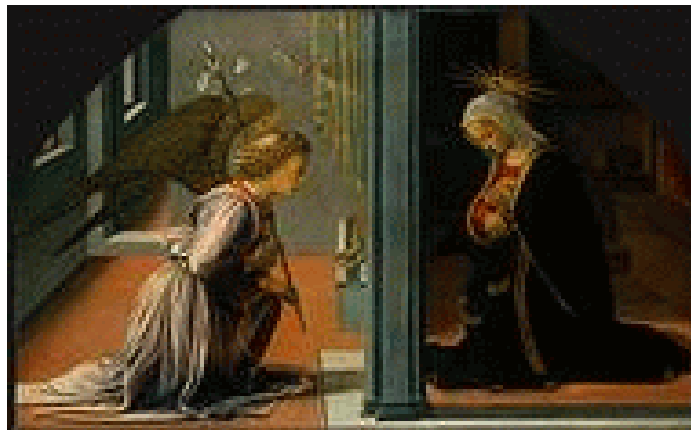


Overwhelming and Ordinary - God, Mary & Us (I)

Bible Reading:
[Matthew 1: 18-25](#)



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Scripture: [Matthew 1: 18-25](#)

Monologue by Mary - Thirteen And Very Pregnant

I am here and right now I am very alone.

At first I felt a little skeptical, like Sarah when the angel told Abraham she would have a baby. Wondered what on earth was going on. *[Chuckles]*

A girl of thirteen should answer back to an angel? I have to admit I was a bit proud of having been chosen by God for such a special task . . . for all of, maybe, five minutes.

“Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. Let it happen to me just as you say.”

[Pauses, looks to congregation] Then I told my mother, “I have seen an angel! He had a message for me.”

Mother was more concerned with preparing dinner for the men. “Mary,” she said, “bring me some oil. Bring the flour.” She was too busy then to hear about an angel’s message.

She did stop to listen when I told her about the baby.

“Mother, it is not going to be Joseph’s baby.” *[Realizes what she is saying, breaks off]*

And that’s when I began to realize that while I might be blessed among women, it was a very mixed blessing.

My mother lives in disgrace. My father wants to know who the father is. “I’ll beat him within an inch of his life,” he screams.

Again I told them about the angel. They called me blasphemous. How could I tell them that the Lord Almighty was responsible?

What am I to say to Joseph? How am I to keep my belly hidden?

[Voices of townspeople speak into an off-stage mike. Mary reacts to their harsh words and quickly exits down the center aisle. "She won't say who the father is!" "I bet it's Jacob--he's had his eyes on her. He laid more than eyes on her!" "That adulteress! She should be stoned!" "Her mother says she's hearing voices in her head. But it took more than voices to do that." "Maybe she and Joseph just anticipated the marriage day. I wouldn't blame him. She should be stoned. . . ." "It's broken her father's heart. She should be stoned."]

Message

There is deep mystery here.

Powers at play beyond understanding -

Mary doesn't get it.

Joseph can't comprehend what happened.

Parents and neighbors - completely beyond their grasp.

And we..... we are just as bewildered by it all.

Facing us are events of history, facts in time.

But events, facts that don't fit the regular scheme of things.

They are, as some would say - **way** outside the box.

They are mysterious events of incredible significance.

They are mysterious events presenting us this important teaching:

God's powerful sovereignty

coming to bear on human life

in promise-keeping, life-bringing faithfulness.

Events outside the box.

Know what “the box,” if we can call it that, looked like?

In Ancient Israel, couples went through a period of betrothal before actually being joined in marriage. That “pledge of marriage” was far deeper than modern engagements - which we can make and break without any ramifications. Betrothals, pledges of marriage, were considered legally binding; made in front of legal witnesses. You were actually called husband and wife. It took a writ

of divorce to break this state. If the man died during the period of betrothal, the woman would be treated as a widow. After a proper period of living apart in this state, the man would take the woman to his home where they would live in fully consummated marriage. Children would be born.

