



gracefellowship

Series: Journey to Christmas
Date: December 4, 2022

Title: Begin with "Yes!"
Passage: Luke 1:26-38

Advent Reading: Faith (Isaiah 40:9-11)

Intro: Today we are beginning a new teaching series called "Journey to Christmas." Along the way we will see the different journeys people took on the way to the first Christmas. Today we are going to look at Mary; next week we will talk about Joseph's journey, followed by the shepherds and Magi. At our Christmas Eve service we will talk about the journey of Jesus and how He brought love and peace to the world with His first arrival.

While I'm talking about the Christmas Eve service let me just make a couple announcements about that:

- We want to use that as an outreach opportunity. That doesn't just mean to invite your friends who go to another church and don't have a service on that night; it means invite someone who doesn't go to church somewhere. Start thinking of your neighbors, co-workers and friends who are not attending church or may not know Jesus and invite them to come with you to the Farmer's Market. It's going to be a great night! Part of being a disciple-maker is introducing people to Jesus. This event can help you do that as you invite someone with you to worship and hear the good news of Jesus.
- Update on MK- The 23rd will be here final time leading worship for us. She has done a great job as our interim worship leader but needed to step away as she pursues some other things in this season of her life. Make sure to show her your love and appreciation on the 23rd when we are together.

// Pray //

Have you ever said "no" to something and later regretted it? My dad had an employee one time who years earlier had been invited to be in the initial investment group for a restaurant start up. It would take a substantial amount of money to invest and at the time he just didn't think the risk was worth it, so he declined to be part of the original ownership group. Today that restaurant is

called Cracker Barrel! You may have heard of it! His initial investment would have made him a fortune- but he said “no!”

Mary is one of my favorite people in the Bible. One of the main reasons I love Mary and her story is because she is a person who says “yes” to God. She says “yes” when she knows it will be costly. She says “yes” when she knows it will be difficult. And her “yes” results in God’s ultimate purpose of redemption being fulfilled. Look at this familiar story with me.

:: Luke 1:26-38

26 In the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy, 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.

28 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.

31 You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him 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 Jacob’s descendants 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 on 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.

36 Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month.

37 For no word from God will ever fail.”

38 “I am the Lord’s servant,” Mary answered. “May your word to me be fulfilled.” Then the angel left her.

Last week we looked at a passage in Galatians 4 and we read this: “When the set time had fully come, God sent His Son, born of a woman...” Thousands of years before, when Adam and Eve rebelled against God and sin entered the world, the plan was set into motion for the redemption of mankind. God had established the plan and set the time for when this redemption would occur. Now, what we read in Luke’s gospel is God choosing the vessel through which He will send His Son into the world. That person is a teenaged girl named Mary. Mary lives in a small town called Nazareth; there were about 300 inhabitants of this tiny town. When you think about who God might choose to be the Mother of His Son- the Messiah- a young girl from a tiny village might not be your first choice! But God saw something special in Mary.

Mary's journey to that first Christmas began with her saying "yes." Throughout Scripture we see times when God gives someone an assignment and they initially decline.

- Moses: When God tells him that he is going to send him to Pharaoh and use him to set the Israelites free, Moses makes all kinds of excuses before finally telling God to pick someone else! That's when God has to inform Moses this wasn't a request- he's going!
- Jonah: God instructs Jonah to go to Nineveh, the enemies of his people and some of the most brutal people who ever walked the earth. Jonah charts a boat and heads in the exact opposite direction as far away from Nineveh as he can go. But again, God has to say, "I wasn't asking- I was telling you, you're going!" He sends a storm and Jonah finds himself being thrown overboard where he is swallowed by a great fish and spit out on shore 3 days later near Nineveh.

Mary doesn't do that. She has questions, but no objections. If you notice, she asks Gabriel a question, but it's a question of logistics, not a challenge to the assignment.

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

The question is: How? How is God going to do this? Mary was young- she wasn't stupid! She knew what it took to have a child and she says, "I'm a virgin." This is faith looking for understanding.

Mary's question to Gabriel is faith looking for understanding."

And Gabriel is ready with the answer.

35 The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on 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.

This is going to be a supernatural act. It will be the power of the Holy Spirit who allows Mary to be pregnant. And it's interesting because the language that is used here is so similar to what we see back in Genesis at the creation of the world.

:: Genesis 1:1-2

1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

2 Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

The supernatural act of creation begins with the Spirit of God hovering over the waters. Now Mary is told that the supernatural act of creating life in her womb will be the result of the Holy Spirit overshadowing her.

