

Mary's Story
Luke 1:26-38

Brothers and sisters, this morning we wrap up our countdown to Christmas as this is the last Sunday before we celebrate the birth of Christ on Christmas Eve next Sunday.

And so, this morning as we look at Mary's story and how God intended to include Mary in His plan to fulfill His covenant promises, not only to Abraham but all the way back to covenant promise He made to the first woman, Eve - we need to be reminded that this God loves us!

And while fulfilling His promise to Eve, that one day her offspring would crush the head of the serpent, is a good reason for the season, its important to understand that God makes His covenant promises to people like Abraham and to Eve and uses people like Mary in His plans to fulfill them because He is a God of love. That's the "why" behind the reason for the season – it's all expressions of God's amazing Love.

And Mary's story reminds us that we don't have to impress God in order to get his attention or love, He loves us just because He loves us, because that's just the kind of God he is!

So, as we see Christmas decorations go up, the lights on people's homes shining at night, as the shops with their Christmas displays, and Christmas music playing over the radio and in the malls as we shop for gifts...

As we enjoy the seasonal flavored lattes at Starbucks or Tims or 2nd Cup of wherever you like to get your coffee...

Brothers and sisters, please remember - the "why" behind this whole season is God's amazing love.

Remember John 3:16 *"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."*

Because brothers and sisters, believe it or not - we need to be reminded that God loves us – and of how much God loves us!

Especially around Christmas time, not just because of how commercialized things have become, but because for many people Christmas means lots of stress - because there are so many things to do in order to get ready for it.

And it's not just busyness - Christmas can also mean loneliness and depression for those who have recently lost loved ones or who can't be around their family or friends for whatever reason.

That's why John 3:17 is just as important as verse 16 – because it says *“For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.”*

In other words the birth of God's Son, and by implication the celebration of the birth of God's Son was not intended to be something that burdens us, or causes us stress and anxiety

But its something that God did out of love, with the intentions of liberating and freeing us up – as Jesus himself said *“I have*

come that they may have life, and have it to the full. (John 10:10)

However, that's not always how we experience it, is it?

When it's something this important, the fulfilment of a promise after hundreds, maybe thousands of years... When it's the very Son of God - we ought to do something, we ought to make sure things are right!

Christian author Max Lucado wrote a kid's story called the Children of the King.

In the story a kind King sends out an announcement that he intends to come to visit some kids who did not have any parents.

The littlest girl of these children was lead to believe she should prepare something significant and important for this visit, and when she couldn't she was worried.

Her brothers and sisters were all very talented and were preparing to amaze the King with their singing, their wisdom, and so on...

But in their preparations they soon lost sight of what they were preparing for and all of them became distracted and forgot about the king's visit and pursued their talents instead.

The little girl however, ended up showing kindness to a stranger who showed up at their town. She took care of his horse while he had a nap, and getting him some food and drink.

Later on this kind stranger could see that she was worried and anxious about something and he asked her about it.

She told him that she was worried that she wouldn't be able to do anything to impress the King who was coming to visit them.

As you might have guessed, the kind stranger was really the King in disguise and the little girl had no reason to worry or be anxious.

And as we read in the scripture this morning, when the Angel visited Mary to tell her she would be the mother of the messiah, she was initially anxious as well.

But by the end of the Gabrielle's visit, Mary is calm and willing to make herself available to God's to be a part of His plan.

So what was it that helped Mary move from being "greatly troubled" to being able to say "I am the Lord's servant, may your word to me be fulfilled"?

Well friends – it was God's love! God's love moves Mary to respond the way she did in the end.

God loved Mary so much that He took the initiative to break into her life to make her a part of his plans.

You see Mary was just a young woman in her early teens, just an average Israelite girl who was planning to get married.

And she didn't have any particular skills or abilities, like interpreting dreams or being a skilled administrator but...God wanted to use her anyways.

So God sent his angel Gabriel to tell Mary about His plans for her life, and it was Gabriel's greeting that caused Mary to become so worried.

He says *"Hail Mary, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you"* and then the text says *"Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be" (vs. 29)*

Why is this troubling?

Well friends think about it for a moment...

How would we react if our boss came to us and said *"Hi there John, my most favorite employee..."*

Or if our friend comes up and says *"Jane... my most favorite person in the whole world..."* or when you teenager comes up and says *"Hey Mom... Dad, have I told you how much I love you lately?"*

Our response is... this person is buttering me up, what do they want from me? And so Mary rightly wonders what kind of greeting is this?

Who favors her? Who is this person greeting her in such a way, what does he want from her? She wasn't anyone special; she didn't have any particular talents, why was she suddenly getting this attention?

Because to be favored meant that somebody wanted you for something.

Imagine you're a professional athlete walking out to your car in the parking lot one night, and a man approaches at your car and says *"Hi... how ya doin'? I work for Big Eddy and he likes you, so now you're working for Big Eddy too – and Big Eddy*

has got a lot of money riding on the game next week, so you're gonna help him out by throwing the game - kapeche!"

Being favored could be bad news – depending on who favored you. So Mary is troubled by this greeting.

And friends when someone tells us that “God loves you and He has a plan for your life” that can be troubling for us as well.

Maybe because we don't know who this God is, or maybe because we think we know who this God is...

Maybe we had our own plans for our life, and they are going along quite nicely thank-you very much. We didn't ask from them to be interrupted.

It can leave us quite agitated and troubled as well.

