

Notes from the sermon: Faith That Matters

Delivered on Sunday, December 16, 2018

“Once in our world, a stable had in it, something bigger than the whole world.” CS Lewis

“In the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, “Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.”

1) GOD INTERRUPTS

God sent an angel to the earth. God sent an angel to a country. God sent an angel to a District/state. God sent an angel to a little town. God sent an angel to a tiny pheasant girl.

Think of it.

Notice what Luke didn’t write. He didn’t start off the chapter with: Once upon a time, in a land far, far away. The land has a name, the angel has a name, the time has a “stamp” and the girl has a name.

A common question I hear from growing Christians is: “How can I know God’s will for my life? Well of course the Bible is our primary resource for knowing God’s will. But, their question is aimed more at specific decisions. They want guidance between choosing between two options, both of which are biblical. It is safe to say, that Mary was planning a life that was within God’s will. However, I’m confident that her plans did not include getting pregnant out of wedlock. God’s will find you too. The best way to be in God’s will is to be the kind of person that responds well when God interrupts our plans.

Do you believe it? If belief in the miracles of the Bible doesn’t come easy for you, please know that you are not alone.

2) FAITH ASKS

In the beginning of the same chapter, we have Zechariah asking for proof. Apparently even religious leaders struggle. Now, Zechariah’s need for proof isn’t what we should be after. We don’t get to “know” until we see Jesus face to face when we pass from this life into the next.

But we get to have faith that has questions.

Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. 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, and he will reign over Jacob’s descendants forever; his kingdom will never end.” “How will this be,” Mary asked the angel, “since I am a virgin?”

Look at this girl. An angel appears to her and her response is so human- so imperfect. Most translations inform us that Mary was “troubled”. I respect Bible translators, and I realize it must be an extremely difficult job. But, for me, I’m greatly troubled when I drop my cell phone in the water, or I can’t find my car keys. Those are not good experiences, I think the Greek informs us Mary felt more emotion than just

troubled. The Greek word here is from two Greek words. “*Dia*” means to the fullest degree. “*Tarássō*” means stirred up, or to upset. In our vernacular, it sounds to me that Mary’s first honest response was that she couldn’t be more upset, or as the young people say: she “freaked out”. I mean who wouldn’t? Now it’s important to realize where she is at emotionally right now to try to interpret her next response to this angel. So here what happens next...

Gabriel doesn’t seem to pause or to tell her to sit down or to calm down. He just keeps going. I think the jest of what Gabriel says next could be paraphrased: don’t be afraid, I have come to you because God has found favor with you. You will conceive and give birth a boy named Jesus. He is God’s Son, the King of King- the Eternal One. The context here is that Mary’s people have waited hundreds of years for the Messiah, and Mary was being told that the time has come and that she was the one to bring Him into the world. Notice Mary doesn’t say some super spiritual words or even praise God for bringing the promised Messiah. Instead, she basically says, can we back up a second? “How can this happen?” I know not a man. In other words, Gabriel, where I come from, it takes two people to have a child.

Mary doesn’t ask that she may **know**, she asks for understanding. How can this happen? It doesn’t make sense to me.

If the woman who would give birth to the Son of God, had a faith that asks questions then so can you. Faith doesn’t mean you know for sure. That’s not faith, we call that knowledge. With knowledge we wouldn’t need faith. Without faith it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6)

Consider Job, he went on and on for what may have been days, asking God “why” and never did he sin. Never did God say he was displeased with him.

I think faith is most pleasing to God when you are going through the darkest night, when you feel abandoned by God and you say, yet I will trust in You my Savior. Wait, didn’t someone else feel abandoned by God? Didn’t someone yell from a cross, “my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

No matter what you are going through or how far away from God you may feel, rest assured trusting that you have a God who understands you and honors faith that asks questions.

Consider this: Reference this video about the distance between the earth and the closest star: .
<https://youtu.be/AAwabyyqWKO>

The number of stars in the Milky Way is uncountable. God created this world with a word and the Bible says Jesus holds the universe together with his power. And we want God to come into our live on our terms? We serve a great, great God. Let our response be like Mary’s:

“And the angel answered her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born^e will be called holy—the Son of God. **36**And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. **37**For nothing will be impossible with God.” **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.”

III FAITH SUBMITS

We like to plan how our life turns out. We want Jesus to help us reach our goals. We want options. Like choosing a cellular service provider, we want to make sure the terms of agreement are acceptable. We want to know what the signal is like and how much data the plan offers.

When you are a Christian, you don’t get to choose the plan. You get to surrender or choose not to.

Mary's faith had questions, but her theology didn't waver. She knew that God is her Savior and her King. It is a dangerous thing to forget who is king of your life. God will interrupt your plans, but you are allowed to ask questions. You see, questions are important because they give strength to your faith. And faith trusts in a God who holds the future- your future.

A final story in closing: From Elisabeth Elliott's book *The Path of Loneliness*, Find the story here:
<https://theupdevo.com/?s=The+beggar+and+the+king>

This Christmas season, may we all have a submissive faith to a gracious God who loves us so much that He sent His only Begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him, shall not perish but have everlasting life (from John 3:16)