

Experiencing the Impossible

By Bill Scheidler

Alternative Titles:

Facing the Unexpected
Mary, Christmas
Mary had a Little Lamb

Text: Luke 1:26-38

Now in the sixth month [when Elizabeth was in her sixth month of pregnancy] the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, 27 to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. 28 And having come in, the angel said to her, "Rejoice, **highly favored one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!**" 29 But when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and considered what manner of greeting this was. 30 Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for **you have found favor with God.** 31 And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name JESUS. 32 He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. 33 And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end." 34 Then Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I do not know a man?" 35 And the angel answered and said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God. 36 Now indeed, Elizabeth your relative has also conceived a son in her old age; and this is now the sixth month for her who was called barren. 37 **For with God nothing will be impossible.**" 38 Then Mary said, "Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.

39 Now Mary arose in those days and went into the hill country **with haste**, to a city of Judah, 40 and entered the house of Zacharias and greeted Elizabeth. 41 And it happened, when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, that the babe leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. 42 Then she spoke out with a loud voice and said, "**Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!** 43 But why is this granted to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? 44 For indeed, as soon as the voice of your greeting sounded in my ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy. 45 Blessed is she who believed, for **there will be a fulfillment** of those things which were told her from the Lord."

The Song of Mary

46 And Mary said: "My soul magnifies the Lord, 47 And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior. 48 For He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant; For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed. 49 For He who is mighty has done great things for me, And holy is His name. 50 And His mercy is on those who fear Him from generation to generation. 51 He has shown strength with His arm; He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. 52 He has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted the lowly. 53 He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He has sent away empty. 54 He has helped His servant Israel, in remembrance of His mercy, 55 As He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his seed forever."

56 And Mary remained with her about three months, and returned to her house.

What we know about Mary?

1. She was a young woman (somewhere between 12-17, most likely under 15).

Don't want to underestimate what God can do with young people.

2. She was a virgin (had not had any sexual contact with a man).
3. She had a belief in the coming Messiah.
4. She was betrothed to Joseph.

Betrothal in the Jewish culture was much stronger than our engagement. She may have had little to say about the selection of Joseph to be her husband. In any case, they were considered married in every way except that they would not live together or enjoy sexual union until after the marriage ceremony itself. Betrothal for a virgin usually lasted for a year. Betrothal could only be broken by death or divorce. If Joseph had died before the marriage ceremony took place, she would have still been regarded as his "widow" (a widow who is a virgin).

5. She was a woman of no apparent significance from man's viewpoint.

- Nothing is known of her parents (occupation or social status)
- Not wealthy
- She was simple, plain and ordinary.

How did God see Mary?

But God sees us as individuals. He sees us differently than anyone else does. He sees our hearts, our faith and our personal devotion to Him.

As far as God was concerned she was:

God saw Mary as "Highly Favored"

The angel told Mary that she was highly favored. She was going to be allowed to participate in the greatest event, the greatest miracle of all time. This favor, however, would not feel so very special most of the time. Sometimes when God puts His hand on you it complicates your life.

Having such favor for Mary would involve nine things that did not feel much like "favor":

1. Being accused of adultery. Any sexual involvement in the betrothal was seen as adultery and punishable by death (Lev. 20:10; Deut. 22:22-24; John 8:3-5).

The man who commits adultery with another man's wife, he who commits adultery with his neighbor's wife, the adulterer and the adulteress, shall surely be put to death.

Leviticus 20:10

If a man is found lying with a woman married to a husband, then both of them shall die-- the man that lay with the woman, and the woman; so you shall put away the evil from

Israel. 23 If a young woman who is a virgin is betrothed to a husband, and a man finds her in the city and lies with her, 24 then you shall bring them both out to the gate of that city, and you shall stone them to death with stones, the young woman because she did not cry out in the city, and the man because he humbled his neighbor's wife; so you shall put away the evil from among you. Deuteronomy 22:22-24

Then the scribes and Pharisees brought to Him a woman caught in adultery. And when they had set her in the midst, 4 they said to Him, "Teacher, this woman was caught in adultery, in the very act. 5 Now Moses, in the law, commanded us that such should be stoned. But what do You say?" John 8:3-5

2. Experiencing the shame of having a child out of wedlock.
3. Going through difficult strains of relationship with family, spouse and friends (that may have continued for thirty years). Jesus would not be vindicated as the Son of God until His baptism at Jordan.
4. Having your baby hunted by a paranoid king and having to live in hiding (moving often) for a few of years (Egypt).
5. Having your first born son teased by other children about being a bastard (They lived in Nazareth, the same city in which she was found with child).
6. Raising a child that you did not fully understand at times (Luke 2:51).
7. Seeing your son falsely accused and criticized by religious leaders.
8. Seeing your son arrested by the Romans, publicly beaten and humiliated.
9. Seeing your son die the worst possible and a most painful death.

Had Mary known all that was in store for her she could easily have said, "Perhaps, God, you should favor someone else."

