

Mary's "Yes" Luke 1:26-38

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Back in the time when Ronald Reagan was President, Mrs. Reagan had an anti-drug campaign with a very simple slogan: "Just Say NO!" The idea was that we have a choice even when it comes to drug use.

This morning we are going to look at the story of Mary. We can summarize her story with the slogan, "Just Say Yes." We must choose to do what God commands us to do.

Many people believe Mary was barely a teenager. As we remarked last week, she was engaged to be married to Joseph, very possibly in an arranged marriage. She lived in the town of Nazareth. The city resided almost midway between the Mediterranean Sea and the Sea of Galilee. Most scholars believe the town probably was between 400-600 people.

To put this in perspective, La Harpe is listed at 1400 people (which may be generous). Those who live here know many of the people in town. We also know that news travels at the speed of light in La Harpe. . . especially bad news.

When I had been in La Harpe for a few years, people started to ask when I would be moving on. (That was a little unnerving!) I asked them why they thought I would be moving, and their response was, "Any good Pastor never stays very long." I gratefully acknowledged the compliment and then asked, "Don't you think La Harpe deserves a good Pastor?" It was as if it was a brand-new idea! That is what it must have felt like when the angel appeared to Mary. The first thought might have been, "Is it possible that you got the address wrong? Nothing like this happens to people who live in Nazareth."

We don't know the circumstances of the angel Gabriel's visit. Was Mary busy working in the home? Was it in the evening? Was she awakened from sleep? Was it, like Joseph, a dream? We don't know. All we know is what the angel said,

²⁶In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a village in Galilee, ²⁷to a virgin named Mary. She was engaged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of King David. ²⁸Gabriel appeared to her and said, "Greetings, favored woman! The Lord is with you!"

²⁹Confused and disturbed, Mary tried to think what the angel could mean. ³⁰"Don't be afraid, Mary," the angel told her, "for you have found favor with God! ³¹You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. ³²He will be very great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David. ³³And he will reign over Israel forever; his Kingdom will never end!"

³⁴Mary asked the angel, "But how can this happen? I am a virgin."

³⁵The angel replied, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the baby to be born will be holy, and he will be called the Son of God.

³⁶ What's more, your relative Elizabeth has become pregnant in her old age! People used to say she was barren, but she has conceived a son and is now in her sixth month. ³⁷ For the word of God will never fail."

³⁸ Mary responded, "I am the Lord's servant. May everything you have said about me come true." And then the angel left her.

The Ask

The account starts with "in the sixth month." This is a continuation from the previous story about Zechariah and Elizabeth, who were relatives of Mary and soon to be the parents of John the Baptist. Elizabeth was well past child-bearing age. Zechariah and Elizabeth had made peace with this reality. An angel appeared to Zechariah while was on duty in the Temple and told him the long wait for a child was over. In other words, "Surprise!"

Now, six months later the same angel, Gabriel, came to see Mary. What the angel says is significant. In fact, it may sound very familiar if we quote the King James Version,

Hail, *thou that art* highly favoured, the Lord *is* with thee: blessed *art* thou among women.

Some from a Catholic background might recognize this as part of the Rosary better known as the "Hail Mary."

Mary is told she will conceive and give birth to a son. Mary then asked a very logical question: "How can this happen since I am a virgin?" Mary was not doubting, she was clarifying. We all understand that there are certain natural laws that govern the world. One of those laws is that you need a man and a woman to produce a child. We think of natural laws as the things that always happen.

What the angel says to Mary is this: natural laws are still under God's Sovereign Control. Natural laws are the way God *usually* governs His creation. However, the laws of nature are completely under God's control and can be transcended anytime He chooses to do so! He can cause the sun to stand still; He can make a shadow go backwards; He can enable a woman long past menopause to have a baby; and He can impregnate Mary without a man.

The angel knew this was hard for Mary to comprehend which is why he pointed to the pregnancy of Aunt Elizabeth, who, long past menopause, was now pregnant. God is patient with Mary, and she does not disappoint. . . Mary says she is willing to serve in whatever way the Lord should choose. She says "Yes."

Don't miss the risk that Mary was taking.

- She could be divorced by Joseph, exposing her family to embarrassment.
- She could be executed as one who was unfaithful to her betrothed.

