

FIVE FORKS BRETHREN IN CHRIST CHURCH

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SERMON: *Mary*

SERIES: *Through the eyes of...*

SCRIPTURES: *Luke 1:26-38*

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**Credit to Tim Mackie (The Bible Project Videos); Kent Hughes; John Ortberg*

Well good morning, it so great to worship with you. Want to say welcome to all of you gathered on-line, at home, tuning to the live stream.

This Friday is a special day for followers of Jesus. This Friday we will celebrate God entering the world as a baby. So I hope you're preparing. I hope you'll consider tuning in Thursday evening to one of our Christmas Eve Services. We want to celebrate with you.

This morning we are in week 4 of our series: **Through the eyes of...**

Since the beginning of the advent season we've been walking through the Christmas story, wanting to see the story through the eyes of those who were present 2,000 years ago in that quiet little village of Bethlehem when God entered our world.

Stories filled with confusion and doubt, conflict, uncertainty...but also stories of hope, peace, joy, love. That's the Christmas story.

This morning we want to see the story through eyes of an incredible young Jewish girl. Through the eyes of **Mary**. Don't you wonder, what that young lady was thinking, feeling, experiencing as Christmas morning approached?

And didn't Rachel Hovis, do just a great job of helping us begin to understand what must have been going in Mary.

As I was preparing for this message, I was thinking that sometimes when it comes to Mary, mother of Jesus, we're not exactly sure what to do with her. Some Christian traditions have placed Mary on a pedestal too high. So high in fact she begins to take on some divine attributes. On the other hand, I think that because some traditions have placed her too high, other traditions, more like ours, have significantly minimized her role in the Christmas story. Almost overlooking her role.

Sometimes we just need to step back and admire this remarkable woman. What an incredible example of courage and faithfulness. So this morning, I just want to highlight three qualities...as we see the Christmas story through the eyes of Mary.

If you have a Bible turn with me to Luke 1...

I. Mary's Story

Luke 1 - ...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^[b] the Son of God.

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

First, we must pause and admire...

A. Mary’s Courage.

Keep in mind, Mary is likely very **young**. Most Jewish girls at this time, in her situation, are probably 13 – 16 years old. Think about it, in our world, a girl of that age, cannot drive a car, drink alcoholic beverages, or to be honest really even go on a date. I have told my own daughter, Adalyn, she is not dating until at least 30. Mary is young.

In addition, finding out she is pregnant before marriage is kind of humiliating...humiliating because you can’t hide it. There are lots of things in our lives, embarrassing things that we can hide from those around us. Our eating habits, our thought lives, our flawed personal hygiene practices. We can hide our singing voices...that we use only in the shower or in the car all alone. We use make-up to hide our real skin, wrinkles, blemishes, we use hair products to hide our real hair color. We can hide so many things...Pregnancy is not one of them.

Pregnancy happens to be one of those things that is clear and obvious. And unwed pregnancy carries significant **shame** and embarrassment. And shame is such a powerful motivation in our lives isn’t it. If we know...something will shame us...we avoid it all costs.

Can you imagine, the looks that Mary got as her belly began to grow? The whispering and the rumors. Everyone would know. Everyone would talk. Everyone would assume. This is going to destroy her reputation. And I bet you the church people would be the worst!

A few weeks ago, Jenny and I started to feel flu-like symptoms, the week before Thanksgiving. So we went to get tested for COVID. The nurse met us at the door and escorted us through a waiting room. Everyone staring at us as we walked through. No one said anything, but everyone knew...they're going to get tested!

I remember sitting in the little doctor's office with Jenny as they ran our tests, feeling like a little kid waiting in the principal's office to get in trouble. I'm a rule-follower. Have been since I was little. I've been so careful, I've been following the protocols. I feel guilty when I break the speed limit. And when the doctor came back in, there was this moment of shame and almost humiliation. I even pointed at Jenny and said, "I think she had it first. I probably got it from her." Dr. said... "You both have the virus."

Doctor kind of looked at us with what felt like eyes of disgust...like, "have you been out in public. Have you been failing to follow guidelines?" She even said, "I'll walk you out." Kind of like, I don't trust you to walk out of here on your own.

