

THE FAITH OF MARY

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Luke 1:26-38

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INTRO.

-- The Christmas story is not only a wonder-filled story for children; it's also a power-packed description of discipleship. The main characters in the Christmas story illustrate, instruct, and inspire us in key areas of discipleship. So each Sunday during this Advent season, we'll look at one of those Christmas characters and explore the discipleship example that he or she provides to us. Today, we start with one of the greatest examples of faith in the Bible. Alongside great faith heroes such as Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Daniel stands a humble young woman named Mary. We see her example of faith in Luke 1.

Luke 1:26f.

I. The Person (vv. 26-27)

A. Her Age

-- When you think of Mary, how old do you picture her? I just referred to her as a "young woman." That was probably being rather generous. Most scholars and commentators believe that Mary was a teenager and may have been around 12-15 years old at the time of today's story. In that culture, a person pretty much went from being a child to being an adult.

That might be hard to imagine for anyone who spends much time around young teenage girls today. When I was a teacher, I taught in a junior-senior high school, and the first year I had a class of 7th grade English students. I have to tell you that I never would have chosen one of those young teenage girls for something as important as giving birth to and caring for the Son of God and then rearing the One upon whom the salvation of the world would depend.

But God sees things - and people - very differently. Many of the heroes of the Bible were chosen and used of God in great ways when they were teenagers.

Joseph was a teen when he was sold into slavery and God began preparing him to be the means of preserving the people of God.

Samuel was a young boy when God called him.

David was a teenager when he faced and defeated Goliath.

Daniel and his friends were teens when they were taken into captivity; yet they were willing to face death rather than worship a false god.

Timothy was possibly still in his teens when he started working with Paul and pastoring churches.

-- Faith isn't necessarily a function of age. Young people can have a faith that is stronger than those who are much older.

Ecclesiastes 12:1 (NLT) Don't let the excitement of youth cause you to forget your Creator. Honor him in your youth before you grow old and say, "Life is not pleasant anymore."

B. Her Engagement

-- Another important detail about Mary is that she was engaged. Actually, she was "betrothed," something more serious and binding than today's engagement.

Scene from The Nativity

-- In betrothal the couple's parents would agree to the marriage and then negotiate a price for the bride. A public announcement would be made, and the couple would then be pledged to one another. That betrothal relationship was legally binding and could be broken only by death or divorce. The betrothal lasted for a year, during which the couple continued to live separately and to refrain from sexual relations. Any sexual relations during that time was tantamount to adultery. If the bride became pregnant, the marriage would be annulled.

II. Her Faith (vv. 28-38)

-- Mary, this betrothed teenager, displays a faith beyond her years in the way she responds to the events and circumstances that start in verse 28.

A. The Event (vv. 28-37)

1. The Angel's Appearance (28)

-- Mary's life-changing event starts with the sudden appearance of an angel.

v. 28

-- This event occurs 4 centuries after the last of the OT prophets, Malachi. More than 400 years the heavens have been silent, but now God breaks that silence by sending the angel Gabriel to Mary. This isn't the first time that you meet Gabriel in the Bible. You meet him 500 years earlier when God sends Gabriel to deliver a message to Daniel, and then we see Gabriel once again delivering a message in the first chapter of Luke.

Cf., 1:19

2. Mary's Reaction (29)

-- Mary reacts to the angel's sudden and totally unexpected appearance in a most understandable way - by being frightened and awed.

3. Gabriel's Assurance & Announcement

a. The Assurance (30)

--The assurance is in verse 30.

v. 30

-- The word "favor" comes from the Greek word for grace. The same root was also used back in verse 28, where Gabriel's greeting could be literally translated, "Grace to you, O graced one."

-- So in verses 28 and 30 Gabriel repeats a form of the word "grace" three times. One thing this tells us is that God's chooses Mary not so much because of her merit but as an act of His grace. Mary is the object of God's favor.

b. The Announcement (31-33)

-- Gabriel proceeds to deliver his announcement in verses 31-33.

vv. 31-33

-- Gabriel discloses 5 truths about the child that Mary is being chosen to give birth to.

