

Mary – The Lord is with You
[Luke 1:26-38, 46-55](#)

Well, when an angel comes to visit, you know it's something big! Our scripture lesson from Luke describes the scene when Mary is first told she will bear the son of God. This message was enough to throw anyone off! Consider the scene. Luke 1:26 says "in the 6th month..." This was not the 6th month of the year. Rather, time was being measured by another miracle. Mary's relative Elizabeth was also blessed with a visit from an angel – and was to conceive a child in her old age. There is no doubt Elizabeth's child will be special – one called out from the others. It is to the point where time is even measured by Elizabeth's pregnancy.

So Mary receives a visit from an angel, and Mary is called to serve God. Her call story has some classic

characteristics. First, God gets her attention. The angel says, “Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.” This is quite a wake up call. You almost expect Mary to turn around and say, “Who, me?”

The second part of a typical call story is the announcement. “You will conceive and bear a son and you will name him Jesus.” Right off the bat we have some problems. First, as you know, Mary was engaged to Joseph. We talked about Jewish customs concerning marriage. The couple was at the phase of the marriage agreement where they were considered married and Joseph was away preparing a place for his bride. You can imagine Mary’s surprise seeing as she and Joseph maintained celibacy during their year apart. So Mary raises the obvious question – how can this be? Once again we see that with God, all things are possible.

We then come to the third part of a call story – reassurance and a sign. The angel told Mary to not be concerned – the child she would bear would be holy, the son of God. That’s quite a bombshell to drop on a young woman. We need to understand the situation Mary was in. As someone who was betrothed, if she became pregnant, she was eligible to be put to death according to ancient Jewish law. But the angel also gives Mary a sign of reassurance – her relative Elizabeth was also going to bear a child in her old age. And the angel finishes with those special words – “Nothing is impossible with God.” At this point, Mary takes a leap of faith. Knowing the potential risk to her very life, she accepts her call – “Here I am, the servant of the Lord.”

Mary then proceeds to visit her relative Elizabeth. If Mary needed any other confirmation, she received it on this

visit. Who better to understand the miracle Mary was experiencing than her relative Elizabeth who had a similar experience. It seems Elizabeth was the only one who could truly understand Mary's excitement, anxiety, fear, and joy at the idea of being called by God to give birth to God's son. Let's face it – Mary's story is a bit bizarre. Yet Elizabeth was aware of the miracle even before Mary said a word. Elizabeth seems to function as a wise caregiver for Mary, providing comfort and council from one who truly knows what is going on.

Elizabeth had spent years dealing with the scorn of being barren. Women were pretty much measured and judged by their ability to bear children, particularly sons. Yet Elizabeth remained barren and had to face the ridicule and gossip of those who always meant well yet tended to look down on someone who could not fulfill her role as a

good wife. One thing we have learned through the Bible stories is that when a woman was barren and then conceived a child, that child was special – meant for a special purpose. We saw this with Sarah who gave birth to Isaac. We saw this with Rebekah who gave birth to Esau and Jacob. So we know that Elizabeth’s child will also be special – called by God for a purpose. So God had prepared Elizabeth to not only be John's mother, but to be a guide and comfort for Mary.

Elizabeth reassures Mary just as the angel had.

“Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear.” Elizabeth recognized that there is a deep seeded joy that comes from being blessed by God, and that joy was going to sustain Mary throughout her experience. Elizabeth probably knew how difficult things would get for Mary. Perhaps there would be talk about the fact that Mary

was pregnant when she had not completed the necessary steps in her marriage contract. Perhaps Mary would be excluded from some village functions, or perhaps no one would believe she was carrying the son of God. Elizabeth was providing a source of courage and strength for Mary – she was going to be ok, even when times were hard.

Elizabeth understood the difficulty of facing the potential ridicule Mary may have to endure because Elizabeth had experienced it herself firsthand. Elizabeth served her role as mother for John the Baptist, and as a special companion for Mary.

So Mary not only accepted her role as mother of a miracle baby, she embraced the joy of God's love as part of her experience. It is interesting that we lit the candle of joy last week. We bring that joy with us as we light the candle of love this week. There is true joy in doing the work of

God – in saying ‘yes’ to God’s calling in our lives. God is still in the calling business. Are we at a point in our lives where we can say, “Here I am God, use me?”

Perhaps when God calls, we have put God on hold. We have other important things to take care of before we can get to this. So God patiently waits for us to answer. Perhaps when God calls, God gets a busy signal. We have too many other things going on right now, all of which are vying for our time. Perhaps the phone is ringing but we are screening our calls – we don’t want to answer to just anyone. Perhaps God is calling, but we don’t recognize the number so we don’t answer. But God is calling.

As we move into Christmas week, the celebrations continue. We prepare and plan for a special time with friends and family. Let us remember the reason we celebrate. God sent his only son into our world as a tiny,

innocent baby to a couple who said, “Here we are God – use us.” This season is about hope, peace, joy, and love. God presents us with God’s most precious gift. Let us step forward, accept God’s gift of love and eternal life through God’s son Jesus Christ, and let us answer the call, “Here we are God – use us.” Amen.