

December 22, 2019

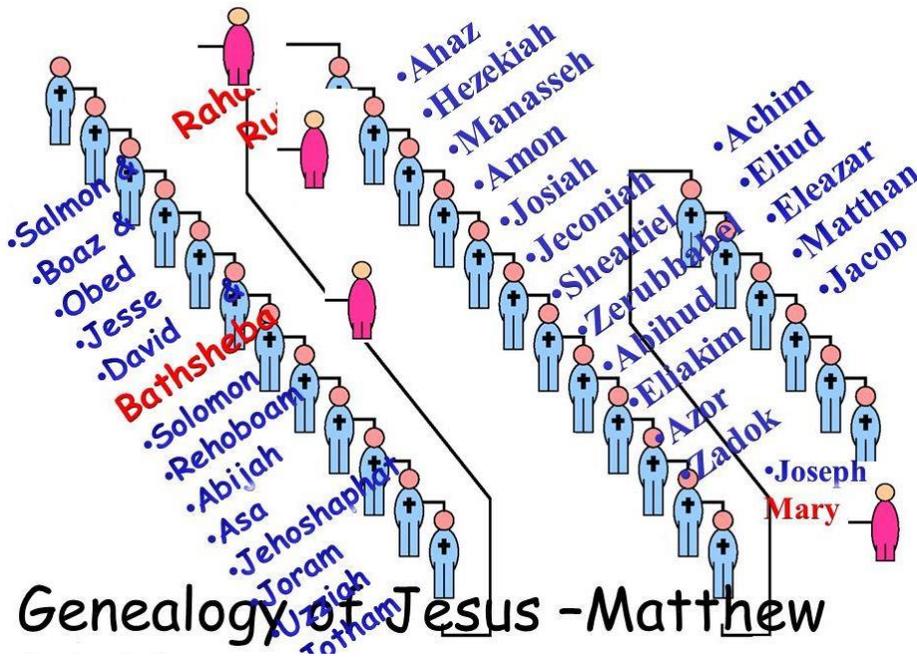
“Mary” Christmas

Matthew 1:18-25 (CEB)

<sup>18</sup>Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. <sup>19</sup>Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. <sup>20</sup>But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. <sup>21</sup>She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” <sup>22</sup>All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

<sup>23</sup>“Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel,”

which means, “God is with us.” <sup>24</sup>When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, <sup>25</sup>but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus.



For the past four weeks we have been looking at the women included in Matthew's genealogy of Jesus. We learned about God's grace through Tamar, Rahab, Ruth and Bathsheba. The genealogy ends with: "and Matthan, the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary by whom was born Jesus who is called the Christ".

Now that the prologue is finished we come to the story. The fulfillment of time has come and so we rejoice and celebrate God's love being made known. Matthew writes the story of Jesus' birth through the eyes of Joseph. What did you learn about Mary through this Scripture text we just read? The angel talks to Joseph, he obeys the angel and gives the name to the baby. All we know about Mary through this story is that she was engaged and she got pregnant by the Holy Spirit. Mary does not say a word, Mary is passive.



## **THE TRUE STORY OF THE 3 LITTLE PIGS! BY A. WOLF**

Last Sunday my family and I went to a play called "The True Story of the Three Little Pigs". Have you ever wondered why the wolf blew on the houses? Has anybody asked and heard what the wolf has to say? In the play we watch Mr. Wolf as he was brought to court and we had to hear why he destroyed and ate the piglets. He was actually baking a pie for his grandma and he ran out of the sugar. Mr. Wolf just went to his neighbors to borrow a cup of sugar. He got accused of many things when in reality nobody wanted to help him in the time of need.

The story can be totally different. It depends on whom you ask.

Matthew's record is more about Joseph. Mark and John do not mention the birth of Jesus. I am glad there are four gospels. I look in the gospel of Luke to learn more about Mary.

Luke starts with an elderly couple named Zacharias and Elizabeth. An angel came to Zacharias and announced that they, in their old age, would have a son. They were to name him John. We know him today as John the Baptist.

Luke writes: “When Elizabeth was six months pregnant, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a city in Galilee, <sup>27</sup> to a virgin who was engaged to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David’s house. The virgin’s name was Mary. <sup>28</sup> When the angel came to her, he said, “Rejoice, favored one! The Lord is with you!”



Who is Mary? We know little about her. She was a Jewish girl from the region of Galilee. That’s about it. Mary was probably living a very common unremarkable life. She was probably doing what every engaged 13-year-old girl did in preparation for marriage. We have no information about why God chose Mary. Only from her responses can we guess why.

