

## **Christmas Morning**

### **Luke 1:26-38**

In the sixth month, 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. 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. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name 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 the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end."

"How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"

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. 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. For nothing is impossible with God."

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

### **Sermon: Mary's Reason For Joy**

The passage of scripture that we have before us today is the wonderful story of Mary, the virgin pledged to be married to Joseph. Mary is one of those figures whom is venerated by over a billion people on the earth. Almost all of us have heard, or once upon a time recited, "Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee." Besides Jesus, she is one of the most celebrated figure in the Gospels. And there is so little that we know about her. We don't know where she came from, what eventually happened to her, how old she was when she had Jesus, there is so little that we know that it is almost surprising that she commands much of the spotlight in Christianity. Of course, what she is known for is being the mother of Jesus. Mary is visited by the Angel Gabriel. Gabriel was also named in the Book of Daniel as a messenger of God. The angel wishes Mary greetings and calls her highly favored. The Lord is with her, Gabriel shares. Now, Mary is a human being, just like us. And I like the way the scripture puts it, because it shows us that Mary would act like anyone else. Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. That's a nice way of saying, she freaked out just a little bit. If an angel showed up at your doorstep, you would also be greatly troubled and full of wonder. "Whoa! Hold on here just a second." I believe in angels, but I don't have any scheduled on my appointment book. They just show up, unannounced. And I think I would freak out just a little if ever visited. Gabriel could see Mary's reaction, and gave her the assurance, "Do not be afraid." And then he drops the bombshell. "You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name 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 the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.”

Understandably, Mary had some questions about how this could happen, since it would have been impossible for her to have kids yet. And Gabriel assures her, “For nothing is impossible with God.” Our passage ends with Mary saying, “I am the Lord’s servant,” Mary answered. “May it be to me as you have said.” Then the angel left her. If you read on, you hear Mary’s song of joy and praise. “My soul gives glory to my God, and my Spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for He has been mindful of the humble state of his servant.” This morning, I want to look at the joy that Mary had with the coming of this news. She found herself blessed and joyous at the visit of Gabriel. And I want to bring it home to what this might mean for us today.

We look back at the joy that Mary had and we think, “Of course she would be happy.” Look at everything that happened to her. If anyone in the world should be joyous, it should be her. There are four reasons that I think Mary is joyous. There might be more, but there are four that I read out of the Bible. The first reason for her joy is that she is visited by an Angel. Right off the bat, that’s her number one reason for joy. She is visited by a Godly messenger. The Latin word for greeting is Ave, hence the famous song, Ave Maria. The Ave Maria text in Scripture is one of the most widely used text in musical history. Countless composers have used it in their masterpieces. Greetings, Mary, the Lord is with thee. I know she freaked out at first, but once she got her head around the idea, think of the wonder! Think of the intrigue! Think of the feelings of “oh my gosh, angels only come to famous people”. Just a greeting alone brings joy. How many times do you go the mailbox and open it up and find a letter sent by a friend? I don’t know about you, but if I find a personalized letter from someone in the mailbox, amid the countless junk mail, credit card offers, magazines I didn’t order and solicitations, it almost makes my day! Hey, I got a letter today. An actual, bonafide letter! How many times do you open up your e-mail and delete almost every one? I don’t mind the forwards from friends, but when I find a personalized message that has some content, I get excited. Now, imagine if your personalized greeting was from an angel. If you had 100 percent iron-clad proof that God had a message for you. You would go through the roof! I think that was one reason Mary was joyous. God had something to say, to her. She was one of the lowly in the world, she was in a humble state, and yet, and yet God had something to say to her. If that was a reason for joy for Mary, then that is a reason for joy for us! We have that! Mary was joyous because God had something to say to her. Let me tell you this: God has something to say to each and every one of us. We think that God only talks to special people, holy people. But I believe that God wants to speak to you, personally. And he uses the same methods that he has used for centuries. How many times have you just opened up the Bible to a random page and discovered that a particular passage speaks to your heart? It happens! How many times has God used other people to speak his truth? You know what I’m talking about, you’re listening to someone, you hear their voice, but it’s God’s words that you hear. It happens! How many times has God used coincidences to prove to you that you need to do something? It happens! I’m sorry to say, God doesn’t use e-mail yet, but I do know that he answers knee-mail. Prayers get answered! Sometimes we might not like the answer, but He cares enough to listen and respond. Why was Mary joyous? Because God spoke to her. And we can have that joy as well.

