

How to Be Used by God

Series: Encountering Jesus (through the Gospel of Luke)
Brad Bailey – Dec. 9, 2018

Luke 1:26-27

In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, ²⁷ to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary.

1. Don't expect God's work will _____ our expectations.

Luke 1:28-30

The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you." ²⁹ Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. ³⁰ But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God.

2. Move beyond responding in _____ to that of _____.

Luke 1:31-35

You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. 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, ³³ and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end." ³⁴ "How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?" 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.

3. Trust in _____ to work beyond natural dynamics.

Luke 1:36-37

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. ³⁷ For nothing is impossible with God."

4. Realize that there are _____ in whom we can find confirmation and encouragement.

Luke 1:38

"I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May it be to me as you have said." Then the angel left her.

5. Embrace our truest identity... a _____.

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Intro

Last Sunday... was the **start of launching into a new season.**

Launching into the **Gospel of Luke**... **Encountering Jesus**

Launching into **Advent season**...**Luke offers us what we could call the Christmas Prequel**

To appreciate what was at hand...Illus: **InSight Mission to Mars**...

Most don't make it... Launched last May...travelled for **6 months**...**300 Million**

miles...entering Mars atmosphere at 12,800 MH... heat shield reaches 2700 degrees F.

As it descends... it loses communication in the final 7 minutes... **7 minutes of Terror**... Years of work... \$ 870M... and silence waiting... **if they hear nothing... it'd done.**

> So it was with human life. A people called...final prophet... then **400 years** of silence...broken.

This is what Advent season is about.

God comes to Zechariah...and announces that he and his wife Elizabeth will bear a son ... who will be the one who prepares the way. They are to name him John...and he will be the one who God foretold would be a prophet who prepares the way for the coming of the Messiah... the Savior of the world.

Today we pick up with God coming to the one who would bear that Savior.

But let me stop and ask us a simple question.

Do you remember the story in which God forced his will upon another?

Do you remember the incident in which God came and indwelt a person without their desire?

No. Because it is never told.

He may have used the hardened hearts of various people to play out his work...but no where does God simply take control of someone. [1]

That may give us comfort... but it should also help us realize that... our role...is affected by our will. So we do well to consider...

Do we want God to work with us?

And if so...to realize...

Our role will be affected by our response.

Christmas is about what God has done. But **what God did**... **involved human response**. There is no Christmas that does not involve the process by which God comes to people and their response.

And so it is that **when God comes to Mary**... **we discover how to be used by God.**

Luke begins...

Luke 1:26-27

In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, ²⁷ to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary.

I know many of us may have heard these words many times. We'd be wise not to let them lose their **wonder...** their **wow...** their **"what?"**

Luke as a doctor had explained that he has sought to get the facts and write an orderly account...and so at the very start we get the details in the timing. He begins: "In the sixth month..." that is, the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy.

"God sent **the angel** Gabriel... to Nazareth, a town in Galilee"

An angel. Many today may dismiss such a figure as being part of some ancient idea...that is outdated. But in fact today more people believe in angels today than in ancient time...and more claim to have experiences with angels... sometimes as more of a personal support figure...sometimes more like a personal "pet." But here we hear of the rare time in which God sent a messenger.

Where did he send this great messenger?...

Not Jerusalem. Not Jericho. **to Nazareth, a town in Galilee. This is a little hill town in the mountains. In this area of the Middle East...it is** like telling us God chose to come be born through one in... Lompoc... Barstow ... Bakersfield... Mohave.

What would we think? We **all know** that the **important** things in life... **NY...LA....**so it's **just doesn't fit.**

And the recipient? A virgin named Mary...pledged to a man named Joseph.

Mary was **pledged to be married to Joseph...** another word used is **"betrothed."** It is similar to being engaged...but more binding. It was generally a 6 to 12 month period before the wedding...in which they were often referred to as husband and wife...and could only be separated by divorce. And they were not to have sexual intimacy...as such, Mary was a virgin. So it's rather untimely to become pregnant. It's socially scandalous. [1b]

The work of God appears to be...

Wrong place... wrong people... wrong timing.

So the first thing we learn about How to be Used by God

1. Don't expect God's work will fit our expectations.

Of course this is what has long been the wonder of the events in the Christmas story.

Perhaps no where is it as amazing as here in God entering humankind.

But it Is always the way of God.

We develop lots of ideas about the way things are supposed to be... what is usual... what we can expect. **We expect our life stories to play out** according to **what others have defined... what we want...** what we are **comfortable with**.

