

## Mary: To Be Venerated or Emulated? Luke 1:26-56

Think for a moment about the hardest thing you have ever had to do. It may have been a decision you had to make, a task you didn't feel qualified for, or standing against something you knew was wrong when everyone else was in favor of it.

I don't know if it was the hardest thing I have ever done, but at the time it was difficult. I well remember the first time being asked to drive a forklift. I was working in Ypsilanti during the first part of summer break from college at the business of a family friend. Others who could drive it were away and the daughter of the owner, who could drive it, was busy doing something else so she told me to do it. Mind you I was given little instruction – here's the gas, here's the break, this is forward, this is reverse. Everything was going okay, until I turned a corner and had to navigate around a pallet. I hit the edge with the front wheel and about tipped the hi-lo over. Can everyone say 'panic'? You can say it was almost a crash course in driving the forklift.

Over the years, I've made some other decisions. Looking back some were not the right decision, but I did them anyway. They weren't right because I knew they were wrong. There have been other difficult decisions that I knew were right that I did out of conviction. And yes, still other decisions I knew would be right but let someone else handle them. I would say that knowing what to do and not doing it is still wrong. James said that.

**How about you? Can you identify? What's the hardest thing you have ever been asked to do?**

During this month of Christmas, we have been looking at familiar passages from the Old and New Testaments surrounding the birth of Christ. Last week we looked at some of the responses of people regarding the news of the newborn King. We considered Herod and his indignation on hearing about the birth of a rival king. Others like the religious leaders and the people of Jerusalem showed either indifference or indecisiveness.

Today I want us to look at someone who had a

different reaction to the news about the coming Messiah. It's in **Luke 1:26-56**, the story of Mary and her response to the news by the angel that she was chosen, **BY GOD**, to be the mother of the Savior. In her response she provides us with an example to follow in those times when we are asked by the Lord to do what seems like the impossible, in times when what we are asked to do may not make sense, in times when it will require virtue, integrity, courage, humility, faith, obedience, a servant's heart, and yes, even worship. That's Mary.

She was asked to do something by God in which others would scrutinize her, criticize her, even ostracize her. She would bear the brunt of hurtful gossip and glaring looks. Under the law she could be subject to death by stoning. **How could she make them understand that she had not been unchaste and that her pregnancy was a miraculous act of God through the Holy Spirit? It's never stated, but how did her parents respond when they found out? Did they accept it as fact or did they wonder? How would people be convinced that an angelic messenger had visited her, especially when God had been silent for 400 years dating back to the voice of Malachi the last prophet to speak before we open the pages of the New Testament?**

She now had a reputation in the eyes of many. But then, at the end of the day, it doesn't matter what others think about you, it only matters what God thinks about you. You live for an audience of one. You live to please God and God looked on her with favor. If there was ever a time that she needed Emmanuel, God with her, if there was ever a time that she needed to trust in the Lord with all her heart, if there was ever a time for her not to be anxious, it would be in the ensuing months and years to bear the scrutiny she would no doubt have to endure, and endure it as a young teen. I hope you know Emmanuel is with you in those times.

Although it is not directly stated in Scripture, most scholars believe that at the time of this heavenly messenger who visited Mary, she was around the age of 13 or 14. Think back to when you were that age and ask yourself if you would have been ready to receive let alone obey the news she was about to

be told? If you were a believer at that age, what was your walk with God like? Would you have been found to be highly favored like she was?

As we look at this passage is she to be venerated as the Roman Catholic church believes or is she to be emulated as someone who gives us an example of giving herself as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to the Lord? She shows us what it is to be available, obedient, and willing when approached with doing God's will.

**How many of you know that you can be available, but not willing or obedient?**

**How many of you know that you can be willing, but not available or obedient?**

**How many of you know that you can be obedient but not available or willing?**

What Mary did and how she responded requires all three. It takes both your attitude and your actions to demonstrate availability, willingness, and obedience. Mary gives us a wonderful example to follow of complete trust and obedience to the will of God. In our passage, let's journey together to see three things about her. The first thing we see is that Mary expressed honest surprise that showed her reliance on God.

## **I. MARY EXPRESSED HONEST SURPRISE THAT SHOWED HER RELIANCE ON GOD – vv. 26-33**

Maybe there was an occasion where you were busy doing chores around the house when you heard a knock at the door, or the doorbell rang, or you saw someone pull into the driveway where you wonder who in the world it could be. You weren't expecting anyone so you went to see who it was.

