

Overwhelming and Ordinary - God, Mary & Us (III)

Bible Reading:
[Luke 1: 39-45](#)



PREPARED BY
KEN GEHRELS
PASTOR
CALVIN CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH
NEPEAN, ONTARIO

Scripture: Luke 1: 39-45

Monologue by Mary - Thirteen And Very Pregnant

She looked at me and said, "Mary! What a blessing to see you, my dear!"

How ready I was to hear those words.

I had traveled with a caravan down to Judea. My father supplied me with a donkey. You can imagine Elizabeth's surprise when I arrived.

[Reflects] She called me a blessing. What a change from what the people back home were saying!

"And you, also, Elizabeth. *Adonai sar shalom*. Blessing be yours, and God's peace within your walls."

Elizabeth couldn't wait to tell me her news. A woman at her age, barren for years, now pregnant in her sixth month.

She was surprised to hear that I already knew. Who would have thought that an angel would have spread such wonderful gossip!

I was surprised to hear that Elizabeth's husband, Zechariah, had met Gabriel too.

I told her, "Gabriel came to tell me that I am also to be a mother. Elizabeth, I am to bear the Messiah."

Then Elizabeth winced. I quickly came close to support her. She said she'd just felt the strongest kick ever.

And then something amazing happened. Elizabeth became filled with the Spirit of God. She said, "Mary, my dear, you are blessed among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! How fortunate I am to have the mother of my Lord come to me. The babe that kicks within me is leaping for joy to hear your voice."

First, the angel called me blessed, and now Elizabeth. Even her unborn baby knew!

Looking at the beautiful smile on her face, I remembered Gabriel's words, "For nothing is impossible with God."

Message

It's scarcely a generation ago that we in Ontario would often witness what Mary experienced. Young unmarried girls who became pregnant would "go to visit auntie." The pregnancy would be a scandal. Family would be embarrassed. Dirt on their name, they felt. Best to tuck things into a corner.

Send her away till things cooled down.

Or until the baby was born and could be adopted out.

That sense is still very strong in many middle Eastern cultures - sometimes pregnant, unmarried women are even murdered because they supposedly bring dishonor on the family name, no matter what the cause of the pregnancy - rape or otherwise.

Don't go and whitewash the tension with which Mary would be living. We've considered some of that in our past two weeks of Advent observance.

Yes, there was an angel who spoke to her.

Yes, the Holy Spirit caused the virgin to conceive.

But nobody saw the angel.

Nobody experienced the presence and power of the Spirit.

All they saw was the pregnant teen.

And a restless, awkward Joseph.

I wonder what went through Mary's mind as she trudged towards Elizabeth's home? Did she feel rejected? Terribly alone? Frightened? Small?

Perhaps a degree of all of these?

The gossip mill works fast - it does today, it did then.

Word gets round, and I think we can safely assume that Elizabeth had some idea that Mary was coming, and why.

As Mary walks into Elizabeth's home, I suspect she was walking on egg shells. Nervous. Would she be allowed to stay?

It **could** have been a most frosty reception - tuck the young misguided girl into a corner, feed and water her and wait it out.

It **could** have been a time for rebuke, similar to the reception given a woman from Old Testament Israel, a woman to whom Mary is often compared, a woman who wrote a song remarkably similar to the one Mary sang - the song we'll look at next Sunday.

The story of Hannah is told in 1 Samuel 1. She is also in despair; in her case because she **wasn't** pregnant. She enters a house, the house of the Lord. What greets her are words of rebuke, quick and sharp rebuke from the high priest, Eli. He accuses her of a moral lapse, calling her drunk.

Elizabeth **could** easily have accused Mary of a moral lapse, calling her loose. A quick, sharp rebuke about getting what you deserve may have followed.

But it doesn't.

In the middle of a topsy, turvy situation, something stirs inside Elizabeth.

Her womb bounces.

Her heart grows strangely warm.

Words, which seem to come out of nowhere, fill her mind.

What seems to all the world to be an impossible situation doesn't seem so impossible to Elizabeth. Impossible is a word that has been erased from her vocabulary because of what has happened to her, a woman that by all rights should not be pregnant. **Way** past the age.

The angel came and told her husband Zechariah that they would have a baby. He didn't buy in - began to protest, and was clamped down with a holy muteness until the child was born.

The Bible doesn't tell us what Elizabeth said when Zechariah came home and told her. But what would the response of most older women be, when their husbands would come round to them saying, "*Honey, the angel told me to*"?

The angel was right.

And now Elizabeth was in her last trimester.

So.....

If the impossible could happen to her, so too for her young niece.

And Mary receives a warm welcome.

Elizabeth is open to the miracle work of God in a person's life.

She's open to it because she has experienced the power of His grace in her life.

And because she is open, she is also willing to respond to the prompting of the Holy Spirit.

Because she is open, she recognizes the bumping and turning in her womb as leaps of joy, rather than just an extra strong kick or two.

Because she is open, she understands the thoughts placed in her mind as thoughts come from God rather than stray wishful daydreams; she understands them as thoughts meant to be passed on to Mary.

Because she is open, she doesn't allow these thoughts to be become swamped with thoughts of jealousy - that this younger girl receives the dream of every Jewish woman, to become the mother of Messiah, rather getting it herself.

She is open.

And she passes on the thoughts in her mind to Mary.

We read the account of what happened.

When it seems to Mary as if everything was crumbling around her, the Holy Spirit drives Elizabeth to surround Mary with holy affirmation and support.

Elizabeth, says v.41, was filled with the Holy Spirit.
The Spirit fills Elizabeth's body with baby bumping.
The Spirit fills her mind with holy thoughts.

