

Here I am - the Servant of the Lord

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Date: 22 December 1996

Preacher: Hilary Roath

- [0 : 00] The Gospel of Luke begins with two stories, two stories of wonder.
- The first, the announcement to Zachariah of the birth of John the Baptist to a quite elderly Elizabeth. And the second story immediately follows by the announcement of an even more wonderful birth of Jesus to Mary, a virgin mother.
- By these two announcements, I believe Luke wants us to understand the wonder of Jesus' birth, the wonder of the birth of the Son of God.
- But I think he also wants to show us the face of Mary of Nazareth. The face of Mary of Nazareth has made this possible.
- Here I am, she said, here I am, the servant of the Lord. Let it be with me according to your word.
- [1 : 22] In her home, the call of God had come to Mary. And she responded by giving herself in a magnificent act of abandonment.
- She abandoned herself into the hands of God. Mary lived in quiet, obscure Nazareth.
- It nestled high up in a circle of hills. It was shut off from the world. Nazareth is not mentioned in connection with anything in the Old Testament.
- It's not mentioned once in the Talmud, where there are lots of obscure places named. And it's not once mentioned in the pages of Josephus, who mentions no less than 204 towns and cities in Galilee.
- But into this little mountain town, God sent his angel Gabriel. His name means power of God.
- [2 : 41] And we're familiar with his name. And we're familiar with his mission. But what he looked like, and what he sounded like, is left to our imaginations.
- Because we don't know any more than is written. But I can imagine his kind, steady gaze, searching, gazing at Mary.
- And he says to Mary, Greetings, favoured one. The Lord is with you. Greetings, favoured one.
- The Lord is with you. And the angel tells her that she is to conceive and bear a son and name him Jesus.
- But how, Mary wanted to know. How could she bear a son when she was a virgin? The Holy Spirit will come upon you.
- [3 : 49] The power of the Most High will overshadow you. The child will be holy. And will be called the Son of God.
- And Gabriel tells her that she is destined to be the mother of the Saviour of the world. Can you imagine yourself or put yourself in her place?
- That angel appeared to her in private. No one saw him. No one heard him. So who was going to believe her?

Her character would be ruined. She would be scorned. She would lose her friends. But worse of all, she would lose her betrothed husband, Joseph.

Because despite him loving her, he would have to cast her off. Even her life was in danger. Because she could have been charged with an offence, which by Jewish law meant death.

[5 : 07] Can you imagine yourself in her place? Moses, when God himself appeared to him and makes it known that he's chosen him to be the deliverer of his people, argues, debates with God.

Telling him that he's made a mistake, that he's chosen the wrong man to accomplish his purpose. Who am I, says Moses, that I should go to Pharaoh, that I should bring forth the children of Israel.

So, it would not have been unreasonable for Mary to say to the angel, go to my parents, go to my neighbors and friends, tell them what has happened to me.

Save them from sorrow. Save me from dishonor. Save me from sorrow. But not a word of this kind, not a word of this came from Mary's lips.

Mary rises above it all. She rises above it all when Gabriel delivers his message to her. There was no asking him to pass her by or go elsewhere.

[6 : 34] No telling him of her unworthiness. No pushing herself forward in any way. Here I am, she says.

Here I am, the servant of the Lord. Let it be with me according to your word. So, whatever passed through her mind while the angel was telling her what she had been appointed to, and to the place that she was to fill in eternal history, Mary's instant response was that of absolute faith, absolute trust, absolute self-surrender.

She surrendered to all that God was calling her to do. Here I am, the servant of the Lord.

Let it be with me according to your word. And as she spoke these words, she gave herself in complete abandonment to God's will, that he might do in her and through her whatever pleased him.

And no sooner as she'd said, here I am, than it was done. And the Holy Spirit overshadows her and forms in her, forms in her, the Savior in her own body.

[8 : 16] She had given her consent. She had given her consent. God would not take possession of Mary without her free response to his call.

But her response was no mere resignation. It was no passive. She was no passive instrument in the work of human redemption.

It was with a generous heart that she embraced all that God was requiring of her. When we think of Mary, we seem to think of her as being timid.

She's usually portrayed as a pleasant, compliant person, rather than a strong, courageous one.

We see her as meek and mild and humble and quiet. And that's the Mary that the Christmas nativity scenes and Hollywood movies give us.

[9 : 33] But the woman that God chose as the one to bear Jesus, Jesus the Savior, recognized the ugliness of the inequality of our world.

She was angry at the brutality of the oppression in our world. And Mary longed for a better world, as we will hear in her song of praise.

But Mary had dwelling within her the eternal Son of God. And she could not have gone through this experience without it having an enormous effect on her inner being.

Mary had got an amazing secret. An amazing secret.

And who could she share it with? Her cousin Elizabeth. And as the angel had told her, who was also with child, through God's blessing.

[10 : 46] So Mary goes from Nazareth into the hill country to a city in Judah, where Elizabeth lives with her husband, Zachariah.

And as she enters the house, she greets Elizabeth. And Elizabeth's greeting confirms Mary's experience.

