

Fear Not, Just Trust
Luke 1:26-38

Slide 1

Have you ever been afraid at Christmas time? Maybe as a child you were afraid of Santa? Or maybe you were scared that you hadn't made the good list and were afraid Santa wouldn't come.

Perhaps it was a rough year financially and you were afraid that you'd let your family down at Christmas since you'd seen their list and weren't sure that you could meet their expectations.

Or, maybe it was your first Christmas in your new reality and you were afraid of spending Christmas alone, either because of death or divorce.

This advent season we're looking at the various "*Fear Nots*" that show up in the Christmas story.

Last week our message was "*Fear Not, Just Believe*" where we looked at Gabriel's visit to Zechariah and his message in Luke 1.

Luke 1:13, "*But the angel said to him: "Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to call him John."*

At that time, we looked at the ramifications of those words, "*your prayer has been heard.*"

Sometimes we're afraid that God won't answer our prayers, but we must understand that when our prayers are answered there are many different parts that go along with that answered prayer.

So, this morning we're moving to the next chapter of the Christmas story where we're introduced to Jesus' mother, Mary.

If there's a person who should receive best supporting role in the Christmas story, it's Mary. She almost deserves the lead, but how do you compete with the Son of God?

It's like the story of the Sunday School class where the teacher asked the students, *"What's grey has a bushy tail and collects nuts."*

One little boy blurted out, *"It sounds like a squirrel, but I bet the answer's Jesus."*

Well, Mary was a critical piece of the puzzle, and she truly is what makes Christmas, Christmas.

Through the years she's been called The Holy Mary, Saint Mary, The Blessed Mother, The Mother of God and on and on and on, but in the Bible, she's simply called Mary.

Mary was the one chosen to change the diapers of God. But, before that, she was just a young lady with all the dreams and aspirations that young ladies 2000 years ago had.

She was going to get married and raise a family. So, let's see why Mary was told to *"Fear Not!"*

Slide 2

Our story begins with these words in Luke 1:26-27, *"In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary."*

Up to this point it wasn't all that complicated. Just a young couple who were planning on getting married.

Now, it's kind of interesting how Mary's described: *"God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a village in Galilee, to a virgin."*

I don't know when the last time was that I introduced someone by stating they were a virgin. Let me think. No, never, but that description is instrumental in the story.

I know there're people who can't wrap their minds around the entire idea of the virgin birth. There're even some pastors and churches who say that it's not possible for a virgin to conceive.

In fact, they assure their congregation that it's not really necessary to believe in the virgin birth.

They say, that when Matthew wrote that, he simply meant that Mary was a young woman, or a young unmarried woman.

If you've ever been to Greece, then you might have had the opportunity to visit the Parthenon in Athens.

Slide 3

This is considered to be the most important example of Classical Greek architecture.

It was built around 400 years before the birth of Christ, dedicated to the Greek Goddess Athena.

Slide 4

Here is a stature of her. She is called *Athena Parthenos*, or literally Athena the Virgin.

Slide 5

Parthenon, the building, literally meant the Virgin's Room. Why's that important? Because the Greek word Parthenos is the word that is used time and time again to describe Mary.

So, there're only two options, either Mary was a Virgin or someone other than Joseph got her pregnant before the wedding. Because, we know from his response to the news, that it wasn't Joseph.

Entire sermons have been preached on the Virgin birth, but the bottom line is you either believe it or you don't believe it, the choice is yours. I believe it.

It was Mary who was there when Jesus was conceived, it was Mary who was there when Jesus was born, it was Mary who was there when Jesus was murdered.

Slide 6

Luke 1:28-30, *"The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you." Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God."*

Did you know that Gabriel is only mentioned six times in the Bible? Four of those instances are in the book of Daniel where he revealed the prophecies of God.

The last two are found in the book of Luke where he first spoke to Zechariah concerning Elizabeth's pregnancy and again here.

