

Christmas 2016 Luke 1:26-38 Galatians 4:19 www.bible-sermons.org Dec. 25, 2016

I believe this is the twentieth Christmas message I have preached. Every year I pray and consider what God would have me share: the basic message of what took place, the contrast of Herod and Jesus, the incomparable wonder of God in the flesh, the love of God that would send Jesus, or something completely fresh. I've never needed to go back and preach the same message because there are so many angles from which to approach and learn from the first Christmas events. Last night we looked at the wise men and considered what gifts we should bring today, and we discovered that if we have acknowledged Jesus' name, that is to say all that He is and has done for us, then we should continually offer a sacrifice of praise (Hebrews 13:15). Thanksgiving should be more than a day in November, Christmas, or Easter but the daily life of those who have found forgiveness through Jesus' sacrifice for us.

This Christmas Day I'd like us to consider the heart of Mary along with the Galatians 4:19. *19 my little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you!* That was the inspiration for a song the Lord gave me a decade ago, Let Me Grow Up in You. Is Christ being formed in you. Is He being expressed more clearly in your life as you age?

The angel Gabriel came to tell Mary of God choosing her to be the mother of the Messiah at a time when Israel was under the thumb of Rome. Taxation was a burden and combined with temple taxes and prescribed offerings these expenses made getting by in those days a struggle. Jews felt they had failed God and were once again being punished for not being faithful. That is part of the reason for extreme religiosity of the Pharisees and their demeaning attitude toward Jews who made no effort to keep all the laws of Moses. But they all did have one great hope, the Messiah.

Women in Jesus' day would pray to be the mother of the coming king, one who would oust the Romans and return Israel to the glory of the days of King David. The present king was Herod the Great, an Idumean who served at the pleasure of Rome. That was particularly distasteful to Jews, for the region of Idumea had been an enemy of Israel in the past. And yet, Herod embarked on some building programs that brought glory to the nation. One project in particular caused some Jews to side with Herod's rule. That was the restoration and expansion of the temple.

It was in this climate that the angel Gabriel came to Mary in the town of Nazareth. Nazareth was a town of descendants of David. She was betrothed to Joseph, which is like an engagement only more binding. To end a betrothal, there had to be a divorce. The angel's greeting caused her concern. *28 And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!"* Luke 1:28 The fact that she was troubled by that greeting shows she was spiritually mature. Other people who were addressed in a similar way ended up being asked by God to do some incredibly dangerous task.

Commented [PW1]: Hebrews 13:15 (ESV)

¹⁵ Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name.

Consider Gideon who was told he was a mighty warrior (Judges 6:12-13). If that angel who came to Mary was a deceptive spirit, he would flatter her (Genesis 3:5). Many false religions and cults began with the flattery of a deceptive spirit. We should be concerned if we hear a spirit tell us how special we are for the same reasons. The Apostle Paul warned about such evil angels (Galatians 1:8). Either you are about to be deceived by your prideful heart, or asked to do a dangerous and impossible task that only God can do through you.

Gabriel went on to explain and calm her concerns. ³⁰ *And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God."* ³¹ *And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus.* Luke 1:30-31 Most of the time angels appear to men, they have to tell the person not to fear (Daniel 10:19). Mary had found favor with God. The only way to find favor with God is to confess your sins and look to God to have mercy on you and forgive you (Proverbs 28:13). Mary was a humble woman but also a spiritually mature woman.

Gabriel told her that she would bear a son and that she was to call his name Jesus. Isaiah had predicted 700 years earlier that a son would be given to us, a son who would be called Everlasting Father and Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6). The name Jesus is from the Greek form of Joshua. You can find it all through the Old Testament, especially in the Psalms, translated as the word "salvation" (Psalm 9:14; 13:5). The implications are profound. Joshua led the Children of Israel into the Promised Land. Salvation usually referred to military victories over enemies. That is why the name Jesus was rarely given to those in the line of David. It would be like putting a target on their back and an expectation that would be impossible to live up to. I wonder how Mary felt when she heard the name. How would you feel if an angel asked you to name your child after Douglas McArthur or George Patton?

Gabriel continued, ³² *He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David,* ³³ *and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.* Luke 1:32-33 Mary would then have understood that the angel was speaking of more than just a military king, but the Messiah, the light to the nations of the world (Isaiah 9:2; 49:6). The Messiah was to be the son that was given to the world. He would reign on David's throne forever (Hebrews 1:8). His kingdom will never end (Daniel 7:14). The great honor that the women of Israel sought had come to lowly Mary, the wife of a carpenter, in the little town of Nazareth.