The angel came unexpectedly. God has a way of surprising us in our ordinary lives. How do we respond when God interferes with our plans? We have our daily

routines but God has much greater plans. God uses ordinary people for God's extraordinary mission.

The angel, Gabriel, came and told her: "Rejoice, favored one! The Lord is with you!". How would you feel?

Have you ever received an e-mail like this one? *"This is to inform you that you have been selected for a prize of a 2019 BMW 7 Series car, a Check of \$1,500,000.00 USD and an Apple MacBook Air laptop from the BMW Automobile international annual computer balloting programs held on the 1st section of the 2019 award promo in the UNITED STATES OF AMERICA"*. What do you do with it? Delete it, put in junk or block it? We used to get calls that we went to the Caribbean island and we have won another free trip. Right. Obviously spam. You simply hang up.

We are very suspicious of these great deals they offer us. The angel tells Mary, "Rejoice, you are favored!" Favored? How? Why? I can imagine her thinking: What did I do? Why me? What is next?

We know she was greatly troubled and rightly so. She kept pondering what kind of greeting that was. If a stranger comes to you in the mall and says, "You are chosen for a great prize. You found favor in our eyes", will you even talk?

As we have learned from all the women in the ancestral tree, God chooses us. God chooses you even if you think you are not worth it. I am a little fish. There are many other people who can do much greater things.

All you do does matter a lot. Think of Tamar, Rahab, Ruth. Do you think they thought that their faith, that their choices would really make such a difference? Did they know that God was making a path preparing to send His only Son? They had no clue that they were part of a much bigger plan to bring the greatest love, best gift and the most wonderful redemption plan for us all.

God comes into our lives when we least expect and are not prepared. The angel came to Mary and told her that she is a favored one. The Lord is with her. The Lord is present now.

The angel's greeting is the same to all of us. Rejoice. You are favored by God. You may think that you are insignificant. The truth is that God is here with you, now. There is hope, joy and peace available simply by knowing that God is with us.

God does not have to do anything for us. God does not have to perform a miracle. God does not have to give us answers or do what we want him to do. We need to discover that it is enough to have God's presence with us.



What do you need to happen to you today so you can be happy? What do you need God to do for you so you would believe -- Believe enough to say: "YES" and be His servant.

Mary was troubled and tried to discern what all this means. She was troubled – not happy, not excited, but troubled. When I hear the word of God speak to me does it trouble me?

Gabriel continued: "Don't be afraid, Mary. God is honoring you. <sup>31</sup> Look! You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. <sup>32</sup> He will be great and he will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of David his father. <sup>33</sup> He will rule over Jacob's house forever, and there will be no end to his kingdom."

This is more than one can comprehend. It is totally out there. It is impossible. It is the craziest thing.

Can you imagine the response of an eighth grade girl today? "Get real. This – like – totally freaks me out. I am engaged. How am I supposed to have a baby when I am not sleeping around? I am going to become an unwed mother? Let me get this straight. Somehow I am going to have a baby boy named Jesus which means savior.

He will be called the Son of God. Does that make me the mother of God? This is totally weird. No way.”

We can safely assume she knew the prophecies of the Old Testament. Like all of her people she was waiting in expectation of the Messiah who would save her people. No one knew when or how. Mary, for sure, did not know she would be a chosen instrument of God.

How was your week? Did you have lots of joy? Was your life slow and restful? Was it filled with uplifting events? Did you have time to reflect and center around Christ?

I, personally had a rough week. I had to battle my feelings, my moods and my attitude. The rush of trying to meet everybody’s needs almost got the best out of me. My whole being was unbalanced and I was not happy. I set aside Wednesday to fast and pray and study the word of God so I could re-center.

It is not easy to be whom God wants you to be. It can be a challenge to be at peace with yourself and others. Rather than work harder and getting lost in busyiness I chose to admit my troubles to God, to accept the promise of God’s presence and to seek God’s face more diligently. I searched for what was preventing me from resting in God’s peace.

Mary was troubled and looked for discernment.

After she heard what the angel told her, she did not say: “Sure, you got it Gabriel. I am on it!” It was not easy to believe, it was not easy to process it all and she had to have a faith that is bigger than she was.

The only question Mary asked was, “How can this be since I am a virgin?” At first it sounds like a biological question. Maybe Mary was asking a deeper question. Maybe she was asking how she could believe this announcement? How will God do it? Can God do it? Can I truly trust God?