We touched on this last week, but I don't think that when Gabriel appeared to Mary, he was saying, *"Don't be afraid, I'm an angel."*

Rather Luke 1:30 says, *"But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God."*

Now, you wouldn't think that finding favor with God would be something of which you'd be afraid, but listen to what finding favor with God entailed for Mary,

Luke 1:31-33, "You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. 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, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end."

I love the fact that Mary doesn't question that her Son will be great, that He'll be called the Son of the Most High, that He'll be given the throne of David and will reign over Israel.

She's very practical. Listen to her question in Luke 1:34, *"How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"*

Now in this instance Mary doesn't use the Greek word Parthenos, instead what she says is, *"I've never known a man."*

This may seem a little vague to us here in 2022, but it was crystal clear 2000 years ago. She was stating without hesitation that she was a virgin.

The Angel's response was basically, *"No problem, you just need to trust us on this."* Well actually, he was a little more wordy than that.

Luke 1:35-37, "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 the Son of God. Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. For no word from God will ever fail."

I have no idea what went through Mary's mind right then, but listen to her response: Luke 1:38, "*I am the Lord's servant,*" *Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled."* Then the angel left her."

Sometimes I think, because we can't fully understand what happened here, we tend to relegate Mary to some obscure corner by never actually talking about her.

We've seen how the Catholic Church has virtually deified Mary, and, in an effort to not appear pro-Catholic, we do what's normally done with other pregnant teenagers like her, we prefer that she not come to church.

The only time we mention Mary is at Christmas and the rest of the time you'd think that Jesus was raised as an orphan.

But Jesus wasn't raised an orphan, it was Mary who changed God's diapers and it was Mary who wiped God's nose and it was Mary who held God when He was crying.

"Well," you might say, "*He was the son of God.*" That's true, but God was an absentee father and delegated the raising of His son to a very young Galilean girl by the name of Mary.

Yes, Jesus was the Son of God who came to take away our sin but, before that, He was a teenager and before that, He was a child, and before that, He was a baby.

God may have been His Father, but Mary was His mother, and she was the one who raised Christ to be the man that He became.

Ask yourself this question: *What type of person would you want to raise your kids?* I probably wouldn't want me raising mine, I'd want somebody that was a good parent.

But what made Mary special? So special in fact that God was willing to entrust her with His one and only Son. God was willing to trust Mary because Mary was willing to trust God.

What was it that she needed to trust God with? Mary needed to trust God with the details.

Slide 7

If we believe that life begins at conception, then the reality is: one minute you're not pregnant and the next minute you are.

Now, you're at least somewhat aware of the possibility of that happening. Regardless of how unplanned it was, or how surprised you were, the possibility's there.

But for Mary, that wasn't the case. She was unpregnant, is that even a word? She was unpregnant and then she was pregnant with nothing in between.

In the account we read last week we discovered that Elizabeth and Zechariah couldn't have children. Then Gabriel told Zechariah that their prayers had been answered and they would have a son.

But there was nothing "miraculous" about John's birth. We have to assume from the story that Elizabeth and Zechariah did their part, and as a result Elizabeth conceived.

Elizabeth could say that John looked just like his father, Zechariah. When she was scolding John or praising him, she could say, "*You're just like your father.*"

But with Mary it was outside the natural, she had to believe that she would become pregnant, not because of anything she might do, but because of the power of the Holy Spirit.

It's all well and good to say you believe that God has your very best at heart, or that you believe God can do anything.

But Mary basically said, *“Not only do I believe it here, in my heart, but I'm allowing You, God, to work it out in my life. I may not understand it, I might not even agree with what you are proposing but you are God so bring it on.”*

Think about it. Can you trust God with the details of your Christian life? The everyday, how you fit your Christian commitment into the real world?

When God asks you to serve? When He asks you to give? Can you trust Him to take care of the details?

We kind of get the story, i.e. Mary was engaged to Joseph, she became pregnant by the Holy spirit, she travelled to Bethlehem with Joseph, Jesus was born, they got married, and they all lived happily ever after. The end.

