

“May It Be As You Say”

Advent 2017 – part 4

Luke 1:26-38

Have you ever been in the company of a famous person, maybe as a guest in your home? Last spring, I was invited to play piano for a Christian artist named Grant Norsworthy. His former band, Sonic Flood, was quite popular when I was younger. Even though I was honored to be invited to play with him, I was also a bit scared. I wondered, “What sort of invitation was this?” I mean, I have never played in front of thousands of fans like he had. I am not a professional musician. Was it even possible for me to play with Grant?

When I called him up, Grant assured me that it was possible, and my talents were exactly what he needed for his music workshop. He told me he would teach me what I needed to know. I just had to be willing to come and play.

As excited as I was, this invitation was an inconvenience. I had to rearrange my weekend schedule. I had to pack up my 60-pound keyboard, my amp, all my microphones and cables, drive over an hour to Kingsley, unload and set up my equipment, stay at a stranger’s house, and get up early for the practice. And the truth is, I did these things gladly because of the opportunity to play with a famous musician.

When guests arrive, there is inconvenience. The more important the guest, the greater the inconvenience and stress. Can you imagine if an angel showed up on your doorstep? Suppose you knew that tomorrow at 3 PM, Gabriel would be coming to your house. Imagine your panic, even with twenty-four hours to prepare. Well, Mary had no such warning.

“Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you!” (Luke 1:28) Even though Gabriel starts with a word of blessing, it is not surprising to see Mary flustered and apprehensive by the sight of an angel. She wonders if this greeting really is good news. Mary knows her bible. She knows that Moses, Isaiah, and Daniel all trembled before these heavenly messengers, who, despite what they said, did not always bring universally accepted “good” news.

Seeing the look of doubt on her face, Gabriel attempts to reassure her. “Don’t be afraid, Mary. You really have found favor with God.” Then he delivers the so-called “good news.” Mary is going to become pregnant and have a son.

I really cannot imagine her shock and surprise at this announcement. Mary is engaged, not-yet-but-almost married. Maybe she expects to start having children in the next two years or so. But because the angel says her child will be called “the Son of the Most High,” she rightly understands that this will be no ordinary, future pregnancy. This will be an immediate, miraculous one. From her perspective, this is not good news at all.

Understand, in this time, Mary was already considered to be the wife of Joseph, even though the wedding ceremony was still months away. According to scholars, there were several steps to the marriage process in ancient Jewish society. First, the families would come together to arrange the marriage. Once it was finalized, this agreement was legally binding. After the engagement was announced, the girl would still live with her parents for a year before the actual wedding, but that whole time, she was considered to be the promised man’s wife, and she was expected to be faithful to him. It is even likely that Mary was only a teenager, even as young as 12 or 13. (*Abingdon N. T. Commentary, Luke.*)

So let me translate the angel's words as I think Mary heard them: "Good news, Mary! Because God likes you so much, you will be rewarded with an unexpected pregnancy under highly unusual and unbelievable circumstances. No pressure, but your child will grow up to be the Son of God, the Savior of the world. Aren't you lucky?"

That is how I would understand his message. There are so many reasons this pregnancy would be inconvenient for Mary, physically and emotionally. She would have to explain this to her husband and family, who might not believe her. She would be subject to ridicule. Remember, Nazareth was a small town, just like ours! And Mary would live with the constant burden of the people's expectations of her son. Sort of like this comic here. (*Show Mary and Joseph with a bumper sticker on their camel that says, "My son is God."*) They would hope her son would free Israel from the Romans and reestablish the throne of their beloved king David.

Why would God do this to a young girl? Why would God create this hardship for a young family just starting out? I believe it was because Jesus needed a human family. God chose Mary because she really was favored by God. Mary was faithful, humble, and obedient. She was the perfect mother for Jesus. Her character and integrity had already prepared her for this unexpected event.

Mary only has one question for Gabriel. "How is this possible, if I am a virgin?" That really is a statement of faith. As she speaks to the angel, she has already accepted that this event will happen to her. She just wants an explanation. When the angel tells her, "The Holy Spirit will overshadow you," that is not much of an explanation, but it is enough for Mary. Her response to all this

astonishing news is simply, "May it be as you say." That is all. She was ready to do whatever God asked.