- She could forfeit any opportunity for future marriage.
- She would be talked about in town.

All of these things would have economic consequences both for her and her family. Yet, Mary said “Yes.” Look carefully at what Mary did.

The Response

She clarified. As I said, Mary does not just rush off and say, “OK, let’s go.” She made sure she understood what it was that God was asking of her. She made sure she was hearing God correctly.

Sadly, I have met people who were convinced God was telling them to do something and then they went ahead without making sure they understood what exactly God wanted them to do. We can do this often with the promises of God. We read a verse in the Bible, and we interpret it as God giving us specific promises or instructions. (Think about people who engage in horrible acts of violence and say they felt God told them to do that particular act).

It is much too easy to take a Bible verse out of context and apply it in a way that we would like the promise applied! In effect we are twisting the Bible to say what we want it to say! We must always examine the wider context of a verse. If it is a promise, who is the promise made to? Is it to all believers? Is it to Israel? Is it to the church at large? Or is it a promise to a particular Biblical character?

Imagine you read that I was busy buying Christmas Gifts. Let’s say you took that statement and concluded that I was buying Christmas gifts for you! You say you are claiming the truth that I declared. You tell everyone that I am shopping for you. And here is what is going to happen . . . you are going to be really disappointed on Christmas morning! It would have been best to ask, “For whom am I buying Christmas gifts?” “What are the limits of the statement?”

When Zechariah was told that his wife was going to have a baby, Zechariah appears to have doubted God. As a result, he was unable to speak until John was named in the temple following his birth. Mary is not doubting . . . she is clarifying. She wants to make sure that she understands what God is calling her to do. That is wisdom. We must show that same kind of diligence when we feel God is calling us to some task or ministry. God will not call us to something that requires us to violate another clear command of Scripture. If it seems there is a contradiction, we must stop and examine carefully.

She Magnified the Lord. The great declaration, known as the Magnificat is found later in the chapter,

My soul glorifies the Lord
⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
⁴⁸ for he has been mindful

of the humble state of his servant.
 From now on all generations will call me blessed,
⁴⁹ for the Mighty One has done great things for me—
 holy is his name.
⁵⁰ His mercy extends to those who fear him,
 from generation to generation.
⁵¹ He has performed mighty deeds with his arm;
 he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.
⁵² He has brought down rulers from their thrones
 but has lifted up the humble.
⁵³ He has filled the hungry with good things
 but has sent the rich away empty.
⁵⁴ He has helped his servant Israel,
 remembering to be merciful
⁵⁵ to Abraham and his descendants forever,
 just as he promised our ancestors.”

Mary could have fretted; she could have spent all her time afraid of what might be. Instead, she focused on the goodness of God . . . not just in choosing her . . . but also for His faithfulness throughout history. She focused on how BIG God was . . . she set her mind on what it was possible for God to do, rather than on what seemed impossible. Mary saw the adventure of faith. She celebrated the goodness of God.

She kept her Focus. Mary was able to say yes to God because she focused on His goodness and character rather than on her weakness. She focused on God’s graciousness rather than on the potential rumble from the people around her. Mary was able to say “Yes” in the midst of all the uncertainty, because she refused to take her eyes off of the Lord. It was HIS plan, not hers. She trusted Him. If He was the One asking, there was no question that she would trust Him.

Mary’s Place in the Church

Before we look at some applications from Mary’s story I think it is important to note that Catholics and Protestants (those who are NOT Catholic) differ on the role Mary should play in the church and in redemption itself. Protestants say the Catholic Church has elevated Mary to a dangerous place. I don’t want to sound like I am Catholic bashing; because I am not. I do think it is helpful to know what Catholic Doctrine teaches. There are four doctrines the Catholic Church affirms about Mary that we do embrace because we do not see any Biblical basis for these doctrines.

1. The doctrine of the **perpetual virginity of Mary** was declared in 553 AD. This doctrine says Mary was a virgin and stayed a virgin throughout her life! In other words, Joseph and Mary NEVER consummated their marriage.
2. The **Immaculate Conception** –most protestants think this doctrine refers to the birth of Jesus. That is not what it refers to. In 1854 Pope Pious IX declared that Mary was born

sinless so the stain of her sin did not get passed on to Jesus. The Immaculate conception is about Mary's conception, not Jesus'. This sets up the teaching that Mary was sinless and capable of being the Mother of God.