### **A. The Messenger Was Unexpected – vv. 26-27, 29**

Mary had no advance warning of a knock or doorbell. I believe the angel just appeared in the room with Mary. We aren't told that he glowed with the Shekinah glory of God whose presence he had just left, but why not? How else would Luke have known it was an angel if Mary hadn't told him in his investigation of the events surrounding the birth of Christ? I think it was more than just his assertion

for dramatic literary effect.

**Verse 26** tells us that the angel Gabriel was sent from God to Mary in Nazareth, a town of Galilee. Nazareth wasn't really a city, but a small village, probably only a few hundred in population. The Greek word for city can mean anything that isn't a rural area. It was off the beaten track, not linked with any trade route or connecting to any of the religious centers in the region. Nathaneal would question its poor reputation when he would ask if any good thing could come from Nazareth.

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In addition to its insignificance, Galilee where this little village was located, was in what was called Galilee of the Gentiles, a place that was populated by both Jews and Gentiles. This is an indication that the Savior would be for the world and not just for the Jews or just for the religious elite. That's where the angel was sent and sent to a poor peasant girl.

Mary did not expect this visitor and we read that she was troubled by the unexpected guest. But while she wondered at the greeting, it was not a question of doubt or disbelief.

John MacArthur helps us understand why she was perplexed at the greeting when the angel stated that she was highly favored by God. **"Mary was perplexed because she knew that she was a sinner and did not understand why God had favored her. But Mary's genuine humility manifested her true righteousness. All genuinely righteous people are distressed and terrified in God's presence, because they are acutely aware of their sin (similar to the response Isaiah had)...Nothing in her brief life could have prepared her for this astonishing event."**

When God asks us to do something that seems impossible to us – it is possible to God. He won't ask us to do something He can't do through us.

**Why would God call her favored when she was a sinner like everyone else?** But it was her humility and righteous life that God was looking for in the person who would be the mother of Jesus. The unexpected messenger had not gone to the wrong address or to the wrong person. God had His eye on her to accomplish His will.

Next, we see the message was unexpected.

## **B. The Message Was Unexpected – vv. 28-33**

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His message of a most unusual birth announcement would be of great significance for all mankind. She would give birth to a son, whose name would be Jesus, which means God saves. It's the emphasis Luke states later when he writes that Jesus came to seek and save the lost (**Luke 19:10**). The angel revealed several important truths about this baby that would be born to Mary.

His name reveals His identity and purpose.

Of all the words that could be used to describe Jesus, Luke uses the word "great". Any word pales to comprehend the reality of His greatness. The psalmist tells us that the Lord is great and therefore to be praised greatly and then adds that His greatness is beyond our comprehension (**Ps. 145:3**).

Gabriel adds that this baby would be the Son of the Most High (referring to God) indicating His deity, but also indicating that He would possess the very nature of God. It also speaks of His sovereign rule. Son of the Most High means He would be a carbon copy of the Father, with the same divine nature. He would be divine and human at the same time. God in the flesh. It doesn't mean He would enter into someone already in existence, but that He would enter into the world as a baby, having His own human body and nature, but would also still be God.

**Hebrews 1:3 "The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of His being."**

**John 1:14 "And the Word became flesh..."**

As the angel would later tell Joseph, He is Emmanuel, God with us, God incarnate, God in the flesh. As God in the flesh, He would be perfect in every way and therefore the only capable and acceptable sacrifice and substitute for sinners when 33 years later He would die on the cross for our sin.

The angel adds that this baby who would be born to Mary would be given the throne of David as rightful heir to the kingdom as promised in **II Samuel 7:13**, but that it would be a kingdom that would not end,

unlike all the other reigns of David's descendants.  
**Revelation 11:15 "The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said: 'The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He will reign for ever and ever.'"**

But Mary wondered how this would happen since she was not married to which the angel told her that the Holy Spirit would make it happen. Nothing is impossible with God. If He could create everything from nothing, He could certainly make this happen. It would be a divine miracle.

Ambrose of Milan, an early church father, writes: "Having been chosen as His mother, she then immediately receives the even greater privilege of actually conceiving Him. We must then ascribe great faith to Mary...Mary submitted her will, pledging obedience. When she asks 'How can this be?' she has no doubt of the outcome, but seeks to know how it will happen...The Virgin Birth signifies a divine, not a human mystery. 'A sign is given: a virgin shall conceive in the womb and bring forth a son' (Isaiah 7:14). Mary knew this Scripture and believed it would happen. But nothing told her how it would happen...Mary hears and believes."

**Do we have that kind of faith that leads to obedience to do what God ask when we hear Him speak to us through His Word?**

Even in her honest surprise, she trusted God and relied on Him to help her through it even if she didn't understand it all. **Can we respond that way?**

Her honest surprise led Mary to express humble submission that showed her regard for God.

