the first time that you're actually considering this news of the Son of God coming, that God would show unmerited favor and grace on unworthy people like Mary and like you and me, that God became a person to bring salvation, that this news was life-changing for Mary, but also for us.

This is news that we can't ignore. And just like hearing about COVID that impacts everybody, we can't pretend that the news of Jesus isn't for us. We can't just say it's for someone else.

[10:48] This message is for all people. God sent His Son, Jesus, for all people to be able to know and follow Him, because one day we will stand before Him.

Now, you may have responded to this like Mary, being troubled at the news. And I think this is a good and rational response. We should be troubled at this news.

Someone I know is dying of cancer at the moment. And they don't want to talk about death. They don't want to face the reality. They don't want to use that big D word of death.

They're just placing their trust and their hope in doctors. The doctors are going to fix it. I don't have to think about my future. The doctors have got it sorted. But that would be like, you know, thinking that COVID is not going to impact our lives, or being on the Titanic that's going down, and ignoring the calls to jump into a lifeboat.

Each of us need to consider our future and what this news means for us. We should be troubled by this news. Troubled that we are in so desperate need, God would have to come Himself.

[12:01] We need God to favour us. And the wonderful good news of the Bible is that He does. He has chosen to show His grace and His favour.

If this is news to you, come and talk to me. If you're still considering this, talk to the person next to you. Talk to the person that you're with. Because I believe that we can respond to this news like Mary.

We can place our trust in Jesus. In God. And that is the way, just like Mary, to have joy. To rejoice at what God is doing. Joy even in a broken world.

But what if this is old news? What if this is a message we've all heard before? What if, you know, it doesn't actually seem that exciting anymore?

It doesn't have that same, you know, hit of adrenaline or a dopamine rush when I'm flicking through Twitter that I get. It doesn't seem to be life-changing joy anymore.

[13:05] I think Mary's response to hearing the good news is helpful for us as we consider the old news. I think it is helpful for us to consider what it is to be troubled by this news.

To question God and then to trust in Him and finally to rejoice. Starting with troubled. Mary, when she heard this message from the angel, she was troubled.

He said to her that she was greatly favoured. If you're feeling like the news of Christmas isn't that new or interesting anymore, I want to encourage you to sit in this. Because God says to us the same thing.

Sure, we haven't had an angel visit us and say, hey, you're highly favoured. We have God saying that to us in His Word. Ephesians 1, 7 says, In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins in accordance with the riches of God's grace.

God shows His grace, His unmerited favour to each of us. And this should trouble us. This should disturb us.

[14:10] It's news that should shake us out of a mundane faith because it's easy to get used to Christmas that Jesus became a baby. It's easy to get used to this news and just go through a process of coming to church week in and week out and forget how amazing and radical and troubling this news is.

Sometimes though, God will creep up on us and remind us of this great truth. Particularly when we've been doing the wrong thing. When we've been sinning.

When we've hurt someone else. And we realise, oh, I am despicable. I am sinful. And yet, Ephesians 1 verse 7, God has shown His immeasurable riches in His grace to me.

I don't deserve anything good from God and yet He chooses to love me. Be reminded of this truth from Ephesians 1, this word from Mary, God has poured out His unmerited grace on us. One of my favourite TV shows of the past years is a TV show called Ted Lasso. Not sure if you've seen it. One of the characters in this show attempted to ruin this main character, Ted Lasso's life. [15:32] But when they realised what they've done, they came and apologised to Ted. And He just says, I forgive you. The other person cannot believe it and they are brought to tears.

God has shown His amazing grace, His amazing favour to us. He says far more than forgiveness. He doesn't just forgive us, but He chooses to show His riches to us.

His love that He would bring us into His family. He says, you are more precious to me. God has shown His amazing favour that He would choose you and me, sinful enemies of God.

That He would shine His face on us. We should be troubled by this. We should be stirred deep inside, reminded that we do not deserve it and it should remind us of how great and wonderful our God is and our need and our dependence on Him.

Secondly, I think this news for us is really helpful because it reminds us that it is good to question God. We can keep bringing our questions to Him.

[16:43] James chapter 1 reminds us that if any of us lack wisdom to ask God and He gives generously to all without reproach. Asking questions is not a sign of a lack of faith.

We can take our questions to Him. He's bigger than our questions. He is sovereign. We can be asking questions like, God, how am I ever going to stop sinning like this? God, how will my family, my friends ever come to know and love you, Lord?

God, I'm really worried about what's happening at the moment. I'm really worried about case numbers in Sydney. I'm really worried about COVID. God, I'm suffering right now. God is big enough for these questions.

Now, God may speak directly or even through an angel, but as the angel said to Mary, God's word doesn't fail. We have His word and He promises that He is sovereign.

He is in control today and tomorrow and He is with us. So let me encourage you to be troubled by this good news.

[17:53] Be encouraged to take your questions to Him and then each day respond to the good news of the gospel by choosing to trust in Him.

Trust that what God has said about our tomorrow, that He is sovereign for tomorrow, that He has a plan. Trust in that. Trust that His way and His plans are better than anything that we could come up with.

And then finally, to rejoice with Mary at this news. Rejoice that God would save of people like us. If you're feeling not excited by this news, this good news of Jesus, be troubled, take your questions to God, trust in Him and then we can rejoice.

We can rejoice because we don't need to worry about tomorrow. God has it sorted. Lamentations 3 says, When we daily remind ourselves of God's mercies, they are new.

His gospel is new to us. Then the old news doesn't actually seem old anymore. It is new. It is amazing. It is life-giving. I have been married to my wife Alyssa now for almost 15 years.

[19:22] And I remember the first time that we said I love you to each other. I reminded her of this the other day and it turns out she can't remember it. I am very glad I can still remember it though. And I said it, it was on a train between our houses.

We lived about an hour apart and I said it to her on the train and there was a very short pause where my heart was in my mouth and then she responded with those three little words.

But I remember thinking what is she going to say? Do I get off the train now at whatever stop this is? Is she going to run away or is she going to say I love you back?

And it was wonderful news when she did say it back to me. But since that time let's say that she has either said those words or texted me those words every second day.

That would be over two and a half thousand times that I've heard that. It is not news to me anymore that she loves me. I'm pretty sure I've gotten used to that idea.

[20:23] But why haven't I said to her stop telling me. I don't need that information. It's not news to me anymore. I'm actually really bored by that piece of information. Can't you tell me something new and exciting?

It's probably not the wisest thing to say to her. And yet every day when she says those words it's new. After we've had an argument or if there's been pain and conflict and I hear those words it

reminds me that we're okay.

That we're on the same side that we're on the same team that we're going in the same direction. Those words have meaning because of the relationship. How much more so with God when we hear the news again that God loves us enough that he sent Jesus.

We need to hear it again after we've sinned. After we feel distant from him because it reminds us of how great his love for you is for me is.

I need to hear it. We need to hear it when we're lost or lonely or when we're far from home. We need to hear this good news of the gospel of Jesus coming when I'm questioning God when we're wondering about the season of life in because it reminds us of the good news that he is sovereign he is in control of all things and then we can rejoice.

[21 : 50] Let me pray. Heavenly Father we thank you for this good news. Lord I ask that it would be news to us again today.

That it would not just be information but it would be news that leads to our lives being transformed to trust in you to rejoice with you and all of your goodness to us Lord.

Amen.