Elizabeth cries out with a loud voice. Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb.

And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? The mystery that had been worked out in Mary had also been revealed to Elizabeth by God.

So it was no longer a secret that Mary had to keep to herself. And she could know that joy, and we all know that joy, of sharing that with one another when a new baby is on the way.

[11 : 57] She knew the joy of communicating it, and the message of Gabriel had been confirmed. And then out of that wondrous experience, Mary, who was a poor peasant girl, she probably was only about 16 years old, she was untrained.

This young girl was enabled by God to utter her song of praise to him. And that song of praise has for 19 centuries expressed most fully our worship of God, the Magnificat.

And we say that each evening prayer service, the Magnificat, Mary's song of praise. It's as if when Mary met Elizabeth, she could not contain herself any longer.

And her song of praise, she burst forth with it and could not contain her love of God. And she began singing this song.

It's a song of praise to God, but it is also a visionary song. It's talking about a changed world. My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, for he has looked with favour on the lowliness of his servant.

[13 : 40] And Mary sang of God and the promised Saviour. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted up the lowly.

He has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty. not everyone who has called Jesus their Lord and Saviour can sing Mary's song.

Because many prefer a much tamer tune. But there have been people who, through the centuries, have sang her song in their hearts, if not always on their lips.

because this song is subversive. Because it calls into question the present world order.

And it speaks of new possibilities. And it lifts the spirits of people who have been brought low. In 1973, in Santiago in Chile, the democratically elected government of Salvador was toppled by the forces of General Pinochet.

[15 : 05] Pinochet put in place a rule known for its horrible and oppressive methods. And during the overthrow, 25,000 people were crammed into a sports stadium and detained at gunpoint.

And then, every now and again, people were taken out and tortured and abused. And all hope of justice seemed to be battered to pieces.

But among those huddled in the stadium was a popular Chilean folk singer called Victor Jarrar. He had managed to bring his guitar with him.

And there in the middle of the brutality and abuse, he began to play and sing. He lifted his voice against the violence and the destruction that was being opposed on his people.

And the crowd hushed in order to listen to his songs. Songs of courage, songs of hope. And his songs helped them to see beyond the pain, beyond the defeat of the moment and the possibilities yet to come.

- [16 : 23] The soldiers knew his music was undermining their work. So they confronted Jarrah and told him, If you don't stop that song, we are going to cut off your hands.
- And Victor lifted his eyes to theirs and kept on playing. So they carried out their threat and chopped off his hands. And the soldiers laughed at him and taunted him.
- Now try and play your guitar, they said. He couldn't play. But again, he began to sing. And he continued to sing his heart out.
- Sing of his vision for a better world. And the furious soldiers couldn't stop him until they shot him.
- But even that didn't stop the song. The people heard it and remembered it. And throughout the time, Pinochet and his forces ruled Chile.
- [17 : 33] The oppressed people sang the song of Victor Jarrah. Mary sang because she knew that the child she was to bear would change the world.
- Mary brought forth her song of praise. Mary brought forth that which the spirit had planted within her.
- She brought forth the one who would be king of kings whose reign would know no end. She brought forth God's best.
- God's best. God's only begotten son. I think it's easy to believe that we must be special somehow to bring forth God's best.
- God's best. But when we look at Mary and see that God's highest and God's best was brought forth by an ordinary girl, great works are often brought forth by ordinary people.
- [18 : 59] God's best and God's highest was brought forth by an ordinary girl. ordinary people bring forth God's best.
- Ordinary people who struggle to bring forth what God has placed within them. And God has placed within us each one of us his best.
- And he wants us to bring it forth. Mary was an ordinary girl whose faithfulness to the task of nurturing of struggling to bring forth what God's spirit had placed within her made her significant in the history of the world.
- Made her significant as Jesus' mother. and Elizabeth said to her blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.
- She believed there would be a fulfillment of that which was spoken to her from the Lord. Mary was willing to believe God's word.
- [20 : 23] She was willing to believe him. And we bring forth God's best when we are willing to believe God's word. But the trouble with us is that we really don't believe God's word.
- Some of us are like Sarah who laughed when she received the word of God that in her older age she would bear a son. Some of us are like Gideon who asked God to show him a sign when he received the call of God.
- Some of us are like Jonah who ran in the opposite direction when he received the word of God. Some of us are like Zachariah the father of John the Baptist who questioned and doubted when he received the word of God.
- We can't bring forth God's best when we laugh at what seems to be an impossible promise of God. We never bring forth God's best if we laugh and doubt.
- We must understand that nothing is impossible with God. Nothing is too hard for God. The angel told Mary nothing is impossible for God.
- [21 : 46] God's best and to bring forth God's best we must be willing like Mary we must be willing to say as Mary did I am your servant let it be to me according to your word.

I am your servant let it be to me according to your word. and if we believe God's word and live in such a way that it can be brought to fruition in us then we too can bring forth God's best in God's time in God's way God's best will will come forth.

We can all say here I am the servant of the Lord let it be to me according to your word.

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