But do we ever stop and think about the upheaval in her life. Her plan, I'm sure, was to get married and then get pregnant, not the other way around.

Her plan never included the scorn of people in her community, the distrust, if only for a while, of her fiancé, and ultimately the stress of raising the Son of God.

Slide 8

Think about it, Mary lived in a small community, where everybody knew everybody and everybody's business.

I'm sure that people knew that Mary and Joseph were engaged, and they probably knew when Mary and Joseph were supposed to be married.

Now all of a sudden, she's pregnant and they aren't married, and she has this fantastic tale about how she's still a virgin and how the father is God.

A marriage counselor once explained a family situation by saying, "*The first baby can come anytime, the next one takes nine months.*"

I'm pretty sure that 2000 years ago they knew the nine-month rule and may even have joked about the first one coming prematurely, but this wasn't the way it was supposed to happen.

While you probably would've believed Mary and supported her, I'm not sure that the rest of the community would've been as understanding and compassionate as you would've been.

I'm not sure that Mary understood all of the ramifications, but she would've known some of them. Yet, she willingly gave up her reputation and her plans for the future in order to be obedient to God.

Now she had to think about raising a child. We all worry about messing our kids up, but what if you had the added pressure and responsibility of that child being the child of God?

I wonder, as Mary watched Jesus grow up, how often she thought of the words of the angel and wondered when the rest of the prophecy would come true?

For four hundred years the Jewish people had looked forward to the day their Messiah would come. They waited through the Babylonian Conquest, and then the Assyrian Conquest.

They felt sure it would happen when Alexander's troops held sway and now, they watched as the armies of Rome occupied their country, and still they waited.

While it hadn't happened yet, they were confident that God would send His Messiah to deliver them.

Most of them envisioned the Messiah arriving riding a white horse and conquering the conquerors with the might of the sword.

Perhaps that was what Mary envisioned when the Angel told her in Luke 1:32b-33, *"The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end."*

But that wasn't who Jesus was. Instead of leading an army, He came preaching grace and forgiveness. He told others to turn the other cheek and to go the extra mile.

Instead of arriving on a white horse as a conqueror, we read that He fulfilled the prophecy of the Prophet Jeremiah.

Matthew 21:1-5, *"As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, 'Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, say that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away.'" This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet: "Say to Daughter Zion, 'See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.'"*

That, of course, led to the cross. I can't imagine losing a child, but to have that magnified by having your child murdered and, what's worse, having to watch Him being murdered.

We see Mary at the beginning of her Son's story, and we also see her at the end.

Slide 9

Conclusion

John 19:16-18 & 25, *“Finally Pilate handed him over to them to be crucified. So the soldiers took charge of Jesus. Carrying his own cross, he went out to the place of the Skull (which in Aramaic is called Golgotha). There they crucified him, and with him two others—one on each side and Jesus in the middle... Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene.”*

Mary needed to trust God with the ultimate results, but how could this be part of the plan?

The angel said He would be called the *“Son of the Most High,”* but they called Him a heretic and a traitor.

The angel said that His Kingdom would never end, but now she watched His life end on a cross. She watched His followers scatter betray Him. She watched as they denied they ever knew Him.

If Mary only knew that in three days her Son would conquer the grave and rise again. If only Mary could have seen the difference that her Son would make through history, with sins forgiven and lives changed.

If only Mary could see the difference that those who followed her Son would make in a broken world. That for two thousand years, hospitals, schools, and orphanages would be started all in her Son’s name.

God calls us to trust Him, even when we can’t see all of the picture, even when we might not agree with the direction the path is taking.

We’re reminded in Hebrews 11:1, *“Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.”*

At the foot of the cross, all that Mary could cling to was her faith in God and His promises.

I don't know where you are on your journey, I don't know your story, but if God has called you to follow Him, then God has called you to trust Him with the details, the immediate results, and the ultimate results.

As we close, my prayer for you this Christmas season is the same as Paul's prayer for the church in Rome 2000 years ago.

Romans 15:13, *“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.”*