

Text: Luke 1:26-38

Title: Christmas Biographies ... Mary

Before I get started this morning I want to remind you that in less than a month on January 14 we launch our new Sunday morning schedule with a traditional worship service at 9:00am followed by Sunday Bible Study at 10:05 then a contemporary worship service at 11:15am. The new schedule will enable us to be more versatile on Sundays in order to connect with people who need Christ. Along with the new schedule we are launching 40 Days of Prayer ... 40 Days to greater intimacy with God through prayer. Our goal is to begin the new year with a challenge to a deeper commitment to the Lord in our personal devotional time, our connection in small groups and our participation in corporate worship. Watch for more details over the holidays.

Now we're in a series I've entitled "Christmas Biographies." We're discovering how God intends to use people in presenting His Son Jesus Christ to the world. I told you last week about the way Matthew's Gospel introduces the Christmas story:

Matthew 1:18 – "This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about..." Then Matthew goes on to introduce us to two people whom God would use in a powerful way to present His Son to the world ... an engaged couple named Joseph and Mary. Open your Bibles to Luke 1:26. Last week we learned how God used an ordinary guy named Joseph and today we'll see how God used an ordinary teenage girl named Mary. **Read Luke 1:26-38.**

VIDEO ILLUSTRATION – To help you visualize it, this is what it might have been like when Mary received this unusual visitor.

It's staggering to consider that in presenting the Messiah Jesus to the world that God would entrust that task to people ... that He would use us. Just like God used Mary and Joseph to present Jesus *physically* to the world, He intends to use Christ-followers to present Jesus *spiritually* to the world. And it's not to draw attention to us, but to draw attention to (to present) His Son.

ILLUSTRATION – Last year I received one of the greatest awards of my life. I had dreamed of receiving this award for more than twenty years. You see, for years at Christmas I put up Christmas lights in my front yard. But not like Clark Griswold. Mine are spiritual. We have a great lighted Nativity scene. And year after year I thought sure it would impress the judges of our neighborhood

Christmas lighting competition. But I had been passed over year after year. But last year my dream came true. I won the award for the Best White Lights and Icicles. I hope you're as impressed as I am. Now to pull this off I have about four miles of extension cords running in every direction. It's quite an electrical engineering feat to get all of those lights to come on at the same time. So I couldn't do it without all the extension cords. But no one ever says, "Wow! What a great extension cord!" Our neighborhood Christmas light competition has no category for Best Extension Cords. But I couldn't display my lighted Nativity without them.

The Christmas story shows us God's plan to use people as human extension cords to convey the power that brings the Light of Jesus that changes lives. And that's exactly what God does through an ordinary teenager named Mary.

I see four factors in our text that made possible an ordinary teenage girl being chosen to present Jesus to the world. And the first factor is...

1. THE UNDESERVED GRACE OF GOD

Luke is a doctor so with physician-like precision gives some very important details. In v.26 God sends one of His top two angels, Gabriel, to a little out-of-the-way village called Nazareth. Then in v.27 Gabriel is to deliver a message to a young, unmarried girl (a virgin) named Mary who is engaged to Joseph. We talked about this last week. So here's this teenager Mary who is just going about her life in this little sleepy town of Nazareth when ...

Luke 1:28 - The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you."

When it says Mary is "highly favored" it means she has received grace from the Lord. Mary must have had a thousand questions swirling around in her head. "Why would the great angel Gabriel show up in my little village? And why would he appear to me? And why would he tell me God has shown me grace and is with me? Why do I need to know this?" So we're not surprised that...

Luke 1:29 - Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be.

All these questions are swirling around in her mind. And in v.30 the angel reassures her, "Mary, don't be afraid. You have found favor (grace) with God."

You see, the tremendous miracle that God is about to perform in and through Mary starts with the grace of God. She doesn't deserve to be used by God in this way. There's absolutely nothing special about her except that God has chosen to use her. And here's what the Lord will do through her:

Luke 1:31 - You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus.

