

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT 2016

Luke 1:26-38 and Luke 1:39-56

Opening Prayer: Glory to you, Lord God, in the highest heaven. May your favor rest upon us this morning; granting us peace, faith and joy in Jesus Name. AMEN.

We all have grids based on our family and social backgrounds. They are lenses through which we see the world. They are worldviews by which we understand ourselves in relation to others and our environment. But, how much of our worldview is actually a *biblical* worldview? How much of our perceptions and understandings within our worldview are informed by: 1) the Bible's view of God, and 2) the Bible's view of supernaturalism; like miracles and angels? For example, have you been miraculously healed or encountered a celestial, other worldly being? Supposing you have not, how would you respond when/if someone else told you about such an unbelievable thing? Would the truth or validity of the person's report be questioned or dismissed because: 1) the individual was from a different socio-economic class, 2) a different educational background, or 3) a different community? What if you experienced it? Would you think it was time to visit a psychiatrist for medications or a counselor for therapy? These are cultural/familial biases within our worldviews, and our biases can erect barriers that impede our proper understanding of God and the world He created.

We possess other theological or doctrinal biases that form our thinking and understanding about God (or the absence of God). Here is another example, how have you reacted when someone challenged your understanding of God or of a particular doctrine that you've accepted but never really researched? I grew up with some unbiblical doctrines and misunderstandings of God, but I had just as many, or more, unbiblical doctrines and perceptions of Mary, the Mother of Jesus. Ultimately, those biblical misunderstandings of Mary hindered my understanding of the uniqueness of Jesus and, ultimately, misrepresented God in a dangerous and blasphemous way. I was terrified, astonished, perplexed and very resistant to a different biblical understanding of the Virgin Mary when it was presented to me. It took much time for me to change my views, and it required, by God's grace, an open and receptive mind. It's not that I didn't have questions, but I was open to hearing the truth; regardless of how challenging it was. For Christians, however,

that's what it means for us to be under the authority of God's Word as His servants; trusting and obeying God, even when we don't fully understand His Word...the Bible. If anything, Mary is a wonderful example of such faithful, humble openness to God's surprising, terrifying, and challenging Word. While Zechariah was righteous and blameless before God, certainly a Believer, he actually gives us an example of the opposite of Mary's response. Despite Mary's own societal barriers and her common Jewish understanding of Yahweh, her response to God's Word - revealed through a jarring supernatural encounter the angel Gabriel - revealed her faith, brought her joy, and glorified God.

In *Luke 1:5-25*, Gabriel appears to Zechariah to foretell the birth of John the Baptist, and Zechariah is silenced due to his unbelief upon hearing God's Word. **BUT**, in verses *46-56*, Mary glorifies the Lord and rejoices in Him after Gabriel appeared to her in Galilee with an even stranger message; that she will bring forth God's promised Messiah from David's Dynasty (*2 Samuel 7:8-16*); the Anointed Servant from Isaiah (*Isaiah 7:14*). What's even more astonishing is that God, Himself, would overshadow Mary and bring this about. Zechariah, a mature and educated priest, living within Jerusalem, actually on duty serving before God in the temple when Gabriel appeared to him, was silenced because of his doubt - while Mary, a young, unlearned girl in a despised region from a no-name town responds in faith as God's servant. Let's look at Mary's Response to:

1. **Gabriel's Greeting Verses 26-28**
 - a. Mary's Response (*Verse 29*)
2. **Gabriel's Message Verses 30-33**
 - a. Mary's Response (*Verse 34*)
3. **Gabriel's Explanation Verses 35-37**
 - a. Mary's Response (*Verse 38*)

God sent Gabriel to:

1. **Who? (*Verses 26-28*)**
 - a. Mary
 - i. A virgin (Maybe around 12-14 years of age. Imagine a middle school aged student with such maturity and faith. This is a miracle in and of itself!)

- ii. Pledged to be married to Joseph...a marriage not yet consummated.
- iii. Nazareth of Galilee (*John 1:46*)
- iv. YET, “highly favored” and The Lord was with her.

God's message to Mary was:

2. What? (*Verses 30-33*)

- a. The content of the message (*What?*) is that Mary will give birth to a son who “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” (*verses 32-33*). This is the Good News of God fulfilling His promises of a Messiah from the line of David.

Mary Responds:

3. How? (*Verses 29, 34, 38*)

- a. ...to the Angel's Greeting (*verse 29*)
 - i. Greatly Troubled, Wondering/Discerning, Afraid (vs. 30)
- b. ...to the Angel's Message as God's Word (*verse 34*)
 - i. Questioning with genuine openness based on her situation
 - 1. **“How”** will God fulfill His Word (*verses 35-37*)
 - a. Includes a sign of assurance (*verse 36*)
 - i. Upon visiting Elizabeth and finding God's Word of assurance true, she glorifies God and rejoices in Him (*Luke 1:39-56*)
- c. ...to the Angel's Explanation (*verse 38*)
 - i. Submits to God as His servant saying, “Let it be according to your Word” or “May your word to me be fulfilled.”

...“Mary's Faith as God's Servant”

1. *Who* is this God chose?

a. **Mary**

- i. Cultural / Sociological Barriers / Biases
 - 1. Young, uneducated, female from a despised region in a small unknown town.