3. **The Assumption of Mary.** In 1950 Pope Pious XII declared Mary did not die but was taken up into Heaven in bodily form (Like Enoch and Elijah).
4. Mary is referred to as the **Queen of Heaven.** Pope Pious XII also in 1954 declared Mary to be the Queen of Heaven. To accurately understand this, let me quote from The New Catholic Answer Book,

"If Solomon honored Bathsheba so highly as his queen Mother, how much more must Jesus honor Mary as his own? How much more exalted must be the woman – however lowly her original state—who bore the Son of God, Sovereign of the Universe? No doubt her throne too is at the right hand of her Son's throne in heaven. And no doubt, just as Solomon was eager to grant his mother's requests, so Jesus gladly responds to her intercession for his subjects." (New Catholic Answer Book E-4)

This is the reason Catholics in the "Hail Mary" ask Mary to intercede for them. We would point to the passage that says, "There is only one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus." (1 Tim. 2:5)

Let me point out that though these are the official teachings of the Catholic church that doesn't mean every Catholic believes these things. It is the same with a person in a Protestant church. People are not always fully informed as to what their church or faith believes.

Where is God Asking YOU to Say Yes

Let's take a personal turn here. If God was calling you to some "adventure" and asked you to say, "Yes," would you? I believe there are areas where God does call us to say "Yes."

First, **He calls us to say yes to Christ as Savior and as Lord.** In other words He wants us to agree that we are sin-addicted people who apart from Gods' leading would never choose Him. Then we must say, "Yes, I believe Jesus died in my place, for my sin, and is the only way for me to be forgiven." He asks us to say yes to His position in our lives. He wants us to follow Him. If we are unwilling to follow, we have not really trusted Him as Savior. And we cannot follow apart from Him being our Savior.

This is the most important question of life: Have you said Yes to His command that you repent and turn to Him?

Second, **He calls us to live holy lives.** In 1 Thessalonians 4:3, we read these words,

God's will is for you to be holy, so stay away from all sexual sin.

Many people say they don't know God's will for their lives. This verse answers that confusion! God's will is for you to be holy. God wants us to be set apart, to be different from the rest of the world. He wants us to live our lives as if they were an offering to God. He wants us to say "Yes" to His direction. Let me state this clearly, God wants us to live by what He has told us to do in the Word of God.

Third, **God asks to say "Yes" to His command to "go into the world and preach the gospel, making disciples of all men."** He does not want us to be tight-lipped about our faith. God wants us to love others as He does. He wants us to see their value. He also wants us to understand that people who do not come to faith in Christ CANNOT be saved. For these people, this really is a matter of life and death.

If you saw someone drowning, would you look around to see who was going to try to save this person or would you look for some means to help them yourselves. You could throw them a life preserver, you could call for help, you could try to reach them, and if you had the training, you could dive in and try to save them.

Non-believers are drowning in their sin. Your unsaved friends and family members are in deep trouble, and they don't even know it. They desperately need someone to tell them they are lost apart from faith in Christ. God wants you and me to do so.

You may not be able to present the gospel in great detail. You may be uncomfortable talking to others. You may not be able to answer all the questions others may ask, but that doesn't mean you shouldn't do what you CAN do. It is important to learn how to explain the gospel. What does it mean to be "saved?" We to know how to present these truths to our friends and family.

There are other ways to share your faith: you can buy gifts that point people to Jesus. You can have a Bible Study with people. You can pray for someone. You can encourage people to watch our online service or offer to pick them up for worship. You can share Christian music or a book you found particularly helpful. Be creative and be intentional. Do what you can.

Finally, **God may ask you to say yes to some special situation.**

- You may be called to endure illness for a season. Embrace it as an opportunity!
- You may have a child that takes extra care . . . say "Yes" and love that child with the love of Christ.
- You may have a gift or talent that can benefit another . . . say yes and seek to honor the Lord in the use of that gift.

Mary did not have the answer to every question. She did not feel qualified. However, if you asked Mary if she would do what she did again (knowing the heartache she would know), I am sure she would say: I will do anything the Lord asks because He is on our side, both now and forever. Joy and peace are available to everyone. Endurance in hard times is available to anyone. The only thing you need to do is to "Just Say Yes!"