God's favor can involve both a crown of joy and, at the same time, the sorrow of suffering. When God calls us, He does not necessarily call us to a life of luxury and comfort. For Mary there would be a cost for receiving Jesus into her life.

God saw Mary as "Blessed among women"

Mary would become a figure in history that would be considered the most blessed of all. But most of that recognition happened after her death. She had no fame or fortune throughout most of her lifetime.

How did the angel bring assurance to Mary?

He assured Mary, "The Lord is with you"

This was not a wish but a present state of being. Of course, this is the key to our being able to do anything that the Lords tells us to do. Moses told God that he could do whatever needed to be done if he knew that God was going with him.

He assured Mary, “Do not be afraid”

Fear is a natural reaction to the appearance of an angel. It is also a natural reaction to the revelation of God’s purposes for one’s life. Mary had every reason to be afraid (Note that she arose in haste and went to an “out of town relative”, Vs. 39). Fulfilling the will of God would put her life into danger. Self-preservation cannot be our goal in life if we are to fulfill our destiny in God.

He assured Mary with God’s ability, “For with God nothing will be impossible” (Luke 1:37).

It was natural for Mary to have some questions, “How can this be...?” What the angel was saying was impossible from a medical and scientific perspective. This was an honest question. The angel let her know that the work would be all God—the Holy Spirit, the power of the highest.

For with God nothing will be impossible.

All that was needed from Mary was her permission. She had to be a willing vessel?

Mary’s Response (Luke 1:38)

“Let it be unto me according to your word.”

Mary responded, “I am the Lord’s servant, and I am willing to accept whatever he wants. May everything you have said come true” NLT

She had the faith of Abraham believing that God could do something that had never been done before. Even though her natural mind questioned the possibility, she was fully submissive to the will of God whatever the cost.

After the Angel left I am sure that Mary was confused. She undoubtedly struggled with her decision. She might have even experienced “buyer’s remorse.” She needed to be with someone safe while she processed this new revelation. She went to her relative, Elizabeth (many believe to be an older cousin).

Elizabeth’s Encouragement

“There will be a fulfillment” (Luke 1:45)

Mary was encouraged by her relative Elizabeth, a woman who knew something of the miracle working power of God. Don’t expect non-believers to understand what you are going through. Don’t expect them to get excited about your vision. Elizabeth told Mary,

Blessed is she who believed, for there will be a fulfillment of those things which were told her from the Lord.

The Song of Mary (Luke 1:46-50)

A Song of Faith

Mary sang a song of faith before she went back to Nazareth to face her family, Joseph and the religious leaders of the day. In doing so she focused on the end result of her faith and not the process that she would have to endure.

My soul magnifies the Lord, 47 and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior. 48 For He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant; for behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed. 49 For He who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is His name. 50 And His mercy is on those who fear Him from generation to generation.

Seven Lessons learned from Mary

1. One's age is no limitation to being used of God.

Actually, we are not limited by most of the external issues that some see as limitations. One's spiritual relationship and openness to God are the most important things. Sometimes youth is a better choice over older ones. Young people are open, less likely to be critical, more accepting of the impossible. They have had less time to experience disappointment and broken dreams and, hence, make excuses for not going forward. Sometimes older people know too much to easily respond to a new challenge.

2. God delights in choosing nobodies to do great things (I Cor. 1:26-29).

Remember, dear brothers and sisters, that few of you were wise in the world's eyes, or powerful, or wealthy when God called you. 27 Instead, God deliberately chose things the world considers foolish in order to shame those who think they are wise. And he chose those who are powerless to shame those who are powerful. 28 God chose things despised by the world, things counted as nothing at all, and used them to bring to nothing what the world considers important, 29 so that no one can ever boast in the presence of God.

—NLT

He resists the proud but gives grace to the humble. He takes the things that are nothing and makes them into something. There is hope for all of us.

3. God does not need a lot to work with to perform the impossible.

All he needs is a heart of faith and a spirit of willingness. He is looking for people like David whose hearts beat as God's heart.

4. When walking by faith seek out and associate with other people of faith.

Seek counsel, encouragement and prayer from those who believe in God's ability to do the impossible. Do not expect family and friends to understand everything (Joseph had his angelic visitation, but Mary's mother, father and sister did not). People who live in the natural realm will not understand your vision.

5. Being blessed or favored of the Lord does not equate to a life without trouble.

The road to fulfilling the vision of God will involve a certain amount of sacrifice, shame, suffering and sorrow. However, know that the Lord will be with you and His grace will be sufficient for you.

6. The ultimate significance of our sacrifice will not always be seen in our lifetime.

Some of the people who have made some of the greatest contributions to the world were not appreciated until after they died. Since we do not do what we do for the recognition of men (we do it to please the Lord) we do not need to worry about earthly recognition.

- 7. When we cooperate with God's Spirit, when we are on God's side, when we make our will to be harmony with God's will, when our spirit is one with the Spirit of God, when we sing in tune with the heavenly choir...**

MIRACLES HAPPEN!