Being "*filled with the Holy Spirit*", as it arises in other passages, is generally a holy initiative by the Sovereign God, working in response to human need. The book of Acts gives examples of this happening among believers:

Acts 2:4 Cowering believers, quivering in hiding, are filled with the Spirit and given prophetic boldness.

Acts 4:8 A cripple is healed, the disciples are arrested and Peter is filled with the Spirit, who gives him words of bold witness to speak to the authorities.

Acts 4:31 All the disciples gather under threat of persecution, they are filled with the Spirit, they are shaken to their core and provided boldness to carry on for Christ.

Acts 9:17 a broken, blinded Saul of Tarsus, feared around the Middle East for his violent persecution of the Church, is prayed for and receives the Holy Spirit's filling. His life is changed and he becomes the greatest missionary in the history of the Church.

The power of God's Spirit guides, directs, propels and channels people into effective service for the Lord.

Here in Luke 1 the Holy Spirit had moved miraculously in the wombs of both woman, causing them to be pregnant. He now moves miraculously again - in their hearts..... and in baby John's heart within Elizabeth's womb.

Elizabeth responds to that movement and filling and pronounces a blessing, double blessing, on Mary.

You see words of blessing in v.42, and in v.45.

In v.42 she blesses Mary because of the child she is carrying.

In v.45 she blesses Mary because of the teenager's obedient faith.

The result is that Mary is encouraged and restored - stay tuned for next week when we look at the song that Mary sings in response to Elizabeth's affirming greeting.

Elizabeth is open, and blessings result.

I wonder - how open are we?

Can we see the grace of God at work in our lives?

Can we see that grace of God working in the lives of others?

Are we ready and willing to affirm that work of God?

For, you see, the Holy Spirit of God hasn't suddenly gone silent.

He is not somehow impotent to act today in ways that He acted 2000 years ago.

He remains the powerful presence of God on this earth.

He continues to fill believers.

He continues to guide and direct lives.

Can you believe that?

Or do you find yourself willing to accept that it may have happened way back then, but no longer? Funny how that happens, you know - we read an account like this and don't blink an eye. But when somebody today says they feel a twinge in their body, and say that God did it, our eyebrows go way up. When somebody says, "*God told me to tell you....*" we go "*Yeah, right....*"

I wonder - how open are we?

I wonder - have we ever felt an urge to speak a positive word to someone, either when we see them, or perhaps by picking up the phone;

felt the urge but not bothered to act on it?

In doing so, have we ever squelched a prophetic affirmation that the Lord meant us to be transmitting?

I've certainly been on the receiving end of such affirmations. Times when I've been down in the dumps, or wondered if what I was doing was headed in the right direction, when I was ready to stop ---
- and out of the blue along comes a true God-send of a person with a word of encouragement or direction that is worth a million dollars (US currency!). Their words hit like a thunderbolt.
And they don't have a clue how important what they're saying is.
Just an innocent statement, as far as they are concerned.
But not to the one getting it.
It's life-saving stuff!

I wonder - would the Lord want to use us as ambassadors of such to others?
- we who have experienced the impossible, and amazingly great grace of God in our lives, birthing faith within us, giving us peace and joy, direction and meaning to our existence
- would He want us to be people who can season the lives of others with grace?

Are we open to that?

It's easy to be like the high priest Eli who took one look, didn't like the outer appearance of what he saw, and condemned Hannah. Laid right into her.
It's not hard to be like Elizabeth's husband, Zechariah the priest, who was confronted with an angel, live and in person, and still responded to the message, "*Yeah, right.*"
Doubt. Cynicism. Scepticism. Thumbs down as a first response.
It's really easy.
Can't blame Mary's townfolk and family for doubting her story.
It's really easy.
We would have done exactly the same thing!

By the Holy Spirit's grace Elizabeth didn't doubt.
She prays multiplication of God's blessing into Mary's life.
And the young servant of the Lord is strengthened to go on.

We've been focussing on Mary. How richly blessed she was, indeed, to be chosen to be mother of the Saviour. Blessed..... but not given an easy road.
Those who are chosen by God for great work don't often get an easy time of it. Just because we believe and open our hearts and lives to the Lord, doesn't guarantee that we'll ride the wheel of fortune; that we'll cruise easy street. Often it goes precisely the opposite.
Just ask Mary.

And it is while we work that path of faithful, obedient service that we stand in great need of affirmation and support from other believers - believers who have opened their lives to the Holy Spirit and who are open to responding to His prompting.

I want to challenge you to examine your life.
I challenge you to consider how open you are to God directing your life in concrete, circumstantial, or thought-provoking, or even verbal ways.
I challenge you to committing yourself today to be someone who not only **receives** the gracious work of God into your life,
but to become in deeper ways someone who is willing to **pass along** that grace into the life of another person.

It's my observation that our heritage, perhaps because of Northern European resolve or what - I'm not really sure - but our heritage isn't too free with affirmation and support.
Critique and judgement come much easier.

But, then, hey, that came easier in Mary's day, too.

Support in faith.
We all need it.
Jesus needed it, too.

When he came to the end of his ministry on earth, and sank to his knees to pray in the Garden of Gethsemane, he knew that a mob was coming to arrest him. He knew that pain and horror awaited him. He knew the suffering ahead. And it weighed him down in a dreadful way.

So again God spoke to a servant, commanding that servant to go out with affirmation. The servant went. Jesus was comforted and strengthened and completed his mission.

In that case the servant was an angel.
Who knows? Perhaps the same angel who spoke to Mary?
Gabriel..... perhaps?

Elizabeth's work was angel work.
The work of affirmation.
Empowered by the Holy Spirit.

It is now our work.

Don't take easy street, dear believers.
Reach with one hand up to heaven, in openness to the Spirit.
Reach with another hand out to a struggling believer, as an agent of grace.

It could be the greatest Christmas present you'll ever give.