

## **SERMON, ZION, DECEMBER 20, 2020**

Today we take a look at the Virgin Mary. Mary is well worth our study. Her character, her attitudes, her faith, her trust in the promises of our living God are worthy of our praise. The Bible tells us that of all women she is the most blessed. So, today we are going to learn from her. I'm going to mention four things as we remember her.

**NUMBER ONE: GOD CAN USE US DESPITE OUR LACK OF SPECIAL ABILITIES.** God can use us despite our lack of special abilities. When I was a kid in school, we would go to the playground during recess and at lunch time. If we wanted to play a team sport, two captains would be picked. Those captains would look over the rest of us. Then they would take turns picking their teams, based on strength, agility, and skill. They picked the best players first. Those who were picked last were very aware of their place in the opinions of the captains.

But God is not like that. Some people think that God picks only the brightest and the best. But that's not necessarily so. He sometimes picks those who would seem to have little to offer. Why? Because that's the sort of people God often uses to accomplish His purpose.

The apostle Paul says in 1 Cor. 1:26-28, **"For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are."**

What the world thinks is worthless, useless, and nothing at all is what God has used. **"God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are."**

As we look at Mary, the Bible doesn't mention that she had any special skills or abilities. Luke simply tells us, **"In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, 'Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.'"**

I want you to notice several things from this passage.

**First of all, Galilee was not a very respected region of Israel.** The village of Nazareth itself had a very poor reputation. In fact, years later, when Nathaniel, who later became one of the twelve apostles, first heard about Jesus, he asked, "**Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?**" Nazareth hardly seemed to be a desirable location to find an earthly mother for God's promised Messiah!

**Secondly, Luke identifies her as being a virgin, engaged to Joseph.** At that time, a Jewish engagement involved two steps.

**First, there was the formal betrothal.** It included a contract and exchange of a bridal price. Then sometime later, the actual wedding would take place. To break off a betrothal would actually be the same as going through a divorce.

**Secondly, while they were officially betrothed, they would still be living apart.** They would remain so until the actual wedding ceremony took place. Still, they were already legally husband and wife.

Mary's age is not mentioned. But given the culture at that time, she would almost certainly have been a teenager. And not in her late teens at that.

God is entrusting the King of Kings and Lord of Lords to a teenager. In a despised village. Located in a remote area of a little nation that had been conquered and ruled by Rome.

And yet, the angel calls her "**highly favored.**"

You see, God often chooses ordinary people to do extraordinary things. Why? So, that everyone knows that it's not the person who's responsible, it's God.

**NUMBER TWO: THE ONLY THING WE CAN OFFER TO GOD IS OUR WILLINGNESS TO DO HIS WILL.** A second thing we learn from Mary is that the only thing we can really offer to God is our willingness to do His will.

Luke 1:38 tells us that Mary answered, "**I am the Lord's servant . . . May it be to me as you have said.**"

God is not looking for ability. He is looking for availability. Remember the saying: "God doesn't call the qualified. He qualifies the called." God is looking for people who have the right attitude to accomplish great things for Him. He is looking for people who will say to Him, **"I am available. Use me as you will."**

Imagine yourself being responsible to hire someone for an important task. You receive resumes. You arrange for interviews. The resumes list the education, experience, and qualifications of every candidate. All except for one. In this one resume, you notice that under "Education" it says: "None." Under "Experience" it says: "None." But the resume does say: "I'm willing and available." You and I probably wouldn't hire such a person, but God often does.

**NUMBER THREE: SERVING GOD WILL COST US SOMETHING.** Mary also teaches us that serving God costs us something. Mary's response in v. 38 shows us her character: **"I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May it be to me as you have said." Then the angel left her.**

What Mary was agreeing to was no simple matter. She was being asked to bear a child without being married. In her obedience to God, she probably was the object of much doubt and ridicule. Who could possibly believe her story about the angel and the virgin birth?

But Mary knows she is God's servant. So, she lets God work through her as He willed. God could place her in whatever difficult circumstance He desired, for she knew that God was with her.