Jesus' life on earth begins and ends with supernatural circumstances.

The journey to Christmas is supernatural and it is another reason we can believe the story of Easter. A man born supernaturally can return to life supernaturally after his death.

When Gabriel answers Mary's question about how she will become pregnant he goes a step further and explains that another supernatural event was taking place that would prove God was doing this:

36 Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month.
37 For no word from God will ever fail."

This is now proof for Mary that the things God says He will do will be accomplished. Her cousin, Elizabeth, who is way past child bearing age, is pregnant and in her 6th month.

Here's what we need to know about God as we hear that today:

Nothing is impossible for God!

He will keep all His promises.

I don't know what you have going on in your life right now that you think is too big for God, but it's not! God keeps His promises. If God has said it in His Word, it will happen. God is faithful and He is looking for faithful people to join Him in His work! And I think this is what God saw in Mary- a person who would say, "yes," no matter how challenging the assignment may be.

Mary's response to the angel: "I am the Lord's servant..." She recognized her position- this is not a partnership; she isn't becoming equal with God; she doesn't get a big head because she was chosen- she is a servant. "I am the Lord's servant. May your word to me be fulfilled."

This week we started our journey to Christmas together as a church using the devotional that we produced using the writings of people in our church. I love this tradition we have and I enjoy hearing how different people in our church write about the events around the first Christmas. Amy Martin wrote a piece about Mary that echoed a lot of my thoughts from this passage and it's so good I wanted to read it this morning.

"My view of Mary has always focused on her role as the Mother of Jesus. Growing up in church, I had the utmost respect for her and viewed her as this holy, humble woman. She said yes to God and she parented Jesus so He could go on to fulfill His God-given purpose.

But if I'm being honest, I often struggle with relating to her. I mean, she is Mary. She raised the Savior of the World. She is the unicorn of moms.

I've failed to remember that she was just a girl. There she was living her life with a pretty clear view of her future, when all of a sudden God calls her to something completely different. Something scary. Something no one had ever done before. And without hesitation, she said yes. Despite her fears. Despite the unknown. Despite the ridicule she would face.

*She didn't say, "But what will they think about me if I say yes?"
"Will they think I'm a fraud?"*

"I'm not qualified for this. God, can't you choose someone else?"

She just trusted God and said YES.

What if Mary hadn't said yes? Sure, she may have stayed within her comfort zone and lived out the plans she had for her own life. But the entire course of human history would have been forever changed! If Jesus hadn't come to earth there would be no salvation. No relationship with God. We would be slaves to our sin with no hope of Heaven.

How many times has God called us to do something scary? And instead of trusting in Him, we focus on our doubt and fear.

Our yes to God isn't about us. It's about what He wants to do through us to impact the lives of others. The future of the entire world rested in the sound of Mary's yes. She couldn't have known that, but she trusted God.

Our journey to Jesus often requires us to say yes to big, scary, uncomfortable things. But the good news is that when we say yes to God, we can be confident that we won't travel alone.

When you feel God calling you to something out of your comfort zone, look to Mary as the ultimate example of what happens when you respond with a fearful, but resounding YES."

Let me wrap this up today with a few thoughts to apply to our lives as we take our own journey to Christmas.

- 1. God loves to use people for His purposes that readily say, "Yes!"**
- 2. God is looking for our availability more than our ability.**

My pastor growing up used to say, "God doesn't always call the qualified, but He always qualifies the called." If God calls you to something, you can bet He will help you accomplish it.

- **God is able...we are to be available.**

:: Ephesians 3:20-21

**20 Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us,
21 to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.**

3. The big, challenging things God calls us to do are not meant to scare us, but to show us His favor.

We don't have to be afraid to follow God into the unknown.

We don't have to be afraid when God asks us to take a step of faith.

We don't have to be afraid when God gives us an assignment that advances His Kingdom on the earth.

4. While we wait for the second coming of Jesus, say "yes" to His ways and His path.

- Love
- Be faithful
- Make disciples

Put your "yes" on the table before God and then no matter what He asks, when the time comes, you have already committed to doing what He tells you to do.

This morning we are going to end our worship time by taking communion together. We already lit the Advent Candle today emphasizing the faith that we have in God's plan as we await the second coming of Jesus. But this is also a place where your journey to Christmas can begin. If you are not a follower of Jesus, today He is inviting you to say "Yes" to Him by receiving Him as your Savior. This is the greatest "yes" you can ever give.

Introduce Communion

- Pray