(1) His name will be Jesus, which in Hebrew is the name Joshua, meaning Savior.

(2) He will be great. He is the One through whom the world was created and in whom the full glory of God is displayed.

(3) He will be called the Son of the Most High. He is the eternal Son of God, the divine second person of the Trinity, the One who was with the Father in the beginning.

(4) The Lord will give Him the throne of David. He is the One who fulfills all of God's promises about a descendant of David who will rule over Israel. He is the promised Messiah.

(5) He will reign forever, and His Kingdom will never end. He is, in fact, more than Israel's Messiah - He the Savior of the world - He is the eternal, transcendent, omnipotent, and majestic King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

4. Mary's Question (34)

-- Mary responds to this stunning announcement with a very practical question.

v. 34

-- Mary's question isn't one of doubt or unbelief. She isn't laughing the way Sarah did when God promised her a son. Mary isn't even seeking a confirming sign the way Gideon did when God chose him. Rather, Mary's question is the practical kind of a question that could easily arise in a teenager's mind - how is all of this going to happen - how is God going to accomplish this birth?

5. Gabriel's Explanation (35-37)

-- Gabriel replies to this practical question with a rather glorious explanation.

a. Activity of the Holy Spirit (35)

-- In verse 35 Gabriel explains that the promise of a son will be accomplished through the activity of the Holy Spirit.

v. 35

-- The image of the Holy Spirit "over shadowing" Mary recalls the account of creation where the Spirit of God hovered over the waters of the deep and brought life from those waters. It also recalls the image of the cloud of God's presence that descended on the Tabernacle and on the Temple.

b. A Confirming Sign (36-37)

-- Then, even though Mary had not asked for a confirming sign, Gabriel

proceeds to give one to her.

vv. 36-37

B. Her Response (v. 38)

-- We find Mary's exemplary response to this amazing announcement in verse 38.

v. 38

1. The Implications & Risks

-- Consider the implications and risks involved if Mary submits herself to this plan that Gabriel has just presented.

a. Rejection by Joseph

-- The first thing that could easily happen would be for Mary to be rejected by her fiancé, Joseph. Remember that betrothal was legally binding. Mary was as committed to Joseph as a wife is to a husband, and any unfaithfulness was equivalent to adultery, an offense so serious that the offender could be stoned to death. Since Israel was an occupied nation and only the Romans had the authority to execute someone, Mary probably wouldn't have been put to death, but the consequences that she would have to endure could have made her wish for death - starting with the rejection by Joseph but certainly not ending there.

b. Rejection by family & village

-- Mary also faced rejection by her own family and her entire village. The stigma associated with being an unwed mother has disappeared from American society, but it was very strong in Mary's culture. In accepting God's plan Mary was most likely condemning herself to living life as a social outcast, much like the infamous "woman at the well" that Jesus encountered in John's Gospel.

-- We often think of faith as making us totally secure, and faith can do that. But faith also has another side that we often forget about - faith can also demand that we get outside of our comfort zones and do things that feel very risky. Being the object of God's grace can bring us discomfort as well as comfort. Faith may be able to "expect a miracle," but faith also can trust God when the miracle doesn't happen

2. The Submission

-- Understanding fully the risks and consequences involved, Mary made her decision and chose to submit fully and completely to God's plan. From that moment on, her life would be fully at His command; she would be God's servant.

CONCLUSION

When Medieval artists portrayed Mary in stained glass windows, her pane would often have no color on it - just clear glass. All the other windowpanes would filter the light of the sun through their own distinctive designs. Mary was clear, unfiltered. There was nothing of her to affect the light that came through, representing how her faith made her fully surrendered to the plans and purposes of the Lord.

With the simple words "let it be to me according to your word" Mary, the unknown teenage girl from an ordinary family in an ordinary first century Jewish village became the gold standard of faith for believers in every age.