

LARGE-PRINT

Devotions for the Week of December 2, 2018

“It’s A Boy!”: Mary Speaks

North East United Methodist Church

By Rev. Dr. Drew M. Christian

Sunday, December 2, 2018

Read Isaiah 2: 1-5; Matthew 24: 36-44; Romans 13:11.

Advent means “coming” or “arrival”. It is through the weeks of Advent, leading up to Christmas, we prepare...we prepare for His coming, His arrival. This morning, we lit the first candle on the Advent wreath.....we began to count down the weeks until Christmas Eve...the weeks until the night we celebrate God becoming man...the night Jesus was born...as John says, **John 1:14 (MSG)** – *“The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood.”*

Because it proceeds Christmas, many have misunderstood Advent to be a time to prepare for the coming of a child a Bethlehem. Advent is so much more than that. Advent not only points us toward Christmas and the moment God entered the world in flesh as Jesus, but more importantly, Advent points us forward to *“the second coming.”* Advent points us toward when Christ will return, will judge wickedness, and will prevail over every evil. As Laurence Hull Stookey writes, *“Advent is the celebration of the promise that Christ will bring an end to all that is contrary to the ways of God; the resurrection of Jesus is the first sign of this destruction of the powers of death, the inauguration and anticipation of what is yet to come in fullness.”*

In faith, we are called to see that which will be that is NOT YET...society transformed...earth transformed from a

battleground to fertile soil...instruments of war turned into instruments of life.

Look to the skies and ask God to help you prepare your heart this Advent season, not simply to celebrate the birth of His Son, but to prepare your heart to meet His Son upon His return.

Monday, December 3, 2018

Read Luke 1: 26-38.

Can you imagine what Mary must have thought? How scared she must have been? And what a responsibility...to bear God's Son, the promised Messiah. Yet, how does Mary, a young fifteen-year-old girl respond? She replies, "*May it be to me as you have said.*"

What an example Mary, a young teenager, sets for us. She provides an example of obedience, trust, and surrender. So often we are afraid to ask God what He wants of us, of our lives. We are afraid of how God will reply, what He will say, where God will send us. We would be quick, like Moses, unlike Mary, to argue with God over the mission He might plan to send us on, instead of trusting Him.

This teenage girl shows us deep faith, true surrender, and sincere obedience. She is an example to all of us down through the ages.

R. Alan Culpepper writes, "*The annunciation would not have been complete without Mary's trusting, obedient response. Mary had been chosen, "favored," to have an important part in God's plan to bring salvation to God's people, but it is unthinkable that God would have forced Mary to have the child against her will. Mary is an important example, therefore, of one who is obedient to God even at great risk to self.*"

Advent, the weeks leading up to Christmas, is a time to reflect on our own walk with God, our own faith. How are we being obedient to what God is asking us to do? Are we listening? Do we trust God with our futures? Have we surrendered our lives to His plan or are we still trying to hold onto control, onto our own plans? What can we learn from this teenage girl that was willing to answer “yes” when asked to bear God’s very own Son, the Messiah?

Pray that God will increase your trust, your obedience, and your surrender to Him?

Tuesday, December 4, 2018

Read Luke 1: 39-45.

Mary travels to the hill country of Judea and visits Elizabeth. Elizabeth, when she heard Mary’s greeting, felt her baby leap in her womb. She says, “*Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished.*”

“*Blessed is she who has believed...*” Faith is choosing to believe. I once took a course called Lifebuilders. Lifebuilders begins by defining faith as “*Faith is choosing to believe that the Bible is true regardless of one’s emotions, circumstances or cultural trends.*”

We must choose to believe. Mary chose to believe the angel Gabriel, to believe the scriptures she had studied throughout her childhood, to believe in the God of her ancestors, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. She chose to believe and would be blessed and through her the Savior would come to the world and the world would never be the same.

God has given us a choice. We can choose to turn away or we can choose to believe that the Word of God, the Bible, is

true. If we choose to believe the Word of God then the next question to ask is *“If the Bible is true, how should that truth change the way I am living?”*

Like Mary, I pray we choose to believe this Christmas and in believing allow our lives to change to reflect the God who loved us so much He sent His only Son, Jesus Christ.

Wednesday, December 5, 2018

Read Luke 1: 46-55.

Whenever God calls on us to step out, to leave our comfort zone, there will always be fear, but there will always be blessing and joy. Certainly, Mary must have felt fear when the angel Gabriel first told her that she had been chosen to bear God’s Son, Jesus. Yet, she had a deep faith, brought up in the scriptures, knowing the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. She knew that God deserved her obedience, so fear or not, she gave it.

And in giving her obedience, her trust, in surrendering to God, she is blessed and experiences great joy. Elizabeth says, *“Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished.”* Not only is she blessed, but those around her are blessed because of her decision to obey the Lord. Elizabeth says, *“But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy.”*

When we obey, we can be guaranteed two things: we will be blessed and experience the joy of the Lord, and those around us will be blessed and also experience God.