Mary was the right one to give birth to the Christ child because of her humility and obedience. Notice in her response to Gabriel, she calls herself the "servant of the Lord," literally, "I am God's slave." This is not degrading to Mary. This is her acknowledgement of God's power and might. "The honor of a servant is based on the greatness of the Lord one serves." (*Abingdon N.T. Commentary, Luke.*)

What would you have done in Mary's place? How would you have taken this news? It was disruptive, unexpected, and inconvenient. Our world does not like disruptions. We like stability. We like knowing what to expect.

Ask yourself, honestly, do you like it when God disrupts your life? I think most, if not all people, would answer, "No, of course not!"

This past week I read a devotion by Henry Blackaby, entitled "Opposition." (from Experiencing God Day by Day.) Henry pointed out that because of Jesus, Mary and Joseph were forced to flee their own country and escape to Egypt. And that was after the discomfort of traveling to Bethlehem for the census while Mary was pregnant, and then giving birth in a barn! You can see that this young couple faced plenty of hardship all because of their obedience. According to Blackaby, we should not become discouraged when we face opposition. It may very well be a sign that we are in the center of God's will.

When I first entered the ministry, I faced a lot of inconvenience and disruption. After completing two engineering degrees, I thought I was set up for a relatively easy life. Then I received an unexpected invitation to become a youth

minister. Honestly, it was almost as crazy as an appearance from an angel. One step led to the next, and now, fifteen years later, God has led me to be a pastor.

What if I had said no to God? That might have been more convenient for me and less disruptive for my family. But one thing I can tell you, had I said no to God, it would have left a hole in my heart too great to fill. I did not know what I was getting into. I did not even know how it would be possible, but God called me, and God made a way.

When God calls us, it is going to disrupt our lives, and that is OK. In fact, the story of Mary teaches us that maybe we should be more troubled than we are right now. After all, an unplanned teen pregnancy saved the world. Maybe we should be OK with trouble, opposition, disruption and inconvenience, because those are signs that we are obeying God's will. As counter-intuitive as that seems, that is the truth the Bible teaches us.

Mary was faithful, humble, and obedient to God. The world needs more Christians who are faithful, humble, and obedient. So many people live for themselves and rarely inconvenience themselves to help others. So many people ignore God and refuse to answer his call, simply because they are addicted to their own security and comfort.

Look what God did with a lowly, humble girl who decided to say, "Yes. May it be as you say." Through Mary's obedience, God brought salvation to the world. God needs people who will be obedient, people who will change the world because of their faith in Jesus Christ. That is who we are. We are the church. We are the faithful, those who are obedient to God's will. We are the simple vessels that carry the gospel of salvation by our words and our actions.

Christmas is all about good news, however disruptive it might seem. Right now, people are experiencing a lot of disruption, from holiday traffic, to late mail, to long lines at the stores. All because of a child born two thousand years ago.

The world experiences good news when we are obedient to God. But we cannot expect to change the world if comfort, convenience, and security are our primary values. We can only change the world if we make a firm commitment to faithfulness, obedience, and humility, as Mary did, and accept the inconvenience that comes with them.

[PICTURE] A couple of months ago, my cousin's wife gave me a copy of the rosary. You know that the Orthodox and Catholic churches venerate Mary. They do not worship her, but they hold her in very high regard. Even though I have a different theological perspective than my brothers and sisters in those faiths, I think they may have found something that we have lost in the Protestant churches – a great respect for Mary because of her decision to be obedient. Maybe we need a little more of that respect in our church, so that we can follow Mary's example.

Mary leaves us with a choice. Will we choose to allow God to bring forth something amazing through our obedience, or will we choose comfort, security, and disbelief? Each one of us must decide.

I pray that tonight, when we experience the wonder of Christmas through carols and candlelight, we will not forget that the true meaning of Christmas. I pray that God will grab a hold of us enough to disrupt our apathy and awaken our consciences. I pray that when you hear God calling, you will not say, "That's impossible!" but you will answer with the simple phrase, "I am the Lord's servant. May it be as you say in my life." Let us pray.

Memory Verse: Luke 1:37 (NRSV)

“For nothing will be impossible with God.”

Reflection Questions:

1. When have you been around an important or famous person? How did you feel?
2. What have been the most disruptive moments in your life?
3. How is following Jesus inconvenient? What benefits do we receive?
4. Why do you think Mary trusted God so much? Do you have a similar trust of God?
5. Are you a disruptive force for God in the world? Do notice opposition when you obey God?