## **II. MARY EXPRESSED HUMBLE SUBMISSION THAT SHOWED HER REGARD FOR GOD – vv. 34-38**

I see three things about Mary's faith and faithful obedience. First, her humble submission rested in God's word.

### **A. Her Humble Submission Rested in God's Word**

She may have been a peasant girl, from a small, obscure village but she had a depth of understanding of God and His Word as we will see when we get to **verse 46**. She knew that God was sovereign and had a will that would accomplish His purpose. She knew that whatever God had planned, He had a divine reason for a specific outcome and that nothing could thwart His plans to complete what He had determined to do. She knew if God said it, she could believe it.

I believe she knew **Genesis 3:15** where God promised a Redeemer who would come.

I believe she knew **Genesis 12:3** where God promised that through Abraham all the nations of the world would be blessed.

I believe she knew the promise given by God to David in **II Samuel 11:16** that his throne and kingdom would endure forever.

I believe she knew **Jeremiah 33:15** promising that a righteous Branch would come from David's line. But I don't think she knew it would be her, but when she heard the angel, she believed it. She listened to the message of the angel, which had come from God Himself that she had been chosen because she had found favor and she chose to believe God, because God does not lie.

Throughout the Old Testament we read about the holiness of God. Because He is holy, we can trust what He has to say and that He will be faithful to carry out what He promises.

**Numbers 23:19 "God is not a man, that He should lie; neither the Son of man, that He should repent. Hath He said, and shall He not do it? Or hath He spoken, and shall He not make it good?"**

**Deuteronomy 32:4 "He is the Rock, His works are perfect; and all His ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is He."**

If we are going to submit to God humbly and willingly, we must believe that what He says is true. Mary's humble submission rested in God's word.

Second, we see that Mary's humble submission rested in God's Will.

## **B. Her Humble Submission Rested in God's Will**

**Jeremiah 29:11 "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."**

Mary understood that God had a plan for her. She believed the angel when he told her that God was with her and had chosen her to be the mother of the Savior. She knew that God had a will, and her response indicates that she was willing, available and would be obedient to be a part of His will regardless of what she would have to go through.

Warren Wiersbe writes: **"Mary's believing response was to surrender herself to God as His willing servant. She experienced the grace of God (v. 30) and believed the Word of God, and therefore she could be used by the Spirit to accomplish the will of God. A handmaid was the lowest kind of female servant, which shows how much Mary trusted God. She belonged totally to the Lord, body (v. 38), soul (v. 46), and spirit (v. 47)."**

Wiersbe continues by saying **"Faith in God's plan will help sustain you through life's pain and problems."** She well understood what Paul would write that God's grace is sufficient to make the weak strong (**II Corinthians 12:9-10**).

Folks, if we are going to do the will of God, we need to know the Word of God and listen to the voice of God. With so many competing voices clamoring for our attention, it's important to get away and alone with God so He can talk to us through His Word and point the way He wants us to take in order to do His will knowing that His grace will sustain us.

Like Mary, we must humbly submit by being available when God calls us to set aside our agenda to do His. We must be obedient to do what He asks instead of waiting for a more convenient or better time, and we must be willing to do it with a heart that is ready to serve out of devotion and not out of duty. It must be with a ready heart.

Mary exhibited what Paul said should be our response to God when he wrote in **Romans 12:1 "Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of**



**God's mercy to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship."**

Mary didn't hesitate to offer everything she had, all that she was, body, mind, and spirit, to serve the Lord. **"I am your servant."** In the Greek it's the word for slave. It refers to someone who sets aside all his own rights to serve someone else. When they ask, you do. In Mary's case, even her tone is one of willing surrender to do whatever the Lord asked of her. She was ready to obey His will. The word also implies that you will serve only one Master. There wouldn't be competing demands coming from anyone else. There would only be one person whose voice and commands you obey. Mary would seek to do God's will.

From GotQuestions we read: **"Servants of Christ do their work humbly and selflessly, desiring only to please their benevolent Master. There's no pretension, no self-importance, no compensation-seeking in true servanthood."**

When God asks us to do something, believe that God is with us, believe that He has chosen us for the task, believe that it's part of His will for us, believe He will give you the grace and power you need to do it, and then respond in faith as Mary did and humbly submit by saying **"I am the Lord's servant. May it be to me as you have said."**

Mary's humble submission rested in God's will.

Third, Mary's humble submission rested in God's ways.

### **C. Her Humble Submission Rested in God's Ways**

Isn't that what we claim when we sing:

All Your ways are good,  
All Your ways are sure;  
I will trust in You alone.  
Higher than my sight,  
High above my life;  
I will trust in You alone.  
Where You go, I'll go:  
Where You stay, I'll stay;  
When You move, I'll move.