Another reason that Mary was joyous was that Salvation was going to come into the world. It was one of the first things that the angel told her. “You will have a son and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save people from their sins.” That is actually from the Matthew text, but it is true just the same. You will name him Jesus. Jesus is the Greek form of the Hebrew name, Joshua, which means, The Lord Saves. Salvation is coming to Israel. People will be saved from their sins. You want a reason for joy? Salvation is coming. Think about this. Think of all the times that we feel the urge to celebrate and congregate together as humanity? Imagine 80,000 fans cheering all at once. Imagine Times Square at New Year’s Eve. When the end of World War Two was announced, people gathered in the streets in the cities and towns all around, strangers hugged, confetti flew, church bells rang, car horns honked, the end of the nightmare was over. Our boys and girls overseas were coming home - they were going to be safe and out of harms way. Think about all that amount of joy - Now look

at Mary, what she had in her heart, the knowledge that salvation was coming into the world, that joy surpassed all others. If the world knew what she knew, the whole world would have gone crazy in celebration. They call it the Good News, but it was the best news that the world had ever heard. And you know what? If that was a reason for joy for Mary, then that is a reason for joy for us! We have that! We have the knowledge that Jesus came for our salvation! And we still call it the best news that the world had ever heard! We know that Jesus died for us, so that we might be free. We know we have a place in heaven. And yet, how can it be that we are still unhappy? We know how the story ends, we know what's going to happen to us someday, that is not a mystery. The same knowledge that gave Mary joy should be a source of joy for us. Why was Mary joyous? Because salvation was going to come into the world. And we can have that joy as well.

A third reason that I believe Mary was joyous on that day was that she was going to participate in God's action in the world. She had a job to do. God gave her a mission and a purpose. Think about it. Who was Mary? From what we know, she was a young woman from a nobody family, from a nobody town, from a nobody tribe. Name someone by name who lived in Bethlehem. We can't do it. Name someone by name who lived in Nazareth. Besides Joseph, we can't do it. Name someone by name who lived in Jerusalem, the capital. We can't do it - unless you remember who the king was. She didn't have access to the Temple. She didn't have access to the synagogues. As a woman, she wasn't even allowed to read the Torah and sacred scriptures! But now, she was allowed to participate in the faith story, to offer what she could to the religious life of her nation. She had the opportunity to be a part of a mission and ministry that was otherwise shut out from her. And you know what? If that was a reason for Joy for Mary, then that is a reason for joy for us! We have that! We have the freedom to participate in God's action in the world, more so than most people on this planet, more so than most people at any other time in history. You have the freedom to participate in the religious life of your choosing. You have the freedom to pursue whatever ministry you choose. Are you concerned about the homeless? You can do something about it. Are you concerned about the immigrants who live among us? You can be God's hand to them. Do you wish you can do about domestic violence? You have the power to be a refuge for those who need a safe place. Mary found great joy in serving God. You have that opportunity as well! Take advantage of it. Find your passions, live out your calling. God is calling you to serve Him! And I don't know what ministry you are called to do, but you can see the world and see that there is a great need out there. People are dying on the inside, thinking that they can't participate in God's action in the world, and we can. Why was Mary joyous? Because she got to be a part of something special, something lasting, something holy. And we can have that joy as well.

All of the things that made Mary joyous, are the same things that can bring us joy. Mary was special, no doubt about it, but the things that made her the most happy are also available to us. And of course, the fourth reason for her joy was that she was the mother of Jesus. Blessed is the fruit of her womb. She was on an intimate level with Jesus Christ, the son of God. Her son would heal the lame, feed the hungry, give sight to the blind, the deaf would hear, the mute would talk, the dead shall rise again. I was joyous when my kids finally got potty trained and we could leave the world of pampers behind. If that made me happy, just imagine the joy I'd have if I knew that my kids would someday change the world for good? I know I'm dreaming, but Mary knew. Mary's joy came from holding her son, knowing what he would do some day. The last reason for her joy came from knowing who her son was going to become. And likewise, we can have joy, knowing what her son did once upon a time for us. Christmas truly is a joyous time of year. Amen.