Gabriel explained: “The Holy Spirit will come over you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore, the one who is to be born will be holy. He will be called God’s Son. <sup>36</sup> Look, even in her old age, your relative Elizabeth has conceived a son. This woman who was labeled ‘unable to conceive’ is now six months pregnant. <sup>37</sup> Nothing is impossible for God.”

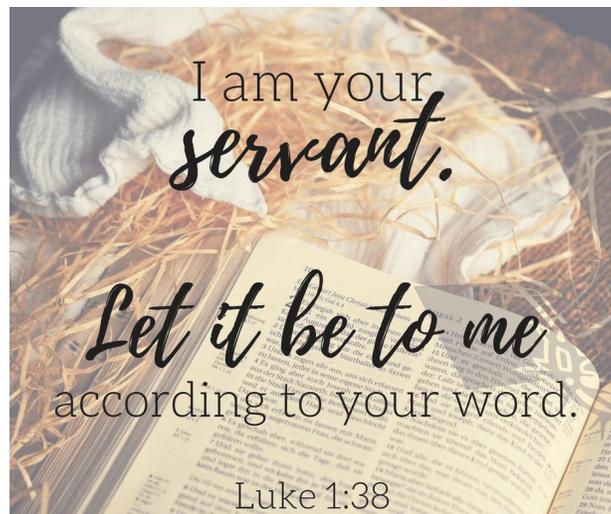
Gabriel points her to see what God has already done. She knows her cousin, Elizabeth and her impossible pregnancy.

Can we see what God is already doing? Do you and I see God at work? Do you notice His miracles? His grace? His love? His Spirit? Power during prayer?

The scene is powerful and beautiful...but is it? Mary is already engaged. Her life is all planned. I think the angel should have come just a little bit earlier. How would you feel after you have prepared for the biggest event of your life –your wedding – and then an angel changes everything.

I do struggle with patience and accepting God’s timing and especially interruptions in my plans. For Mary to say “Yes” to God, she had to say “No” to her plans. She had to trust and believe that God’s plan is better. She had to believe in what will happen. She had to trust in God’s word. Am I able to give my life, my dreams, my future, just because I trust what God is saying?

She risked her life. She risked her future. Her answer was not calculated by math and numbers. Her math had only one symbol: **< God is greater.**



Young Mary did not ask for a few days to think about it. She did not ask a thousand more questions. She did not ask God to change His plan. She said: “I am the

Lord's servant. Let it be with me just as you have said." I am the Lord's servant. Who are you? Who am I? I want to say I am a child of God and I believe it is true.

Are we able to say we are servants of God? As a servant you say, "Not my will, but your will. A servant says, "It's not about me but about my master. It is irrelevant if I live or die." It requires faith. If I truly trust God's love, why do I struggle to believe in His love for me and His plans for me? Why do I keep choosing my brokenness?

"And the angel departed from her". How do you live after you have said "Yes"? How do you let others know that you have said yes to God's plan? How do you return to life when you have decided to believe and follow God? How do you live when you have changed but the world has not? How do you be different when parents and neighbors expect you to be who they want you to be. Joseph wanted her to be a young girl: not a pregnant woman from Holy Spirit.

Today we hear the story how God sent His Son to start his human life in the womb of young Mary. We call this the incarnation.

As I was listening my daily devotionals from Seedbed one thought has stayed with me. It said, if God chose to dwell and be in Mary, just regular girl, don't you believe God can live in you. God is able to dwell in you, Christ can live in you. True God, Holy and powerful God, chooses to live in humans who say yes, you trust their Master and willing to live by God's plan and timing.

The Almighty Eternal Infinite God of the universe became a human to live among us and to save us from our sins. God's amazing love compelled the Son of God to come to show us how we can know hope, peace, joy and love.

God loved the world so much, God loves you so much that He sent Jesus so you could believe and have life. Jesus became one of us so we can have abundant life. Do you believe it?

When we say or hear somebody say, "Merry Christmas", think of Mary Christmas. Mary had a choice. She believed, she accepted and was not afraid to face a life with God. She was challenged in her faith but she enjoyed the presence of God.

Oh. One more thing that Gabriel did not tell Mary: She would see her son rise from the dead. Without the resurrection, all that Gabriel said would have been a lie. Mary's conversation with Gabriel would be an interesting fable with no meaning.

"He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end." We know it is true. Jesus rose from death and his Kingdom, His presence is now with us and will have no end".

Mary's part in all this was simply to say "Yes" to God's message.