Serving God can be costly. I don't know what it may cost you. It cost Mary her reputation. But she was willing to pay the price. Are you ready to say to God, "Here I am, use me"? No matter what. No matter where. No matter when. Mary did.

Does your life ever feel meaningless? Do you ever catch yourself thinking "what's the point?" If so, ask yourself how much you are serving others?

John Gardner wrote, "**When people are serving, life is no longer meaningless.**" When people are serving, life is no longer meaningless. How willing a servant are you? Do you remember that Jesus served you to His very last breath? How much like Christ are you? The stronger your love for Jesus, the more you will desire to serve others in His name. That's how He makes Himself known. If you want to add meaning depth and purpose to your life, give it away in the same of Jesus.

Here's a true saying, "**You can give without loving, but you can't love without giving.**" You can give without loving, but you can't love without giving. The more you give of yourself to others- in the name of Jesus- the more like Him you become. A servant serves out of devotion and not reward. A servant serves because that's who they are. That's who Christ has made them to be. How often we serve expecting nothing in return is a clear reflection of how much we love. Serving without expecting anything in return is a reflection of how much we love.

Henry Ward Beecher shares this thought about love, "**We never know how much one loves till we know how much he is willing to endure and suffer for us. It is the suffering element that measures love. The characters that are great must, of necessity, be characters that shall be willing, patient and strong to endure for others.**"

You know you have truly served when you walk away afterwards feeling like you were the one who received. You know you have truly served when you can honestly say- and believe- that is more blessed to give than it is to receive.

The world cannot always understand a person's profession of faith, but it can understand service. That's how Jesus is made known through us.

**NUMBER FOUR: MARY TRUSTED GOD IN SPITE OF HER LIMITATIONS.** Mary trusted God in spite of her limitations. She "**rejoices in God my Savior for He... the Mighty One has done great things for me – holy is His name.**"

With God's grace upon her, Mary didn't exhibit an inferiority complex. She didn't argue with God like Moses did. She didn't tell God that she was underqualified or too young. What she did was realize that God would help her overcome whatever her limitations might be.

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Mary is a portrait of going wherever God leads. She is an example of knowing that He will supply whatever is lacking. She had an attitude that trusted God's direction.

Think of Mary - a pregnant, unmarried teenager. She had nothing. But God used her to present the greatest gift that man has ever received. Are you willing this morning to put your total trust in God?

There's an old story about a man who was lost and wandering in the desert. He was dying of thirst. As he stumbled along in the terrible heat, he came upon an old shack. He made his way through the doorway and then fell upon the dirt floor. Lying there, and looking around, he saw an old water pump. He crawled over to it. He grabbed hold of its handle. Frantically he began pumping up and down, but nothing came out.

Then he saw a large glass jug full of water. And there was a note attached to it that read: "Pour all the water into the top of the pump to prime it. If you do this you will get all the water you need. P.S. Be sure to fill the jug again before you leave."

Wow! Here's a jug filled with water. If he just drank that water, he could at least prolong his life a while longer. After all, could he really trust a note that was not telling how old? But if he poured all the water in to prime the pump, and it didn't work, he would soon die. However, if it worked, he would have access to fresh water. As much as he needed.

So, he decided. He poured all the water into the pump. Grabbing the handle, he began pumping; a trickle of water appeared. Suddenly, water was gushing out. Cool, flowing, wonderful water. All that he could possibly want. He filled his canteen and drank it. He filled it and drank from it again. He was marvelously refreshed.

Then he remembered the note. He filled the jug, put the cork back in place, and added his own words to the note: "Believe me, it really works. But you have to give it all away to get it back." **YOU HAVE TO GIVE IT ALL AWAY TO GET IT BACK.**

God isn't going to come to any of us with the same job that He gave Mary. But God is calling us to His service. God has called all believers to minister within the body of Christ – the Church. How faithfully are you answering that call? Here's what Mary said, **"I am the Lord's servant. May it be to me as you have said."**

Now what is your response? Are you available for God to use you? Or do you have excuses? Are you willing to let God lead you? How like Mary are you?