So the angel Gabriel puts Mary at ease – *“Don't be afraid” he says “You've found favor with God”*

At that starts to make Mary relax because you see she knows God. She belongs to the nation of Israel – God's chosen people, the one's to whom God has revealed himself so that they know who He really is.

Mary has history with God – or at least she knows about her people's history with Him, the stories of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob – and Joseph...

The stories of how their people had gone down to Egypt and then how God had delivered them from Egypt, lead them through the Red Sea, fed them manna in the desert, how he broke down the walls of Jericho, gave them the Promised Land, and on and on it could go...

There are no shortage of stories which show how God has demonstrated his love through saving and delivering the nation of Israel.

So this puts Mary somewhat at ease.

Additionally the Angel has some really good news for her. Gabriel tells her that she will have a son, and this son will be named Jesus – meaning “He saves.”

And... He will be called “Son of the Most High” He will be given the throne of David and He will have a kingdom that never ends.

Now think about this for a minute – Mary is just a peasant girl, she’s nobody really, but here she’s being told that her son will be royalty... a King in fact. It’s incredible.

But what’s most important about this is not that Mary’s hit the jackpot, but that she knows this good news illustrates God’s love.

Brothers and sisters, God’s love means that when He sees his people struggling to obey him and love him and stay faithful to him He won’t abandon them – even if they deserve it
God’s love means that He sends someone to save them!

And God’s love means that He keeps his promises – we’ve already talked about His promises to Abraham, but God had also made promises to King David.

God had made a covenant with David that his royal line would never end, that He would always have a descendent sitting on the throne of Israel.

For years now it looked like God had forgotten this promise.

Israel had been sent into exile twice, and now the Roman Empire ruled over them and oppressed them.

But now Mary hears the Angel say that God intends to keep that promise to David... through giving her a son.

This is incredible news, but then again God’s love is an incredible thing is it not?

You see friends when we hear that God loves us, and has a plan for our lives and we wonder... what is that all about?

We can look back to how God has acted in the past –with Israel and with Mary, and see that God’s love and his plan for our lives is something good.

God’s love saves us from what is wrong in our lives. God’s love keeps promises, and the best promise God ever made was that He would make this whole world new once again.

“See, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind.”

(Isaiah 65:17)

And, He started to fulfill this promise in Jesus Christ and He is continuing to bring about that new creation by renewing our hearts and minds and lives through the power of His Holy Spirit, and that gives us Hope!

Now I know this almost seems too good to be true, and when we look around at the world and we see all the bad news, when we go through tough times in our own life - that reality seems to contradict what God intends to do.

So it is for Mary as well. Sure she is glad to hear about the amazing things that God’s love will bring into her life – but it seems inconceivable.

That’s why she asks *“How will this be, since I am a virgin?”* or as the original text says- *“since I have not known a man”*

Brothers and sisters, Mary can’t understand how God’s word will come true because she’s thinking within the confines of her normal experience.

The way things work if she’s going to have a child, she needs a man to have one with – and she’s only just engaged, she’s not married yet.

So how will this work? I don’t get it, she says.

Brothers and sisters, here’s another thing about God’s love – it can handle our questions, it’s not wrong to ask God questions...

We just need to be prepared to receive His answers! So the Angel tells Mary how this will all happen.

And the answer is simple – God is going to do it!

You don't have to do the work of trying to conceive, you don't even have to have a husband – the Holy Spirit will do that work, and thus your child will truly be the “Son” of God

And if you need proof that God can do this Mary – the angel says - your relative Elizabeth is already six months pregnant.

In other words Gabriel says to Mary - God can make a barren womb fertile again.

Mary would know that the nation of Israel actually comes from a number of barren women – Sarah, Rachael – Joseph's mother, Hannah... *“So Mary...”* the Angel insinuates *“If God can do all that with barren women, imagine what God can do with a young woman like yourself who is fertile?”*

Fertile not only biologically, but fertile spiritually - because she believes, she has faith; she knows God can do this – because she is one of His chosen people and She knows He loves her.

He is Yahweh, the Holy one of Israel, God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, The Creator of the Heavens and the Earth...

And soon to be the Father of her child...

So she whispers back to the Angel – *“I am the Lord's servant, may the word you spoke to me be fulfilled”*

You see brothers and sisters, here's another thing we learn about God's love – It woos us.

It softens us, it attracts us and it makes us open up and respond to God with willing hearts of our own.

Yes God's love may initially come to us abruptly, interrupting our lives and throwing our plans off unexpectedly, causing us to worry and be anxious.

But, once we've been exposed to it – it conceives and brings forth a reciprocating love in our own hearts – all on its own, we don't have to try to force it, it's not something we chose, it's the gift of God loving us.

So while the Christmas Season can be a time of anxiety and stress and loneliness, if we are reminded that the "Why" behind it all is that *God so loved the world that He sent his one and only Son...*

Then experiencing God's love will give birth to something else in us – it will move us from being troubled to responding to Him with a love of our own.

Brothers and sisters God's Holy Spirit will do this in you, you don't have to conjure it up, you don't have to try to have a supernatural experience, you don't have to fake it till you make it, and you don't have to choose it...

Just allow yourself to be reminded throughout this season of God's incredible love for you

And then out of love for God we too will whisper with Mary – I am the Lord's servant, may your word to me be fulfilled as well.

Brothers and sisters as we prepare for our celebration of Christ's birth in the coming week remember this - God loves you! Amen – let's pray

God interrupt us,
Break into our busy lives
With your love
Stir up a greater love for you in our hearts
So we want to serve you
For it is better to be a servant of the King
Then to be the master of a life
which does not love God
Amen.