How many of us assume that our lives are not part of and grand story...of any work of eternal meaning. We may dream about it...live vicariously through some drama...but our lives feel routine... mundane.

But God is NOT going to be bound by our narrow comfort and expectations.

If we want to be used by God... we have to understand that God's work will not always fit our expectations.

We will have to look at Mary...and learn as she did...that the work of God ...

May not be easy for others to understand.

May be untimely.

May bring hardship... and heartache.

Luke continues...

Luke 1:28-30

The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you." ²⁹ Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. ³⁰ But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God.

We are not told the where or when of this encounter. Perhaps out amidst her doing chores nearby the home.

We are not told much regarding appearance.

What we do know...is that her initial reaction is fear.

"Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be."

She's **"greatly troubled"**.. **afraid**...and we can **imagine lots of reasons** why. A presence that invades space... a presence that says they were SENT by God...a presence that calls her my name ...and seems to know her.

What might such an encounter raise in any of us? I think at our core...most would fear: Is this a **confrontation**... in which her life **will be judged?**

If confronted by God...any of us may wonder: **Is He for me or against me?**

Do I face **judgement**...or is there **hope of help?**

So the angel speaks to the most fundamental fear... and **tells Mary** not to be afraid...for **she is favored**.

This idea of Mary being favored – has led to **venerating her**... with many ideas. In the history of the church Mary has often **been portrayed** as a kind of **misty, other-worldly figure**. If you

look at some of the great paintings of Mary, they make her look **so peaceful and beatific** that you almost forget she was a **real person**.

> **That's a shame** because Luke makes it clear that she was very real.

Do you what the Bible has to say about why God chose her?

Nothing. Nothing suggests that she was fundamentally different from any quality that might be found in any of us. There's not a single word describing Mary's virtues or her piety. Nor any word to explain why God might have chosen her. The issue is not Mary's piety, beauty, or worthiness, but **simply God's favor**. Which is why Gabriel comes with the news, Greetings, you who are highly favored.

This isn't about her qualities...but about God's purposes... and the favor is being included.
[1c]

The truth is that for Mary to move forward... she had to move beyond fear. The angel is not dismissing a natural fear...and we should never lose a healthy reverence.

But we will never serve the grace of God by hiding in fear.

The **second thing** Mary teaches us about **How to be Used by God...**

2. Move beyond responding in fear to that of favor.

Many of us are still a bit in hiding mode. We are not really sure we want God to see us. It feels a little **safer** there.

The **ultimate piety** is not the **false humility** that refuses to be used by God... but rather the ultimate piety is that which feels plenty of unworthiness...but **does not hide**.

It is no small thing to be regarded, to be favored, especially when you are exceedingly aware that you should not be.

We **all live with veils that we think separate us from God**. There are veils of **fear** and **shame**...as well as individualism. Often our veils are the life we have created for ourselves.

God looks through our veils to see the "favored one" even when we cannot see ourselves that way. God's words of possibility speak across our veils announcing that God is with us and that we will conceive within us God's own life. God is always stepping through our veils to choose us as God's dwelling place. (Ft Mike)

God is calling us each out... out from fear...into living in the work of his favor.

All who receive Christ... join the invitation be **join God's favor**. (Eph 1:5-6) And to know like Mary, that **God is with is**. (Matthew 28:20)

Luke continues...

Luke 1:31-35

*You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus.
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, 33 and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever;
his kingdom will never end." 34 "How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a
virgin?" 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.*

Here the figure entering the world is presented. Let's take a moment to not miss what is told of who is coming into the world.

- **The fitting name is to be "Jesus"...**

The name Jesus is a modern-day descendant of the Hebrew name Yeshua, which is based on the Semitic root y-š-ṣ (Hebrew: ישוע), meaning "to deliver; to rescue." **He is THE Yeshua... the savior...the Savior.**

- **He rules a KINGDOM....notive we're told...** he will rule... begiven the **throne** of David... **reign**... for it will be his **kingdom**. The people longed for the shalom of peace... when there is complete peace and all is right... symbolized in King David...but never fully realized. He will fulfill what they only idealized.
- **His reign...Everlasting...** reign **forever**...his kingdom **will never end**.
- **Son of the Most High...and Son of God** – for he will have **no earthly Father**... God will be the source... God chose to be conceived in the womb of a virgin so that the fatherhood of this child would be absolutely unique — **he is the Son of God, not the son of Joseph**. He has a divine Father, not a biological human father. (Will expound that in a bit.)

