

December 21, 2008
Advent 4

"May the Lord Give You a 'Mary' Christmas"

LUKE 1:26-38

In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, ²⁷ to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸ The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you." ²⁹ Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. ³⁰ But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. ³¹ You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. ³² 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, ³³ and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end." ³⁴ "How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?" 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. 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. ³⁷ For nothing is impossible with God." ³⁸ "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May it be to me as you have said." Then the angel left her.

Merry Christmas! Think of how often we say that to each other during this Christmas season. Webster's dictionary defines "merry" as being "full of fun and laughter, lively and cheerful." Think of the shepherds who returned to the flocks after worshipping Jesus as their Lord and Savior. They were certainly lively and cheerful. It says that "they returned, glorifying and praising God, for all the things they had heard and seen."

Here we are on this 21st of December, only a few days before Christmas. We look forward to a merry Christmas with family, friends, and members of our congregation. The best moments will be those when we personally reflect on the wonder, the mystery, the blessings, the hope and the peace that we have in Jesus' birth.

This morning I have to speak to you about having a "Mary" Christmas, not spelled "M-e-r-r-y" but "M-a-r-y." Mary's life totally changed when the Lord God chose her to be the mother of the Jesus, God's Son the Savior of the world. Your life has totally changed because the Lord has also chosen you to know the amazing miracle that took place in the womb of Mary and led you to believe this is true.

Lord, break into our lives with your word

We need the Lord break into our lives and speak his Word to us just as he did with Mary. Mary was busy, oh so busy, making the big plans for her marriage to Joseph the humble carpenter from Nazareth. Then her life changed drastically. The angel Gabriel said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored. The Lord is with you!" At first she is troubled by this greeting but then the angel assures her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for 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." God's Word told her that she was blessed, and God's Word told her of the miracle that would take place in her womb.

God still speaks to us and reminds us how blessed we are. He does not send an angel like Gabriel to appear in our bedroom at night or while we are working around the house. How great would that be if it happened! Instead he speaks to us here on the pages of the Bible and tells us how blessed we are with words such as Psalm 103, "Bless the LORD, O my soul; And all that is within me, bless His holy name! Bless the LORD, O my soul, And forget not all His benefits: Who forgives all your iniquities, Who heals all your diseases, Who redeems your life from destruction, Who crowns you with loving kindness and tender mercies." He breaks into our lives and lets us hear Jesus tell us why he came into the world with simple words that everyone can grasp and understand. "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life."

Have you gone through any major changes in your life this past year, or is everything just coasting along at a normal pace? Where ever you are at this point in your life, you want to have a "Mary" Christmas, a special time where the Lord speaks to you once again from his Word and draws you closer to the your greatest blessing in life, the gift of his Son.

Lord, astound us with the miracle of the virgin birth

What the Lord told Mary changed her life because of the miracle that took place in her womb. The angel said, "He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High." Every time Mary felt the baby Jesus kicking in her womb, she believed that this was the Son of the Most High, the very Son of God because the Lord told her this was the Son of the Most High God. When the shepherds came to see the baby Jesus lying in the manger, they worshiped him as their Lord and God because the angel had told them that he was Christ the Lord. When the wise men found Jesus in Bethlehem, they knelt down and worshipped him as their Lord and God. The name given to Jesus by the prophet Isaiah was Immanuel which means, "God with us." God in the womb. God on the straw in the manger. God growing up in Nazareth. God dying on the cross for our sin. Our lives change when we believe the words of John that tells us, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."

Mary wants to know how she can give birth to a child, who is a baby and God, without knowing a man intimately. "How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?" Even though Mary and Joseph had been engaged to be married they did not sleep together. She was pure. She was a virgin.

Listen to Gabriel's explanation on how this miracle would happen. "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." The conception in Mary's womb took place miraculously through the work of the Holy Spirit and the work of the heavenly Father that would overshadow her. Just as the Father and the Spirit were there for Jesus at his baptism, the Father and the Spirit were responsible for the conception that took place in the womb. This miraculous birth was predicted by the prophet Isaiah who said, "Behold a

virgin shall conceive and bear a son and call his name Immanuel which means God with us." It was the prophet Isaiah who listed one of the names for Jesus as "Wonderful" which means "Miracle."

Over the years great artists have enjoyed painting scenes of the shepherds gathering around the baby Jesus lying in a manger. They show a light emanating from the manger, illuminating the faces of the shepherds who worshiped Jesus as their Lord and God. Their eyes are wide open. Their faces look in awe and wonder. Mary had this same awe and wonder every time she felt the baby Jesus kicking in her womb and she remembered that this was the Son of God. After Jesus was born she held Jesus in her arms and believed she was holding her Lord and God. You may know the words of the contemporary song that ask the probing question:

*Mary, did you know That your baby boy will give sight to a blind man?
Did you know That your baby boy will calm a storm with his hand?
Did you know That your baby boy has walked where angels trod?
And when you kiss your little boy You've kissed the face of god."*

It says of Mary in Luke 2 that she pondered these things and kept them in her heart. I can think of no greater blessing to come to us than a renewed awe and amazement at what happened in the womb of Mary when God's Son took on our flesh.

Lord, help us see the glory of your kingdom

To have a "Mary" Christmas we need to hear once again what Mary heard about a kingdom that would last forever. "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." When I hear these words about a kingdom that never ends, I think of the words of Revelation 20 that assure us that we will live and reign with Christ for a thousand years. This reigning with Christ is not in some future millennial kingdom on this earth, but here and now with Jesus as our King who rescued us from pit of eternal death, and brought us under his care and his love. This love is always the same, it never changes and never fails to protect us and cherish us. Romans 8 assures us that nothing in all creation will ever separate us from the love of God that exists in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Let me illustrate the security and comfort and love we have in Jesus and his kingdom with this teddy bear. A couple of weeks ago we thought this teddy bear might be a good play toy for our grandson. Instead of reaching for it, he became afraid. His father Joel then picked him up, played with him and soothed him. Parents need to be there for little babies and for little children and even the grown up kids to soothe them with their love. We need to be there for each other, always providing this safe place where people know they are loved. Jesus, our king, rescued you from the kingdom of darkness by giving his life for you. He took us from a very scary place, the pit of eternal death that we have deserved for sin. He brought us safely to a place of peace and security where he would be our King of love for ever.

Isaiah 40 says, "He tends his flock like a shepherd, He gathers his lambs in his arms, and

carries them close to his heart, he gently leads those that have young. He carries them close to his heart. Mary would one day watch as Jesus her son fulfilled his work of being Jesus her Savior. She would see him give his life for the sin of the world, and be there when they took him down from the cross. The love she showed Jesus was small compared to the love that he showed her and us by making us part of a kingdom that lasts forever.

Lord, help us have greater faith

If Mary had any doubts about this miracle of bringing Jesus into the world through her womb, the angel Gabriel had an answer to overcome her doubt. "Nothing is impossible with God." How did Mary respond? "I am the Lord's servant, may it be to me as you have said."

Nothing is impossible with God. That sums up our faith doesn't it? Mary believed in this virgin birth. Christians all over the world are celebrating this virgin birth of Jesus, this mighty miracle of the word made flesh. We want a "Mary" Christmas, with a faith given to us to believe what Mary believed about the child in her womb. May the Lord give you a "Mary" Christmas so that you can have a genuine and real "Merry Christmas!" Amen.