It was kind of like the walk of shame, you walk out of the exam room and you think she probably told all of the nurses and they give you that disgusted glare of like...that's the couple who has the virus. And then you parade back out through the waiting room and you just kind of know...people are looking at you again, "stay away, we know you have it." That's how shame works.

Obviously that's a pretty mild level of shame. The shame Mary felt must have been much greater.

Mary knows in saying yes, shame is headed her way.

In addition, there's the added bit that she's engaged. In the ancient Jewish world that is a legally binding commitment. It's all but marriage, just without the ceremony and the consummation.

Joseph has every right to break off the engagement, drag her before the courts, publicly expose her unfaithfulness and even the potential she could be stoned.

And it doesn't get easier for Mary...the Romans decide to raise taxes and everyone has to return to their hometown to register. Now a much pregnant Mary must travel about 90 miles from Nazareth to Bethlehem on a donkey.

Here's how one mother describes it...

Have you ever wondered why doctors and midwives tell you not to travel late in pregnancy? It's because you don't want to be far from home and have a baby. Riding in a car or airplane is bad enough for us today. Can you imagine travelling on a donkey or walking an incredibly long distance with that unmistakable 9-months-preggo waddle? They didn't have supportive shoes back then either.

Once they arrive, Bethlehem is crowded with people, because everyone has to do this. It was so crowded that there were no guest rooms for them when they got there.

As a super pregnant and exhausted momma, I would have been incredibly grumpy. Maybe crying. Maybe stalking anyone who had food within eyesight. We can only imagine her journey up to this point but the scriptures give us no reason to think she had a pregnancy any different than ours.

Now knowing all of the shame and hardship she is about to experience, don't you marvel at Mary's response?... **"I am the Lord's servant. May your words be fulfilled."**

Phillip Yancey writes **"often a work of God comes with two edges, great joy and great pain, and in that matter-of-fact response Mary embraced both. She was the first person to accept Jesus on his own terms, regardless of the personal cost."**

I was reading a fascinating true story recently about an incredibly courageous woman, Patricia. *She suffered from diabetes, a heart attack, and two strokes; she went blind, went into renal failure (which required dialysis) and had both her legs amputated – all while only in her thirties...she was placed in a nursing home, except for those several times a year when she had to be hospitalized, frequently going into a coma for one or two weeks during those stays.*

Pat was also part of a church in DC, that wanted to create a homeless shelter. They could not find anyone with the leadership skills to pull it off, so she volunteered. In between dialysis and amputations and comas, she pulled together the team and got the zoning changes, architectural help, and fund-raising done. She then helped the team figure out the rules for the homeless people who use the shelter, and she recruited and trained the staff who ran it.

Kind of make you feel a little bit soft about how we handle life, doesn't it? I complain cause some of my favorite college sports are being canceled and I can't even get the leaky faucet fixed in our kitchen.

It's folks like Mary and Pat that say, "I am the Lord's servant. May your word be fulfilled." I'll do what it takes.

When Pat died after the shelter's first successful year in operation, homeless people stood next to U.S. Cabinet members such as then Secretary of State James Baker her funeral. (Soul Keeping, John Ortberg, pg. 29)

See as we look at Christmas through the eyes of Mary, I think we are reminded that following Jesus in life is gonna take a little bit of courage, grit, toughness, determination.

Every time you choose a gentle voice with your kids or your co-worker when they frustrate you. That's the courage of following Jesus.

Every time you forgive your frustrating neighbor. That's the courage of following Jesus.

Every time you fight the temptation battle and choose purity over lust with your eyes. That's the courage of following Jesus.

Every time you choose honesty over deceit, even when it will make you look bad...that's the courage to follow Jesus.

Every time you choose generosity over greed...

Every time you do the hard things that are necessary to help others, rather than complain about inconveniences in your own life...that the courage of Mary in following Jesus.

Do you stand back and marvel at young Mary's courage? What an incredible woman!

Second, Mary's story reminds us that...

B. God uses ordinary people for His Significant Kingdom work.

“From all indicators, her life would not be extraordinary. She would marry humbly, give birth to numerous poor children, never travel farther than a few miles from home, and one day die like thousands of women before her – a nobody, in a nothing town in the middle of nowhere.” (Kent Hughes 72)

Mary's life was supposed to be the epitome of average, normal, uninteresting. Turns out that's exactly who God chooses for His Kingdom work.