2. Being pregnant prior to the consummation of her marriage to Joseph could result in Mary being shamed as a social outcast, at best, in her own community. Such a potential consequence could be a result of her obedience to God's Word as "the Lord's servant." However, the Lord also sent the angel Gabriel to Joseph. The Lord was with Mary, and He protected her.
- ii. Theological Doctrine / Worldview prejudices
 1. *Then*: God could/would not become a man.
 2. *Now*: Disbelief in supernaturalism such as angels/miracles.
- b. The point is that God chooses those who are marginalized and discounted according to the world's standards to accomplish His purposes. This is the theme we've been discussing in 1 Corinthians 1:18-2:5 - that God's wisdom and strength is the Cross of Christ, but that message is foolishness and weakness to the world.
 - i. Dear unbeliever, non-Christian, please don't despise the lowly state or the background of anyone who shares with you the Good News about Jesus during this Advent and Christmas Season. While our society wants the approval of the rich, famous and powerful to validate what we want to believe, this is not God's way.
 - ii. Dear Believer, Christian brother or sister, don't let your social or occupational positions (as disregarded by the world as they may be) nor your past (as sinful and embarrassing as it may be): 1) keep you from faithfully responding to God's Word as Mary did, and 2) keep you from proclaiming the Good News of Jesus to others.
 1. Remember, Mary realized that her obedience to God could bring her already low social standing even lower within her own community.
 - a. But, the angel told her she was "highly favored" and that the Lord was with her. Mary possessed God, and that was enough for her; even as she faced being ostracized from her own lower-class community. Later, Mary glorified the Lord and rejoiced in Him; because,

He considered her humble state and did great things for her (*Luke 1:46-49*)

2. Also, and most importantly, remember that the eternal Word of God humbled Himself to become a man in the Person of Mary's Son, Jesus who was rejected by His own people. Even more, Jesus, in His obedience to His heavenly Father, became lower in the eyes of the world by dying on the Cross as a despised criminal for our sins.
 - c. This is "*who*" God chooses to accomplish the fulfillment of His promises.
2. **How** did Mary respond to God's Word?
- a. Seeing Gabriel, a great messenger of God whom we have seen before in Daniel, assured Mary not to be afraid. Such an encounter with a messenger sent from God would be terrifying. Zechariah was gripped with fear when he saw Gabriel. Daniel, the prophet, was terrified and fell prostrate on the ground into a deep sleep as if he were dead before this angel (*Daniel 8:16-18*). Mary could not deny what she had seen. How many of Mary's own community, much less the elite in Jerusalem back then, would be as unbelieving about such an encounter as we would be today?
 - b. Mary, however, is not un-thinking when hearing God's Word. It disturbs and challenges her, but she doesn't dismiss it because it's uncomfortable or because it doesn't fit her present understanding of God or her situation. She is humble and open to God's Word; pondering it; meditating on it; trying to make sense of it in light of her experience and what she has been taught about God and biology. She asks "how" this can be in light of the fact she is a virgin. Ultimately, in her openness, she submits to God's Word; regardless of the possible implications. Why? Because, she sees herself, this young teenage girl, as God's servant. She knew what it meant to pray, "Thy will be done", regardless of the consequences that God's will could have on her life.
 - c. Are we as mature in our faith as this young teenage girl? Mary is a blessed example for us in our faith and obedience to God's Word as recorded for us in the Bible. How open are you to God's truth; even if it challenges your present situation, your understanding of God, and your

expectations of how He works? This is certainly something for us to ponder as we consider the First Advent of Christ when God took on human flesh. God is not constrained by our finite and fallen understandings. He is not a God we can manipulate or control for our own comfort. He is King, not consultant.

- d. Do not let the barriers, prejudices, and values of society's majority close our minds off from hearing and receiving the Truth. Both Zechariah and Mary had questioning doubt when hearing God's Word from the angel Gabriel, but Zechariah was silenced due to his unbelief in what God said through Gabriel; because, it seemed too unreal and impossible. His mind was closed to the truth God was revealing to him. He failed to remember how God used such socially marginalized women in the past: Sarah, Leah, Hannah, etc. As we are prone to do today, Zechariah may have thought to himself, "That's how God worked way back then in history. Not today." Zechariah wanted to be in control; therefore, he did not respond as a servant, even while in the temple serving the Lord as priest. See the irony? Mary, on the other hand, while initially "troubled" and "wondered", she heard and was open to God's Word. While she was raised believing the God of Israel would not be human, she was willing to allow even her theological understanding to be altered by God's Word. Her question of "how" the Lord would accomplish this impossible thing was not the close-minded doubt of Zechariah, but the reasonable questioning of someone open to allowing their views and understanding to be changed. She was open to God's Word to change her worldview and her perception of reality, and this resulted in her openness, submission, and obedience to God's Word; even without all the answers and being uncertain of the future.
- e. Are our social and theological barriers really that different or more challenging than Mary's? Are we really as willing as Mary to be an obedient servant of Jesus according to God's Word; regardless of our degree of understanding or of the social cost it may mean to us? How open are we to the Truth of God's Word fully revealed in the Person and work of Jesus? Are we willing to allow Him to change both how we think of God and how we act toward Him and others?

May God enable us see that we are not the boss nor in control; we are not on the throne at the center of the universe. Rather, may He open our hearts and minds and remove all those barriers that we may know the truth, submit our lives to Jesus, and live according to God's Word, regardless of what that may mean for our lives; trusting in God's perfect plan both now and forever. AMEN.