For a teenage girl to be able to pull this off will require nothing less than the activity and grace of God in her life.

ILLUSTRATION –Students it would be like someone coming to you and telling you that by a strange twist of circumstances you are to become the principal of your school. At first you would think, “Great, now I can do anything I want. Class dismissed!” But then the reality hits home that you are in no way capable, in and of yourself, to take on this task. That's the way Mary must have felt.

As followers of Jesus for us to do what God has called us to do in presenting Jesus to the world requires God's grace. And grace isn't just a feeling that God has toward us. It's literally His activity in our lives enabling us to do what we cannot do in our own strength. Then there's another factor in God using us to present His Son to the world around us...

2. THE UNPARALLELED GREATNESS OF CHRIST

In v.31 the angel Gabriel unveils one of the most stunning descriptions of the life and work of Christ you'll find anywhere. He is to be given the name Jesus. This points to the work of Christ in salvation. “Jesus” means “Yahweh saves.” He will be the Savior of the world. Acts 4:12 says there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.

In v.32 it says, “He will be great...” Now we throw that word “great” around so thoughtlessly. Everything and everyone is great. But Jesus takes that word to whole other level. He is great simply because of who He is. He isn't made great by anyone or anything else. But even still our language is totally insufficient to capture His greatness. We could call Him extraordinary, splendid, magnificent, brilliant, glorious and any other adjective and they would all fail to capture the true greatness of Christ.

Gabriel says in v.32, “He will be called the Son of the Most High.” This points to the complete deity of Christ. He is of the same essence as God. As such Jesus is perfectly righteous in all He is, says, thinks or does. And because of that He will become the sinless sacrifice for our sins when He died on the Cross. But death could not hold Him.

Gabriel saw ahead to the day when Christ would rise from the grave and “the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David.” Last week we talked about the covenant that God made with David that the Messiah would be one of his descendants. And v.33 says that King Jesus will reign over the house of Jacob as the King of the Jews. But more than that His Kingdom will encompass the entire universe and it will never end.

And all of this greatness is entrusted to Mary. The angel says, “Mary, you will have a part in presenting to the world a great and glorious Savior.” This is astounding that God would entrust His great Son’s entry into the world to such unskilled characters like Joseph and Mary. But that’s exactly what God does for us today. He entrusts the greatness of His Son’s reputation to us. We’re the extension cords God uses. We are His witnesses.

But how in the world would a teenager be able to pull this off. She’s completely in over her head. And that’s where we see the next factor in God presenting His Son to the world.

3. THE OVERSHADOWING POWER OF GOD

Luke 1:34 - “How will this be,” Mary asked the angel, “since I am a virgin?”

Now this is just an honest question. This isn’t doubt. She just asked, “How *will* this be?” Or “By what means will this happen? How will you use me since I am a virgin?” She was a young lady who had never had sexual relations with Joseph or any other man. Mary must have wondered “Can somebody like me do this?”

Now this is a critical part of the story. For the Messiah to be fully human and fully God He would have to be conceived in the womb of a virgin. And so the only way this miracle could happen is for the power of God to be unleashed in her life.

Luke 1:35 - The angel answered, “The Holy Spirit will come upon 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.

Here's what will happen. The Holy Spirit will come on Mary in such a way that all of her limitations, all of her inadequacies will be completely overshadowed by the limitless power of Almighty God. And that overshadowing power of God would perform one of the great miracles of history ... right up there with the resurrection of Christ ... the creation of God's Son, the holy Child, in a human womb.

You see God is in the business of taking unlikely people and unlikely situations, and doing amazing things for His glory. In fact, miracles are happening everywhere.

Luke 1:36 - Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month.

You see Mary has learned that her cousin Elizabeth, who hasn't been able to conceive a child and is beyond child-bearing age, will miraculously give birth to a son who will become John the Baptist. God is in the business of taking unlikely people and unlikely situations, and doing amazing things for His glory.