***I will follow You.***

CCLI 1292471 (emphasis added)

If it had been written then, Mary's response to the ways of God that didn't make any sense to her, might have been this song:

***All to Jesus I surrender,  
All to Him I freely give;  
I will ever love and trust Him,  
In His presence daily live.  
I surrender all, I surrender all;  
All to Thee, my blessed Savior,  
I surrender all.***

CCLI 1292471 (emphasis added)

Or maybe she was singing:

***Take my will and make it Thine –  
It shall be no longer mine;  
Take my heart – it is Thine own,  
It shall be Thy royal throne.***

CCLI 1292471

In other words, she held nothing back. Everything she had, all she was, she was giving to the Lord to do His will, loving and trusting Him every day.

***Are we like Mary, willing to surrender our will and our ways to God's will and His ways, without hesitation, to do so willingly, to do so joyfully?***

When we don't know the ways of God, believe **Proverbs 3:5-6** and **"Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not unto your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will direct your paths."**

Mary expressed humble submission that showed her regard of God. Whenever we willfully submit to God's Word, God's will, and God's ways, you can expect an attitude and heart filled with praise. And that brings us to our final point.

### **III. MARY EXPRESSED HEARTFELT SINGING THAT SHOWED HER REVERENCE FOR GOD – vv. 39-56**

Willful obedience stems from joyful obedience. Mary didn't say "I have to" she said "I want to, I get to." There's a difference and the difference comes from the desire to serve the Lord out of

devotion and not out of duty.

The angel had told her that nothing is impossible with God and to confirm that, he told her that her relative, Elizabeth, was going to have a child. The angel said she was in her old age, meaning she was past the years of bearing a child. Yet God miraculously brought about what was humanly impossible in her advanced age. Now, let's be clear that it was done through the normal process of conception, but that doesn't take away from the miracle. If God can do that, He could bring about a miraculous conception through the Holy Spirit. So Mary packed her things and headed for a visit with Elizabeth. We read that when the two met, the baby Elizabeth was carrying leaped for joy at which she affirmed that the baby Mary was carrying was both deity and her Savior.

Let me just pause and remind each of us that when God asks us to do what seems impossible, remember that with Him it is possible. Believe Him.

Mary responds with a song. In her song there are three stanzas.

If you were to take the time, you would see just how well Mary knew the Old Testament in the passages she alludes to in her song. You would see how well she understood God's mercy offered to those who trust Him. You would see how well she understood God's mercy towards those who fear Him. You would see how well she knew the history of Israel and God's promises to them.

In the first stanza she glorified God for His mercy toward her.

#### **A. Mary Glorified God For His Mercy Toward Her – vv. 46-49**

**Verse 46** tells us that her soul glorified God. From the core of her being, she was giving God praise.

In **verse 47** she acknowledged that she had a Savior refuting the notion that she was sinless or that by becoming the mother of Jesus, she was somehow made sinless. Like everyone else, she identified with **Isaiah 53:6** that she was like a sheep who had gone astray and that her best efforts were like dirty rags. In spite of that, she had a Savior in God who

showed mercy to her and blessed her with being chosen to carry the Messiah and would be mighty for her (**v. 49**). And because of God's view of her, she could sing with heartfelt worship.

This passage does not suggest that Mary should be venerated or elevated to a place of adoration. She was not sinless, but one who needed a Savior like everyone else, but one who also knew God's mercy.

In the second stanza we see that Mary glorified God for His mercy toward others.

#### **B. Mary Glorified God For His Mercy Toward Others – vv. 50-53**

God's mercy extends beyond Mary and includes all those who will seek Him out of reverence.

**Lamentations 3:22-23** tell us that because of His great faithfulness and His mercies that are new every morning, we are not consumed.

Those who reverence God for His mercy are humble in spirit and He will take care of them.

#### **C. Mary Glorified God For His Mercy Toward Israel – vv. 54-56**

God is one who keeps His promises. He had made a promise to Abraham and his descendants that through him all the nations of the world would be blessed. Mary knew this child was the fulfillment of that promise made to Abraham, and the promise was forever. Her praise was internal. Her praise was external. Her praise was habitual. Her praise was with humility. Her praise was to the glory of God for the great things He has done.

John MacArthur writes that "[Mary] is the model of faith, humility and submission to God's will. She is an example to all believers of how to respond obediently, joyfully, and worshipfully to the Word [and will] of God." She is to be emulated not venerated. **Will we follow her example and joyfully surrender all our will to God?**