

An Ordinary Girl: Mary

Luke 1:26-38

Everton Hills

4 December 2016

God uses ordinary people to do his extraordinary work through the power of the Holy Spirit. Today, as we continue the journey to the birth of the Christ-child, we are looking at an **ordinary girl called Mary**.

Now to recap, last week I spoke about an ordinary priest called Zechariah, and how, even though he was faithful, incredibly faithful, when an angel appeared to him and told him that his wife Elizabeth, who was well past her prime, was going to give birth, asked for a sign... and he got what he asked for – 9 months of silence! God always gives us what we need. And Zechariah had 9 months of silence to reflect on the fact that when God makes a promise, that promise is trustworthy! And the lesson for us in this busy season is that we need to make time to listen to and reflect on his promises – and today, you should have received a paper copy of a bible ready plan to help you do that!

Today, we learn another lesson about trust – this time from an ordinary girl called Mary.

To be honest we don't know a whole lot about Mary. And a lot of what people think is fable. There is nothing in scripture that says that she was from an exceptional family, or that she went to a good school, or that she was perfect. She was probably just an ordinary Jewish girl, who did ordinary Jewish things, who, in that culture at that time, had been pledged to be married to a guy called Joseph.

So when the angel Gabriel turns up and says, 'You are going to carry the Saviour of the world' how do you think she would react?

Well, a few things that we do know.

We know that she knew about Elizabeth's pregnancy and Zechariah silence. In fact, somehow Elizabeth was related to Mary.

Second, we know that while she wasn't married, she was betrothed or pledged to a guy called Joseph... who happens to be a descendant of King David.

Betrothed virtually meant married. You just weren't living together – or doing what married people do. Mary was still a virgin. But you had been promised in marriage. In that respect, Mary was probably only 11, 12, 13 years old, so the pledge was pretty important. A pledge was a promise, and breaking a promise was not deemed a good thing. So there would have been all sorts of cultural and social expectations as to how Mary, and Joseph, would have behaved. And, Joseph would have been aware as to how people got pregnant, so for Mary to fall pregnant, would have scandalous.

Third. We know that Joseph was a descendent of King David. I am going to unpack that in a couple of weeks, but what you need to know at this point in time is that throughout the Old Testament the bible says that the Messiah will come from David's line.

So with those details in mind, I read Luke 1:28...

Gabriel appeared to (Mary) and said, "Greetings, favored woman! The Lord is with you!" (Luke 1:28, NLT)

Don't you love that! An angel suddenly appears and says 'greetings, favoured woman'. It's a bit like saying, "greetings... aren't you lucky to meet me!"

Can I just say that, as I said last week, meeting an angel would be a scary experience.

Mary is no different.

"Confused and disturbed, Mary tried to think what the angel could mean." (Luke 1:29, NLT)

"Confused and disturbed"... sometimes things are missed in translation. The greek there, actually means **"aargh"**. To be greatly agitated! Sort of like rocking in a foetal position.

Gabriel the messenger gets it. It's not the first time that Gabriel has received such a response. So he utters one of the most used phrases in Scripture... Do not be afraid.

"Don't be afraid, Mary," the angel told her, "for you have found favor with God! You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be very great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David. And he will reign over Israel forever; his Kingdom will never end!"
(Luke 1:30–33, NLT)

In other words... Mary, you will carry the long awaited Messiah. He will be great and honoured and praised. And he will usher in a kingdom that will last for ever.

Now here is the thing about kingdoms.

We have certain expectations of what a successful kingdom would be like, don't we? If you were to be a successful ruler, what would happen?

- Everybody would have a level of comfort that will make them feel all gooey and warm inside.
- There would be wealth.
- Nobody would feel powerless.
- And those rampaging southerners, outsiders, well, they just wouldn't be able to mess with you – so you and your people would feel safe.

That's certainly what the faithful Jews would have thought. The Messiah was going to bring an end to the tyranny of a disagreeable political rule.

Interestingly, this desire for safety and met needs, is what brings about most wars and riots in our world. Because wherever two people are, there will be haves and have nots – no matter which side of the fence you sit.

And that's why Jesus' concept of kingdom; being about self-sacrifice and humility and service and love and forgiveness and reconciliation, is so unpalatable. Because that understanding of kingdom does not align itself with humanity!

Listen to what Mary is told...

“...the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David. And he will reign over Israel forever; his Kingdom will never end!” (Luke 1:32–33, NLT)

“The Son of the Most High”. The Most High is a title that the Jews used for Yahweh, for God.

Gabrielle is saying that your Son is going to be the son of the Divine, who will break into time and space by taking on flesh. And this God, Mary, that will be your son, is going to be reigning over Israel. Reigning over – that is an active thing. He is not going to be looking down on us from a distance, but he is going to be involved in the life of his people. And his kingdom is going to last forever.

Now that is a big claim. Humanly speaking, no kingdom has ever lasted in our world.

But sometimes we put our faith in the wrong kingdom... think of what is happening in the USA. The kingdom of the USA will not last forever. Think of what has happened throughout history. There is only one kingdom that will last forever. And that is God's kingdom.

Which leads to the question... where will you put your faith and trust?

Because Jesus invites us to be part of his kingdom. Right here. Right now. Through us.

Through you and me, his kingdom breaks into our time and space as his Holy Spirit works through us. But it is not a kingdom of this world; a kingdom that will fail, a kingdom that is marked by a desire to be rich and powerful and mighty.

No. His kingdom is different. And that is why his kingdom will never fail. Because his kingdom is marked, not by what you have, not by gold plated palaces, but by self-sacrifice and humility and service and love and forgiveness and reconciliation.

So put yourself in Mary's shoes, as she hears of this promise.

Her gut reaction is mixed. On the one hand, she is wondering what will happen to her if she is found to be pregnant; in her world, being pregnant before marriage would have been accompanied by some pretty massive ramifications – she could be stoned to death, and her family name shamed. Yet, on the other hand, she is told this amazing promise.

So Gabrielle, and this is the important point, responds...

“The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the baby to be born will be holy, and he will be called the Son of God.” (Luke 1:35, NLT)

And then this...

“For the word of God will never fail.” (Luke 1:37, NLT)

Nothing is impossible with God... God's word will never fail. His creative word, which created the universe, will continue to do what it says it will.

And as Mary hears this promise, her heart calms, and she replies...

“I am the Lord's servant. May everything you have said about me come true.” And then the angel left her. (Luke 1:38, NLT)

You know, what we learn from Mary is this...

Even when things seem impossible, or confusing, or scary, if God's word and promise is at the centre of it, **we can live in confidence.**

Secondly, we are not always going to have all the answers. We will often try to control and manage our circumstances. But remember **God is God and we are not...** and nothing is impossible with God.

Finally, **our circumstances are never too big for God, because in Jesus, God has come to us.**

That's why I am passionate about Christmas. Because in the birth of this ordinary looking child, is God himself.