Mary asked the angel how that was possible since her marriage was not yet consummated. Gabriel told her that it would be a miraculous conception by the intervention of the Holy Spirit. He told her how her elderly cousin Elizabeth was with child. And then Gabriel quoted Scripture, a verse I want you to remember as we continue with this message. ³⁷ *For nothing will be impossible with God.* Luke 1:37

Commented [PW2]: Judges 6:12-13 (ESV)

¹² And the angel of the LORD appeared to him and said to him, "The LORD is with you, O mighty man of valor."
¹³ And Gideon said to him, "Please, sir, if the LORD is with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where are all his wonderful deeds that our fathers recounted to us, saying, 'Did not the LORD bring us up from Egypt?' But now the LORD has forsaken us and given us into the hand of Midian."

Commented [PW3]: Genesis 3:5 (ESV)

⁵ For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

Commented [PW4]: Galatians 1:8 (KJV)

⁸ But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed.

Commented [PW5]: Daniel 10:19 (ESV)

¹⁹ And he said, "O man greatly loved, fear not, peace be with you; be strong and of good courage." And as he spoke to me, I was strengthened and said, "Let my lord speak, for you have strengthened me."

Commented [PW6]: Proverbs 28:13 (ESV)

¹³ Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy.

Commented [PW7]: Isaiah 9:6 (ESV)

⁶ For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Commented [PW8]: Psalm 9:14 (ESV)

¹⁴ that I may recount all your praises, that in the gates of the daughter of Zion I may rejoice in your salvation.

Commented [PW9]: Psalm 13:5 (ESV)

⁵ But I have trusted in your steadfast love; my heart shall rejoice in your salvation.

Commented [PW10]: Isaiah 9:2 (ESV)

² The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone.

Commented [PW11]: Isaiah 49:6 (ESV)

⁶ he says: "It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth."

Commented [PW12]: Hebrews 1:8 (ESV)

⁸ But of the Son he says, "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, the scepter of uprightness is the scepter of your kingdom.

Commented [PW13]: Daniel 7:14 (ESV)

¹⁴ And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting

... [1]

Mary would have instantly recognized that this was the encouragement of God to Abraham and Sarah regarding the promise of a child in their old age. Just as God had done for Sarah, He had done for Elizabeth. The impossibility of Mary, a young virgin, having a child was not too hard for God either. **Neither is it impossible for Jesus to be formed in you and me. Nothing is impossible with God.**

Now listen to Mary's response. *³⁸ 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.* Luke 1:38 Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word. Mary submitted herself to God's will, probably with some fear and trepidation, knowing that others who claimed to be Messiah were executed by Rome.

I'm intrigued with the word "let." "Let it be to me according to your word." "Let" doesn't appear in the original language, and yet the implication is found in the tense of the verb that is used. Let brotherly love continue. Hebrews 13:1. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly. Colossians 3:16a Let it be to me according to your word. The word "let" seems to carry with it an act of the will. **To "let" in Scripture is to not hinder it or run from it but to embrace it.** Mary was not going to run from this somewhat frightening call on her life. She was embracing her calling. She believed what the angel declared. She may not have foreseen the great cost of seeing her son crucified until Simeon warned her in the temple, and even then it would have not been clear (Luke 2:35). I don't think she would have changed her mind even then, for her submission began with a declaration, "I am the Lord's servant!" Servants don't argue with their master.

Now let us consider the connection with Galatians 4:19. The Apostle Paul was concerned about the church in Galatia. They had received Paul some time before when he was having trouble with his eyes. They loved him and his message so much they would have given him their eyes if they could (Galatians 4:15). Then some legalists came and taught that they had to obey Jewish laws and follow rituals to be saved. Paul said they had previously found freedom to walk in the Spirit but were being convinced to lean on laws and rituals instead of the Spirit of God.

He said he felt like a mother in labor until Christ was formed in them. He was interceding before God that they might not fall into ritualistic worship but truly have the Spirit of Christ and the freedom He brings to have a personal relationship with God (Galatians 5:1). **It was as if they had a baby Jesus in the manger of their hearts.** You know, mangers weren't pretty places. They were stinky, soot blackened, caves where animals were sheltered from the weather. Our hearts are often similar. Jesus makes us right with God, but we have a lot of habits and patterns that need to be broken so we can live out what is within (Romans 7:18). **And yet, Christ wants to be formed in us, to make our hearts a place from which He might minister unhindered through our lives.** Of course I'm not speaking of us literally being a reincarnation of Christ, but that we embrace His life in us, mature spiritually so that Christ can be increasingly seen in us.

Commented [PW14]: Luke 2:35 (ESV)

³⁵ (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed."

Commented [PW15]: Galatians 4:15 (ESV)

¹⁵ What then has become of your blessedness? For I testify to you that, if possible, you would have gouged out your eyes and given them to me.