Luke 1:37 - For nothing is impossible with God."

You see, plenty is impossible with us, but God is the God of the impossible. When His power overshadows someone, the impossible becomes possible. When you hear the call of God upon your life to do something extraordinary you may ask, "Can somebody like me do this?" The answer is, "No, you can't. But God can do it through you." You may feel *overwhelmed*. That's OK. When we are overwhelmed, we just let ourselves be *overshadowed* by the power of the Most High. This way, what comes from us is not a tribute to our greatness, but to the power of God. He does it this way so He gets all the glory.

So there's the factor of the grace of God, the greatness of Christ, the power of God, and then this factor...

4. THE UNQUALIFIED SURRENDER OF BELIEVERS

Mary's world is about to be turned upside down. You moms know that pregnancy is one huge interruption to your life. Yes, the maternal instinct would well up in Mary as she thought about the joys of motherhood, but then she does the math. Remember that Mary and Joseph are only engaged, not officially married. The Bible makes it clear that the relationship hadn't been consummated. But now Mary

will be pregnant ... out-of-wedlock. There will be gossip and the accusations that she has been immoral. She would be exposed to public humiliation. And yet in all of that Mary's response is amazing.

Luke 1:38 - "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May it be to me as you have said." Then the angel left her.

Actually, there should be an exclamation point at the end of Mary's statement. The NIV leaves out a little word that means "behold" or "hey listen." I challenge you to underline and circle this verse in your Bible. Take a screen shot of it and post it where you see it regularly.

"I am the Lord's servant..." –Literally "I am the Lord's slave girl." She will be completely obedient to her Lord and Master.

"May it be to me as you have said..." – "Lord, I want your will to be done in my life, whatever that means."

How do we prepare ourselves to be used by God the way He used Mary? Here are just a few practical steps I've discovered through the years. Let me share them with you quickly:

- **Bathe yourself in regular confession.** God wants to use clean vessels. So keep short accounts with God. Contrary to what some religions believe, Mary was not sinlessly perfect and neither are we. From time to time we will stumble and sin. When we do it's imperative that we repent and confess the moment we become aware of a thought, an attitude, an action or word that isn't pleasing to the Lord.

2 Timothy 2:21 - If a man cleanses himself from these things, he will be an instrument for noble purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work.

- **Feed yourself spiritually with Scripture.** God spoke to Mary through an angel. Most of us won't hear from God that way, at least as far as we know. The primary way God speaks to us is by His Word. So spend time daily reading and studying the Word of God. Make time in your week for concentrated study and meditation on the Word. I find that if I am living consistently in the Word of God I am also more attentive to the Holy Spirit's prompting when it comes to

the specific things God wants me to do. The Bible comes from God and it is profitable for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.

2 Timothy 3:17 - so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

- **Breathe spiritually through prayer.** Mary had a real conversation with the angel Gabriel. We have the privilege of having a real conversation with the King of the Universe through prayer. Prayer is our spiritual breathing. It's the way we connect to the life and the power of God. It's how we declare our praise to God and our dependence upon God.
- **Release yourself completely to God.** This is what Mary did. This is what it means to be filled with the Holy Spirit ... to be completely under the influence of the Holy Spirit ... minute by minute, hour by hour every waking moment. Say it and mean it...

Luke 1:38 - "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May it be to me as you have said." Then the angel left her.

When we release ourselves to God like this and His power is released in us everything changes. You wake up every day wondering, "God how are you going to use me today?" You come alive to all that God is doing in you and around you and through you. And you allow Christ the freedom to use you any way He wants. After all, you're just the extension cord.

Are you willing to surrender to God and allow Him to do something completely radical through you? Are you willing to say, "I am the Lord's servant. May it be to me as you have said. May God's will be done in my life." If that's where you are today, please stand.