In the midst of this...Mary responds with a question.

"How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"

What we think of **major miracles** are **common place in Scripture**. But actually...they may be **given uncommon attention** because they are **not** common to God's general order in life. Mary knows what is normally possible and what is not.

So Mary is naturally thinking "virgin" and "birth" don't usually go together.

Only when a man and woman are united in sexual union is a life created. She has had no such sexual relationship.

And the **angel gladly explains** it will be the very Spirit of God at work. [2]

The work of God's Spirit is **so easily forgotten...** because it is **unseen**.

- But it is that Spirit which **created life**.
- That Spirit which **gives birth to this life**.
- And that Spirit which **creates new life in us... and works in us**.

Mary had to take that in.

Perhaps it sounded intimidating. Intimate. Beyond her control.

Perhaps it does to us as well.

The **third thing** Mary teaches us about **How to be Used by God...**

3. Trust in God's Spirit to work beyond natural dynamics.

We all will wonder...how am I suppose to be used by God? Not by my limited nature. I can do some good things...but I am only one person...only bear so much influence?

God not only agrees...**Jesus told his own disciples** not to go out into the world until the Holy Spirit came and empowered them. **That Spirit will fill them...**with God's desires... and confidence...and guide them.

No doubt this is a lot for Mary to take in.
There is no way she can understand how all this is possible.
The angel communicates something to help her.

Luke continues...

Luke 1:36-37

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. ³⁷ For nothing is impossible with God."

God knows it is **hard to join a reality no one else shares.**

So he **lets her know...**you are **part of a larger story...** united with all who join the cast.

Very interesting about Elizabeth and Mary...is the way in which they would both share something in common...yet also in notably different ways.

Elizabeth... we are told is her relative...and almost certainly a cousin...though perhaps not a close cousin. So they have some shared culture and history. [3]

They have each been approached with the impossible.

But there are differences... Elizabeth is likely 70 years old... led a barren life... and Mary is likely around 15 years old...hasn't even begin her marriage.

These are differences that they could feel limit the other.

But as we will see next week... Mary heads to Elizabeth...and the there find conformation and encouragement.

A fourth **thing** we learn about **How to be Used by God...**

4. Realize that there are others in whom we can find confirmation and encouragement.

If we want God to use us...we will wonder how...and God will remind us... there are others... who share this story.

We **may think** they are **different in generation...** or **any number of ways.** But we will find that **they share something vital...**they share **the reality of God at work.**

If we want to be used by God...we will find that there is a **deeply personal dimension...** but there is also a **shared dimension.** on one level it is **ultimately personal...**but **never entirely.** We were created as **individuals...**but **never to be isolated.**

Finally... we come to Mary's response.

Luke 1:38

"I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May it be to me as you have said." Then the angel left her.

What a statement. It may be the **most defining statement** at the **heart of the events we call Christmas.**

Between "How can this be?" and "Let it be" the impossible becomes a reality, the never before heard of will forever be spoken of, and the veil between divinity and humanity has fallen.

With these words... **we gain two great gifts.**

With these words **the way is made for God to enter our world.**

With these words **God the Son...who will bear the name Jesus.. comes as savior.**

This is the Incarnation... which means the becoming of flesh... God became flesh.

This is not deity indwelling flesh...but deity becoming flesh. [4]

As John described in his Gospel.

John 1:14 (CEV)

The Word became a human being and lived here with us. We saw his true glory, the glory of the only Son of the Father. From him all the kindness and all the truth of God have come down to us.

There would be **no human father**... and no life who was given it's own independent spirit. God's own Spirit would beget God the Son into human nature... but without the seed of sinful nature.

A number of years ago **Larry King** was asked who he **would most like to have interviewed across history.** One of those he named was Jesus Christ. **When questioned** as to **what he would have asked Him,** King said,

"I would like to ask Him if He was indeed virgin born, because the answer to that question would define history."

This caught people a little off guard. To even ponder that Jesus would be the most significant person to interview in human history... stirring but not surprising. But what was surprising is his focus on the significance of his virgin birth defining history. **Many might have considered that secondary** to so much about his life and death and resurrection. But it is the process by which God begets a life by His own Spirit which sets Jesus the Christ apart.

It is this process by which **God dwells in human flesh.**

It is this process by which **our Savior shares human nature** without being rooted in nature of sin... and shame...and separation.

It is this process by which **he could come as the innocent and take the consequences** of our sin upon himself... to set us free.

And so those words... "Let it be as you have said"... brings our savior.