It is during that betrothal period of living apart, in purity and virginity, that the power of God is unleashed in Mary's life through the Holy Spirit.

Twice (v.18, 20) we are told that the Spirit of God does this work.

No fluke.

No shady immorality hidden behind some cock-and-bull story.

Instead, Mary experiences, and Joseph is introduced to powers far beyond them - powers are at work here that are far greater than they, or we, can comprehend.

We can sense that they're there.

We can witness to their work.

But we can't gather it all in, organize and order it. It's too big. It blows apart, spills out of, and works far beyond the boundaries of any "box", any system, that we can construct.

Including that of betrothal and marriage and human reproduction.

It is, again, the power of

God's sovereignty

coming to bear on human life

in promise-keeping, life-bringing faithfulness.

The sovereignty of God -

Today we are very skittish of power, especially absolute power. We are a people who value their independence and personal freedoms above everything else. We are well aware of the slogan, "*power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely.*" We've seen it happen.

And so perhaps we're ready to back-peddle when we encounter the sovereignty, the absolute power, of God.

So please understand - unlike the brutal Taliban domination which has so graphically been depicted for us, unlike their dark sovereignty of no questions, no face, no life -

God's sovereign power and work is unlike that.

Instead of life-**taking**,

It is life-**giving**,

life-**saving**,

life-**making**.

So the angel has to appear to Joseph and calm this poor man down.

As if he says, "*It's OK. Trust me. Work with me on this one, Joseph.*"

Which Joseph does.

And which we need to do.

To trust that the events of which we read occurred.

That they are as they appear.

That they have the significance attributed to them.

Understand it or not - trust and accept this great, power-filled mystery.

Accept that the Holy Spirit of God was working on human life.

As I mentioned before, in this short section we're told twice that what happens here is through, is from, the Holy Spirit.

It is the Spirit that welds God to humanity. He does this physically through the virgin conception in the womb of Mary. Making life grow within her.

He also does this in our hearts.

It is the Spirit who gives birth to a life of faith in Jesus.

It is the Spirit who guides and grows this faith.

It is the Spirit who nurtures and protects it.

The Holy Spirit is the One who began creation -- Genesis 1:2 *"Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters."*

The Holy Spirit is the One who hovers over Mary and begins the process of salvation, the process of recreation.

The Holy Spirit is the One who hovers over this place - right now - and works the process of life in our hearts, our souls, our minds.

And it is as if an angel says to us:

"People of Ottawa, do not be afraid.

What is happening is from the Holy Spirit.

The life of Jesus is growing up inside you.

It's OK. Trust me. Work with me on this one, people."

Out of the normal realm of experience in this town?

Sure - as abnormal as what occurred then in Ancient Israel.

Just remember what Jesus himself said, at a later time:

"With humanity this is impossible, but with God all things are possible." (Matthew 19:26)

Friends,

We are at the beginning of the Christmas season, the four weeks of Advent in the year 2001. Please understand that Advent is the season that marks the beginning point of, and entry point into, the Christian faith.

You see, the beginning point of, and entry point into, the Christian faith is the birth and the life of Jesus.

One thing that I tell everyone who wants to check out the Christian faith is this - get hold of a bible, and introduce yourself to the person of Jesus. Get to know Him - His life, His work, His person.

People ask me, *"Where do I start in reading this Bible?"*

Answer - read the accounts of Jesus' life: *Matthew, Mark, Luke, John.*

And when you've done that, do it again.

The Christian faith begins, and revolves around, with Jesus. We can talk about all kinds of other elements - introduce moral constraints, ethical issues, social morays, But none of that matters if Jesus isn't firmly at the centre.

Begin with Him.

Says the angel -

"You are to give Him the name Jesus, because He will save His people from their sins."

(v.21)

Jesus - in Hebrew that is, literally, *Y'shua*, meaning *Yahweh is salvation.*

Yahweh being the personal name for God.

God is salvation - Yahweh is salvation - Y'shua - Jesus.