In fact, it's kind of fascinating and really no coincidence. Take a look in your Bible for just a moment. Luke 1...Check this out, Mary's story comes right after the story of Zechariah.

Zechariah, is a **priestly Jerusalem figure**...he's exactly the kind of important person you pick for important church work...and he is told that his wife (Elizabeth) is going to be miraculously pregnant at an old age. These are the parents of John the Baptist.

Well, Zechariah is incredulous, skeptical, unbelieving. He basically laughs at his angelic visitor. "No way. Not gonna happen." And because of his lack of belief, He is made silent. His voice is taken away. He can't speak until the promise is fulfilled.

A pious religious leader, receives the same announcement and doesn't believe it. And then right after Zechariah's failure to believe, Luke tells a story about a teenage girl Mary...young, un-wed, female...anything but priestly...she simply says "I am the Lord's servant." These stories are back to back and that is no coincidence. God's Kingdom work isn't mostly for religious elites, intellectual scholars, wealthy patrons...it's for average, ordinary Jewish girls.

God chose not pharaoh's daughter or the daughter of a religious elite family in Jerusalem. He chose a young peasant girl from Nazareth to be the mother of His child.

In fact the entire Gospel of Luke highlights this theme...God's most significant Kingdom work is for Shepherds and tax collectors and fisherman...it is Zaccheaus's, doubting Thomas's and denying Peter's.

And that's encouraging news because, in case you haven't noticed most of us happen to be average, ordinary...

In fact this is kind of neat, after being chosen as the mother of the Messiah Mary sings a song. Have you heard of Mary's song, also known as The Magnificat? She sings...

“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...

49 for the Mighty One has done great things for me—

holy is his name...

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.

Mary sings out loud, for everyone to hear...that God changes the world through the most unlikely of heroes...and that's a powerful message for the world to hear.

Mary's song has such a powerful message it's reported that several the governments banned the recitation of the Magnificat because they feared being overthrown by the populace. The message was considered too empowering; emancipating all who felt crushed, defeated, and powerless. Governments, nations, places of power feared people would begin to realize that true change happens through ordinary people doing ordinary things.

The German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer recognized the revolutionary nature of Mary's song. Before being executed by the Nazis, Bonhoeffer spoke these words in a sermon during Advent 1933:

The song of Mary is the oldest Advent hymn. It is at once the most passionate, the wildest, one might even say the most revolutionary Advent hymn ever sung. This is not the gentle, tender, dreamy Mary whom we sometimes see in paintings...This song has none of the sweet, nostalgic, or even playful tones of some of our Christmas carols. It is instead a hard, strong, inexorable song about the power of God and the powerlessness of humankind"

Folks sometimes we think that in order for change and progress to happen in our world, we need power and government authority, policy and legislation and we need wealth and special skills...Mary, from Nazareth reminds us that God is often most at work and transforming the world, not in the places of power and wealth and privilege but on the margins of society with the least of these.

If you want to get in on the significant work God is doing...I recommend you begin finding your way to all kinds of ordinary people and ordinary activities!

Every time we feed the hungry. Clothe the naked. Every time we make a phone call to lonely elderly person. Every time you volunteer in the nursery or choose to help out in a children's Sunday school class. Every time you make a meal for a family that is sick or that has lost a loved one. Every time you email your kids teacher to tell them how much you appreciate the extra efforts they have gone to this school year.

That is God using the ordinary in you and me to change our world.

Final, thought from Mary's remarkable story. Maybe what you need to learn from the Christmas Story through the eyes of Mary is...

C. The power of a simple yes to God.

I've often thought that sometimes we make our faith more complicated than it needs to be. I think Mary reminds us that the most profound faith isn't usually one of big theological words or complicated answers or clever arguments.

Mary's response is instead a simple yes to God, "I am your servant. May your word be fulfilled in me."

One author says it like this...

"Mary doesn't see what God sees, but she's willing to do what God says."

Sometimes I call this **"Because you said so kind of faith..."**

There's a fascinating story in Luke 5.

Jesus is talking to Peter and he says...**"Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch."**

⁵ Peter answered, "Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything...."

Now you have to remember Peter is an expert fisherman. This is what he does. He catches fish. He has been out all night. He catches nothing. He's tired and miserable. Disappointed. Hungry. He knows you don't get fish now, at this time of day. And now Jesus is telling him "Why don't you go back out and throw your nets in again."