And with those words comes also comes the process by which God can use any of our lives.

For Mary becomes a model of how to receive the work of God in any life.

For God who is Spirit and became flesh would soon come to **indwell flesh...** to work within us.

**With these words... we see the way of God working in every life that receives him.
For God had us in mind.**

He had said that he would send a savior...and that he would **later pour out his Spirit** into the very inner life of those who receive Him.

And so **Jesus said**, he would ascend but now **send the Holy Spirit** to carry on his life WITHIN us.

This is the indwelling of God's Spirit.

God who is spirit, now comes to dwell within us.

In this exchange...God declares that humanity is not hopeless. He is returning to that which he created in his image. [5]

And in this exchange Mary offers her humanity back to God.

She responds out of a recognition of who she is:

"I am the Lord's servant."

What follows flows from this identity.

I wonder what we hear. I **wonder if we think** these words are beautiful but more of the sweet submission of a young girl.

The truth is that **Mary was declaring our truest nature.** We were created as God's servants.

God's servants. And when we cease to be His servants...we will a million masters. We will serve that which belies our true dignity.

The final thing which Mary teaches us in being used by God...

5. Embrace our truest identity... a servant of God.

Most of us will spend a lot of life trying to figure out who we are. We may think we are who our parents say we are...who are friends say we are... spouses say we are. We may like the idea that "we are our own person"...whatever that means. The truth is that a creature is who they are when in cohesion with their Creator.

Closing Prayer

Song of Response: [Have It All \(Official Lyric Video\) - Brian Johnson | Have It All](#)

Resources: Fr. Mike (Michael K. Marsh) - Learning to Say Yes – A Sermon on the Annunciation, Luke 1:26-38, Advent 4B;
<https://interruptingthesilence.com/2011/12/19/learning-to-say-yes-a-sermon-on-the-annunciation-luke-126-38-advent-4b/>; John Piper messages, “The Virgin Birth of the Son of God” and “The Child to Be Born Will Be Called Holy — the Son of God”

Notes:

1. No where does the Bible describe God forcing his way upon another. The bible does depict that God’s ways...which include the natural and moral order are a force one must reckon with. The Bible depicts that God’s sovereign plans may ultimately rule ...but not with any sense that a specific demand is forced upon another. The Bible depicts that the Holy Spirit leads us...but that leading is never depicted as absolute control. In fact it is clear it is an influence which one can and will be able to defy. Very clearly the Bible described human life as most notably in a position of responsibility for it’s response and choice. Faith is by nature that which requires believing God rewards (Hebrews 11:6.) And those who lead in God’s way... are not to do so by compulsion or domination (1 Peter 5:1-3.)

1b. John Piper expounds on Mary’s challenge eloquently: “Let’s not underestimate what it cost Mary to say Yes to God. From that moment on, she faced the incredulity of her friends (“Oh Mary, how could expect us to believe such a bizarre story?”), the scurrilous gossip of the neighborhood (“Did you hear about Mary? I guess Joseph finally got lucky.”) and the whispers of promiscuity that have lasted 2,000 years. Mary knew—or would soon realize—that saying Yes to God meant misunderstanding and public shame. Gone was her pure reputation and with it her dreams of a quiet, happy life in Nazareth. In the future, her life would at times be happy but it would never again be quiet. Since we know the end of the story we may tend to overlook the possibility of divorce. But Mary had no way of knowing how Joseph would respond to her pregnancy. Would he blow his top and walk out on her? Would he humiliate her publicly? Would he divorce her? As the story turned out, Mary had every reason to worry about Joseph. He didn’t blow his top or try to humiliate her, but he did intend to divorce her. Only an angel’s intervention kept that from happening. That, too, was on Mary’s mind. By saying Yes she risked losing the man she loved. Her whole future was on the line. And all these things were just the beginning. Mary could not know what the future would hold. Before it was all over, she would experience heartache, opposition, slander, confusion, anguish, despair and loneliness. In the end she would face the greatest pain a mother can endure when she would watch her son die on a cross.”

1c. To us this reference to being “favored” may sound a little vague...but many suggest that Mary knew what is happening here. Many Jewish women would pray that they would be the

mother of the Messiah. Mary knows that God is fulfilling a promise which has been waited on for centuries.

2. The Old Testament prophecies speak both of the virgin birth and deity of the Messiah, Lord Jesus Christ. (Source of the following was lost.)

1. (His Virgin Birth) Genesis 3:15 “And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel.”