Mary sings out to God what is called “the Magnificent.” She glorifies the Lord, she thanks God for blessing her, she relates God’s mighty deeds throughout the generations, and she

sings of the rule of God to come, when the hungry will be fed and the poor will be lifted up.

If God is asking you to step out in faith, in ministry, in service, you can be assured that you will be blessed and others around you will also be blessed. If you are obedient, you too will sing, like Mary, God's praises. Trust Him. What is God asking you to do? Obey. Step out. And praise God for all He has done and is going to do in your life. Take time to thank Him and praise Him now.

Thursday, December 6, 2018

Read Luke 2: 8-20.

Let us take a moment today to look forward the birth of Christ. We will look at this passage again in the next few weeks, but today let's look at it in light of Mary, the mother of Jesus.

The Bible tells us that when the shepherds tell Mary all they had heard and seen, "*But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.*"

Take a few moments to read over the words of Mark Lowry's song, "*Mary, did you know?*" It is powerful. This young mother was asked to not only bring a son into the world, at the risk of life and limb (*remember Herod, remember in Jewish culture pregnancy outside of marriage could result in death*), but to bring the Son of God into the world, one who would save the world and would do so by dying a horrific death upon a cross. Did Mary know these things? Probably not. But Mary continued to be faithful, and God continued to grant her strength, through Jesus' tumultuous birth, ministry, arrest, crucifixion, burial, and resurrection. Our last moment with Mary in the scriptures is seeing her in the Upper Room, after

Jesus' resurrection, praying to and praising God. Perhaps at that moment, she understood.

We may not know the future or understand exactly what God is asking us to do. Certainly, we will never know the full ramifications of what God asks, but we can trust Him, like Mary, to lead us along the journey.

*Mary did you know, that your baby boy
Would one day walk on water?
Mary did you know, that your baby boy
Would save our sons and daughters?
Did you know, that your baby boy
Has come to make you new?
This Child that you delivered,
Will soon deliver you!
Mary did you know, that your baby boy
Will give sight to the blind man?
Mary did you know, that your baby boy
Would calm a storm with His hand?
Did you know, that your baby boy
Has walked where angels trod
And when you kiss your little baby,
You've kissed the face of God?
Oh, Mary did you know?
Mary did you know?
The blind will see, the deaf will hear,
The dead will live again,
The lame will leap, the dumb will speak
Praises of the Lamb!
Mary did you know, that your baby boy
Is Lord of all creation?*

*Mary did you know, that your baby boy
 Will one day rule the nations?
 Did you know, that your baby boy
 Was Heaven's perfect Lamb?
 And this sleeping Child you're holding
 Is the Great I AM*

~ Words by Mark Lowry ~
 ~ Music by Buddy Greene ~

Friday, December 7, 2018

Read Luke 2: 21-40.

To fulfill the law of the Lord, Jewish families went through at least three ceremonies after the birth of a firstborn son: (1) Circumcision (Leviticus 12:3); (2) Redemption of the First Born. Each firstborn son was presented to God a month after his birth, a dedication acknowledging that he belonged to God (Exodus 13:2, 11-16); (3) Purification of the Mother. For 40 days following the birth of a son, a mother was considered unclean. At the end of this ritual impurity, a sacrifice was offered as part of her cleansing process (Leviticus 12: 1-5).

Joseph and Mary take Jesus to the Temple to present Him to the Lord, the Redemption of the First Born. Luke writes, *“Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, ‘Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord’), and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: ‘a pair of doves or two young pigeons.’”*

Mary is faithful and once again, obedient. At the Temple, Joseph and Mary meet Simeon. Simeon says to Mary, *“this child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel...And a sword will pierce your own soul too.”*

Jesus would divide families. Some would believe...some would not believe that He was the Messiah. But not only would Jesus divide, Jesus would challenge and cleanse. The birth of Christ is not just a celebration, it is a time of reflection and challenge. Christ will challenge us. *“A sword will pierce your own soul.”* When we invite Christ in, He will *“pierce”* us, cleanse us, remove the layers of dirt and sin, and many times this hurts. He will also ask us to sacrifice. Certainly, Mary sacrificed and her soul was *“pierced,”* as she stood at the foot of the cross and watched her son die. Nowhere have I seen this anguish and *“piercing”* better depicted than in Mel Gibson’s *The Passion of the Christ*.

Jesus will *“pierce our own souls too!”* If we invite Him in this Christmas, He will begin to challenge us, begin to cleanse us, begin to make us *“just like Jesus.”* Trust Him. The cleansing may hurt at times but the results are astounding and eternal. Where do you need to allow Christ to *“pierce”* your heart, your life...to cleanse you and make you whole?

Saturday, December 8, 2018

Read Luke 11: 27-28.

Jesus said that those who *“hear the word of God and obey it”* are more blessed than Mary. We are blessed when we, like Mary, surrender to His Will and obey His call on our lives. Pray that this Christmas, your heart will be prepared to hear and obey whatever direction God has for you. And remember to invite someone to church.