Commented [PW16]: Galatians 5:1 (ESV)

¹ For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

Commented [PW17]: Romans 7:18 (ESV)

¹⁸ For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out.

Can we say that we are the Lord's servant and ask God to let it be to us according to His Word? And what does His Word say to us? ¹ *So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy,* ² *complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.* ³ *Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.* ⁴ *Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.* ⁵ *Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus,* ⁶ *who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,* ⁷ *but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.* ⁸ *And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.*

Philippians 2:1-8 Allow me to restate what the Word says to those who know Jesus as their Savior: be in unity, have love for one another, be humble, esteem others, care for one another, be a servant of God, and humbly submit to whatever He calls you to do. That is the life of Jesus. These are the signs that we are maturing into Christ's likeness. It means we are letting Jesus be formed in us.

Do you see the similarity with Mary? Both Mary's response and Paul's exhortation declare we should be the Lord's servant. Both declare we should let Him have His way with our lives. Both demand humility and an embracing of God's will for our lives so the world can see Jesus. It's a bit frightening, but do we trust the Word from God regardless of what may come, knowing in the end it will be just as God has said? The promise to us is eternal life (John 3:16), the honor of God (John 12:26), heaven, and fellowship with Jesus forever in His perfect kingdom (John 14:3).

When Gabriel came to Mary, Mary had a choice. She could be one of the most blessed women to ever have lived, though her heart would break in the process, or she could have declined the honor and perhaps lived in relative peace until her death. But as a spiritual person who had submitted her life to God, the choice was made long before Gabriel appeared to her. She was God's servant. Have you made the choice? **Are you God's servant come what may? Do you believe His Word to you?** Will you let Him make your heart a Bethlehem, and then move on to letting Jesus be formed in you? Will you let Him grow up in you, so to speak? Will you choose to embrace Christlikeness, denying yourself to humbly walk where God would lead day by day? Will you embrace His will for your life?

The change is instantaneous. One moment she was a woman like any other in Nazareth. The next moment she was a vessel of the Son of God. The same is true when we surrender to Christ as His servant. One moment we are an ordinary person of the world. The next moment we are a servant of the living God, an instrument of the Holy Spirit, empowered to be free from the chains of sinful habits, and an ambassador of God to a lost world.

Commented [PW18]: John 3:16 (ESV)
¹⁶ "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

Commented [PW19]: John 12:26 (ESV)
²⁶ If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him.

Commented [PW20]: John 14:3 (ESV)
³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.

If you have already embraced that offer, are you letting the life of Christ increasingly transform how you think and respond to life each day. Are you increasing in love for others, in humility, in willingness to serve? Jesus didn't stay a baby in the manger, He increased in wisdom and stature and found favor with God and man (Luke 2:52). We are to grow and mature too.

Commented [PW21]: Luke 2:52 (ESV)

⁵² And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.

I think we too often get to a place in our relationship with the Lord that we think is good enough, enough sacrifice, enough love, enough commitment. We become like those Galatians, content with rituals and obeying rules. We set aside a living relationship because it is a little too demanding. It's like being on call 24/7 (John 3:8). But that is the life of Christ and the path to blessing. That is fellowship with Jesus and walking in the Spirit. That is a life of peace and inner joy regardless of what happens to the world and our present circumstances. It's full surrender as a servant of the Lord. Could you be in better hands?

Commented [PW22]: John 3:8 (ESV)

⁸ The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."

I'd like to close with us considering making Mary's declaration. I don't want you to do so lightly. A vow to God is a serious thing (Psalm 50:14). Let's bow our heads and silently consider if we are willing to be the Lord's servant and embrace what His Word has declared for our lives. I'm going to give you a moment and then I'll quote what Mary said. If you are ready and willing, say it in your heart after me. If you aren't ready. That's ok. God knows your heart. Instead, pray that God would help you become ready to do His will.

Commented [PW23]: Psalm 50:14 (NIV)

¹⁴ Sacrifice thank offerings to God, fulfill your vows to the Most High,

"I am the Lord's servant. Let it be to me according to your word."

May God richly bless you and your family as you celebrate the Immanuel, God with us. Unto us a child has been born. Unto us a Son has been given. That is cause for a most Merry Christmas. Amen!

Questions

- 1 What was Israel like in Jesus' day?
- 2 Why would Mary be troubled at the angel's greeting?
- 3 Why the name of Jesus?
- 4 How did Gabriel declare the baby would be Messiah?
- 5 What verse did Gabriel quote and why?
- 6 How did Mary respond?
- 7 What does the word "let" imply?
- 8 What does the Word say to us?
- 9 Describe the similarity of the call to Mary and to us.
- 10 Describe the overnight change and the process.

Daniel 7:14 (ESV)

¹⁴ And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.