Don't you love it when you're an expert at something and someone else who knows less than you do tries to tell you how to do your job? Ultracrepidarian: noting or

pertaining to a person who criticizes, judges, or gives advice outside the area of his or her expertise. Peter is thinking...Jesus I don't tell you how to preach and you don't tell me how to fish.

But Jesus is THE EXPERT on life...everything in life. And so listen to Peter's full response...**“Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything...ready...But because you say so, I will let down the nets.”**

6 When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break.

“God I'm not sure I completely understand what you're up to, but because you say I'll do this.”

Zacchaeus, was a wee little man...did that with his money.

A little boy, in a crowd full of hungry people, with some loaves of bread and a couple of fish.

Mary did that when the Angel visited her.

Jesus would do that same thing in Gethsemane. *“God I'm not sure I understand, isn't there a different way...but if you say so...I'll do this.”*

Mary's story is a reminder that the most profound faith, the most practical faith is rather simple. It's choosing to say yes to God simply because in the end you trust in Him.

Just think about how that little phrase might begin to transform your life.

I want to do what I want to do with my money, but because you say so I'll be generous God. I'll share. I'll just trust you that it is better to give than to receive.

I want to do what I want to with my words and my tongue, but because you say so God...I'll be gentle and patient.

I want to do what I want to do with my eyes and my body, but because you say so I God I'll choose to honor you with my body.

And really, that's enough to be disciple of Jesus and to be used by Jesus. That's all he needs. You don't have to have this world figured out. You don't need to have all of the answers. You don't need to get your life in order. You just need a heart that's willing to say, "Jesus there's a lot of things in my world that are a mess, but I'm saying yes to you, and you're will and your way."

That's Mary.

Courage...ordinary acts...a simple yes...that's the Christmas through the eyes of Mary...and that's life with Jesus. I bet you can relate.

Mary Monologue:

It's another sleepless night on the road to Bethlehem. I am glad that Joseph is sleeping soundly-he has never complained, but I see the weariness in his eyes. He has done much to make this journey as comfortable for me as possible, and we will both be glad to reach Bethlehem tomorrow.

I still almost cannot believe this journey that started nine months ago. I was just an average girl, doing the things every Nazarene girl was taught to do. But then an angel - a real angel!...visited me in my bedroom, telling me that I was to bear a son...and not just any son, but the Son of God! I knew in that moment that the right thing to do was to say "yes," and I certainly don't regret it, but the last few months have had their difficult moments. Telling my parents about the baby on the way-I

think they would have accepted it if I had said it was Joseph's, but they had a very difficult time believing that this child came from God. I know they were disappointed in me. And Joseph-my precious Joseph-the look in his eyes when I told him almost undid me. I really thought after that meeting that he was done with me-he is not a cruel man, but there was no denying that he was hurt and planned to pursue a divorce. When Joseph came and told me that he had been visited by an angel himself and that he was committed to me and this baby...I sank to the floor in relief and spent the rest of the evening thanking God that Joseph was still willing to love me and love this child, even a child that was not his flesh and blood. And the townspeople...there is one thing about pregnancy-you can't hide it forever. It was not easy to walk through Nazareth each day and to receive glares and taunts from those who believed the worst of me. In some ways it was almost a relief that we needed to travel to Bethlehem, giving us a break from the stares and muttered words of our neighbors.

I wonder how soon it will be before my time of delivery arrives. I now understand what my friends in Nazareth meant when they told me that the discomfort at the end of pregnancy takes away some of the fear about delivering. As I lay awake each night, feeling Jesus's kicks and movements, I'm overwhelmed at the Love I feel for this child that I haven't even met yet!. I long to hold him in my arms, to kiss his cheeks, to bathe him, to feed him, and to rock him to sleep. I have never known this kind of love before-the kind of love that would be willing to sacrifice everything, absolutely everything I had for him.

But that's how you love us, isn't it God? The very child I carry is your gift of love to this world. Our people are hurting and longing for deliverance, and you listened and you answered. I cannot begin to imagine what my Son's life will look like, but I am beyond grateful that I will witness firsthand the miracle of the Messiah. The last few months have certainly not been easy, but I wouldn't trade it for anything. I am ready to be a mother-I am ready to meet my Son and my Savior.