• Back in the Garden of Eden, God promised that the seed of the woman would crush the serpent's head (Genesis 3:15). Throughout the Old Testament, posterity is kept track of through the man or the couple. But in Genesis 3:15 the promise stands alone because it emphasizes that the Messiah would be the seed of the woman ALONE, at least apart from a man. This is the first reference to the virgin birth of the Messiah.

2. (His Virgin Birth) Isaiah 7:14 “Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel. (Hebrew - *almah* Greek – *parthenos* – Matthew 1:23)

3. (His Deity and Virgin Birth) Isaiah 9:6 “For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”

4. (Pre-Incarnate Existence and Deity) Micah 5:2 "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times."

3. According to Luke 1:36, Elizabeth was related to Mary. The word used in the Greek original to describe their kinship is *suggenes*, a blood relative. Traditionally, they are believed to have been cousins. St. Hippolytus of Rome affirmed that Mary's mother (Saint Anne) and Elizabeth's mother (Sobe) were sisters. - Elizabeth Catholic Encyclopedia. Retrieved February 18, 2008

And as Apologetics Press article notes...

First, the King James translation of the term *syngenis* as “cousin” (Luke 1:36) is unwarranted and somewhat misleading to those who normally interpret the word to mean “first cousin.” The Greek term *syngenis* simply means “relative” (NKJV, NASB, NIV) or “kinswoman” (ASV, RSV). It is “a general term, meaning ‘of the same family’” (Vincent, 1997). Thus, Mary and Elizabeth may have been first cousins, or they may have been fourth cousins. All we know for sure is that they were kin.

Second, Mary and Elizabeth could have been from different tribes and still have been first cousins. It may be that their mothers were sisters. Their mothers could have been from the tribe of Judah or Levi. As commentator Matthew Henry noted: “Though Elisabeth was, on the father’s side, of the daughters of Aaron (v. 5), yet on the mother’s side she might be of the house of David, for those two families often intermarried, as an earnest of the uniting of the royalty and the priesthood of the Messiah” (1997).

However Mary and Elizabeth were related, tribal heritage among the descendants of Jacob was passed down through fathers, not mothers (cf. Ruth 4:18-22); children were always of their father’s tribe, not their mother’s. Thus, Elizabeth and Mary were descendants of Aaron and David, respectively, by way of their fathers’ ancestry, and not necessarily of their mothers’.

<http://apologeticspress.org/apcontent.aspx?category=11&article=2532>

4. It is important to note that God incarnate is distinct from God indwelling. (The following is from source now missing)

All men have their own personal God-given spirit (for life) (Numbers 16:22; 27:16; Job 32:8; 1 Corinthians 6:20; Ecclesiastes 12:7, etc.) but can receive God's Holy Spirit (called Holy Ghost) indwelling them at the same time (1 Corinthians 3:16; 1 Thessalonians 4:8). What specific portion of God's spirit dwells in man is determined by God, but we certainly do not literally consume or confine all of God himself within the limited confines of the human body. God is not controlling humans as robots (although he could) but his Spirit influences our mind, heals our bodies, gives us spiritual gifts, etc. (1 Corinthians 12:4,11; 2 Peter 1:20,21) We as humans have independent free will to obey and serve God as did Jesus. Unlike man's indwelling Spirit of God, an incarnation is claimed to be the visible flesh covering or body, which solely belongs to the entity (a god) alone.

As surprising as it may sound to some, the thing that makes the Incarnation the Incarnation is not that deity indwelt flesh, but that deity (viz., the divine Logos) became flesh (i.e., human—viz., Jesus of Nazareth). John does not say the Logos entered into a man or dwelt in a man or filled a man. Instead, he says He became a man.

Donald Macleod: “The virgin birth is posted on guard at the door of the mystery of Christmas; and none of us must think of hurrying past it. It stands on the threshold of the New Testament, blatantly supernatural, defying our rationalism, informing us that all that follows belongs to the same order as itself and that if we find it offensive there is no point in proceeding further.”

5. Father Michael Marsh perhaps stretched the boundary here in stating:

“Mary's gift to God is her humanity and through her our humanity. The incarnation of God in Jesus is not, however, limited to Mary. It is an affirmation of God's creation and the goodness of humanity. God chooses human flesh, not a cedar house, as the place of God's dwelling. Each one of us can stand as the “favored one,” the one with whom God is. Each of us is called to grow up to be God-bearers, to carry the life of God within our own humanity.

Mary is a part of us. She is that part of us that is womb-like, the part that gives birth to Christ in our world.”