We need to take this name very literally. For it gives us the deepest definition of Him. Does so in two ways:

- (1) It describes His person and
- (2) it describes His work.

He is God - divinity come to earth.
He is God - come to bring salvation.

The prophet said it -

"The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call Him 'Immanuel' -- which means, 'God with us.'" (v.23)

Now the angel announces it.

And we, we here at Calvin welcome it -
the historical coming of the One who is the keystone of our faith
- the "With-us-God"

Jesus Christ - fully God and fully human - at the same time. One human parent. One divine parent. Mary and the Holy Spirit.

In Him heaven and earth find their juncture, their meeting place.

In Him the Sovereign Creator joins with the Creation. More than reaching into it - He stoops to become part of it; living in what He has made.

God does this because of His love.

The "With-Us-God" -

God's love is so immense that He **wants, longs, will** come to us.

Nothing in history, nothing in Creation can hold Him back.

Nothing can separate us from His love.

What the prophet has spoken **will** come true.

What God has promised **will** be realized.

What Heavenly Love began **will** be completed.

***God's powerful sovereignty
coming to bear on human life
in promise-keeping, life-bringing faithfulness.***

Jesus - *Y'shua* - coming..... to save us.

He comes to take us **away from** the greatest of evil - the guilt, the pollution, the power, the punishment of sin, eternal death.

He comes to bring us **to** the greatest of good: true happiness, the peace of God that transcends all understanding, freedom from Satan's domination, answered prayer, a place in God's family, an eternal future of life - the inheritance of heaven.

This is the mystery, the power and the truth of the Christian faith.

This is life - for you and me.

And, as Joseph was called to accept it,
So are we.

Accept that it is so.
Accept that God loves you.
Accept that Jesus came for you.
Accept His sovereign power and care into your life.

In a few moments we'll be moving to the Communion Table - with simple elements of bread and a cup we will celebrate Jesus and the salvation He won for us. But we do so in the faith and trust that what occurs around the table is more than mere human remembering.

Jesus Himself said, "*This is my body and blood.*"

While the actual physical nature remains just bread and juice we take Jesus at His word that somehow..... something mysterious happens.

We believe that.

Somehow the Holy Spirit takes people who come in trust and faith, and turns this mere human, physical event into a moment of spiritual power and nature. He makes it into a faith-growing, faith-healing time.

The Spirit brings Jesus into us through this sacred act.....

..... birthing, growing, living faith.

Our confession teaches:

Just as truly as we take and hold the elements in our hands and eat and drink it in our mouths... so truly we receive into our souls, for our spiritual life, the true body and true blood of Christ, our only Saviour. We receive these by faith, which is the hand and mouth of our souls.
[Belgic Confession art 35]

The season of Advent has begun.

We look forward to Christmas.

For us it will launch at the Communion table.

Some of you will take part as people who have believed for years. I invite you to make this a moment of recommitment, a moment to confirm, with Joseph, that you have submitted your life to the power of the Spirit of Jesus.

For some of you, you'll take part as new believers. Perhaps the first Christmas season where you are experiencing faith in Jesus. Come in that new faith. Come, along with Joseph, without fear of the Sovereign power of God that works in loving, faithful ways.

As you eat and drink, welcome Jesus in.

And some of you will watch.

You've not made the step of commitment to Jesus yet. And so we'll ask you to watch while the elements are distributed. As you watch I'd ask you to consider the mystery.

God at work so long ago.

God continuing to work now.

Will you accept that power; open your life to receive it?

Jesus has come.

He has come for you.

Say "Yes" to Jesus.

If you do - tell someone before you leave here today.

If you have questions - find someone you trust to discuss them with.

If you're simply not sure - well, please don't shelve the issue in favor of wrapping paper and Visa bills. Make this a season to wrestle with this whole matter of faith.

Yes, it may seem confusing. Imagine how Joseph felt.

Yes, it won't all make sense. It's far bigger than our powers of logic.

But **YES** - it's oh so tremendously wonderful.

It is life.

Forever.