

# MARY, THE LORD'S SERVANT

Kathy Means

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I grew up in the north central part of Montana in a very small ranching community. The town had only two hundred people, and it was surrounded by miles of ranch land. My father was the school principal, and we lived in a small teacherage on the school campus. Each Christmas the school would put on a pageant of the nativity story for the community. My first chance to be a part of this pageant was in first grade. Being one of the younger children, I got to be an angel. But I remember noticing that all of the older girls wanted to have the role of Mary, and several of them thought they deserved it. My sisters were the principal's daughters-why not them? The sheriff's daughter thought she deserved the part. But every year the director would choose somebody who was humble, very cooperative with the desires of the director, and supportive of the other children involved in the program.

Similarly, God looked down and chose Mary, a person who had a humble heart, who knew her Lord, who wanted to do his will as she trusted in his mercy. It is my privilege in this message to take us into the conversation between Mary and Gabriel, the Lord's messenger, in Luke 1. We will hear the words God spoke to Mary that gave her confidence and boldness. In Luke 1, we'll find three gifts that God wants to bestow on all of us as he did on Mary that day. Let's read verses 26-27:

**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.**

From those two verses we find out a bit of history. We learn that Mary was a Nazarene. Nazareth was a small, hill-country town in the province of Galilee. This town was known for its corruption, Roman idolatry, and promiscuity. It was a town about which Nathanael would later say, "Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" (John 1:46.) Yet, wonderfully, in the midst of the darkness God did see something good. He saw the heart of Mary and the heart of Joseph, her betrothed.

Luke tells us that Mary was a virgin, and that in itself is a testimony of Mary's commitment to be set apart by God, preserved for her husband. A betrothal in that time, unlike our engagement period, was considered as binding as marriage. A betrothal lasted for a year. It was consecrated by a priest, and could be ended only by divorce. So essentially Mary was married to Joseph except for the consummation.

We also see a little bit about Joseph in these short verses. He was a descendant of David through Solomon. Mary was also of the line of David through Nathan. Their genealogies are given in Matthew 1 and Luke 3, respectively.

## GOD'S GIFT OF VALUE

Now Mary was in the midst of her normal, everyday activities. I'm sure her mind was filled with dreams of her marriage to come and the future life with her husband-to-be. Then suddenly the angel Gabriel appeared. Verses 28-29 reveal God's first gift:

**The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you."**

**Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be.**

When my husband Tom comes home, I expect him to call out, "Hi, Kathy! It's Tom. I'm home." If he were to come in and say, "Hello, my beloved, you who are God's perfectly chosen bride for me! I am with you both to serve and support," I would be greatly troubled and would wonder what these words would mean!

Well, that's where Mary found herself. It doesn't say that she was fearful of the presence of this angel. But she was troubled by the words he had to say. He said to her, "You are highly favored, and God is with you." Highly favored means to be significant, valued, loved. The angel continued, "The Lord, the abiding presence of God, is with you." Mary's response was one of wonder at his words, one that questioned her value.

Very often we see our weaknesses, our flesh, the part of us that doesn't look very holy or very valued, and we concentrate on that rather than seeing through God's eyes a holy, created being operating the way he created us to. In Ephesians 1:4-5 we read, "...He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself." (New American Standard Bible [NASB].) We are chosen by God, loved by God, equipped by God, and valued by God.

God's first gift to Mary and to us is value, not because of a role we play or a position we hold, but because we are God's son or daughter. We are not adequate in ourselves, but our adequacy comes from the Lord (2 Corinthians 3:5).

## GOD'S GIFT OF PERSPECTIVE

As Gabriel continues in verses 30-33, we'll see a second gift.

**But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end."**

God knows the unspoken concerns of our heart. He knows when our knees are shaking, when there's fear in our life. That is the issue that he caught for Mary—a fear for the future. He immediately addressed it for her: "Mary, don't fear the future. I have told you that I value you, I love you. I have told you that I am with you, and we will walk into this future together." Then he gave her a wonderful gift of what I would call perspective. That is the second gift that I think God wants to give each one of us. As we study his word and spend time in intimate prayer with him, building a relationship with him, he wants us to see his purposes in life, his plan, his perspective of ourselves, our family, and our neighbors so that we can follow his will.

First, we hear God give Mary perspective for herself. He made three very clear points: She would be with child, she would bear a son, and she was to name him Jesus, "Jehovah's Salvation." These are three simple pictures of a path that her life was going to take. Perhaps it wasn't to be a pleasant life. We know how the story of Jesus' earthly life ended at the cross, what Mary needed to deal with there, what she felt for her son. Yet this path was God's plan for her to be his vessel through whom Jesus would be birthed.

He then revealed the perspective of Jesus, her son, in five clear points: He would be great. He would be called the Son of the Most High, the Lord God. God would give Jesus the throne of his father David. Jesus would reign over the house of Jacob forever. And, Jesus' kingdom would never end. I'm sure Mary was reminded of the prophecy in Isaiah 9:6:

**"For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us;  
And the government will rest on His shoulders;  
And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,  
Eternal Father, Prince of Peace." (NASB)**

We see Mary's response to all of this in verse 34:

**"How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"**

It's amazing how easy it is for us to accept in faith the miraculous work of God through the life of his Son, and yet not see that he can do the same miraculous work in our lives. Mary's very first question wasn't about God's great plan of salvation through his Son Jesus. It was about herself: "I'm a virgin-how will this be?"

When the elders first asked me if I would preach today, my initial response was, "How will this be? I've never gone to seminary. I've never preached before. I, I, I..." But God quietly put his word into my heart:

Philippians 4:13: "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me." (NASB)

2 Corinthians 12:9: "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." (NASB)

God has an ultimate purpose, not only in our lives but in this world. Like Mary, we are his vessels through whom the love of Jesus can be proclaimed. We are called to live out this purpose as ambassadors, introducing people to the Lord Jesus.

## GOD'S GIFT OF CONFIDENCE

Let's go on to the third gift that God revealed through the angel's next statement. Verses 35-37:

**The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month. For nothing is impossible with God."**

Basically Gabriel said, "Mary, just step back and let God do it. Don't be concerned about the details, about your weaknesses, about what you feel you haven't yet acquired in life. God will do great things. He has a plan for his Son to be born, a Son who will embrace both humanity and deity. You can trust the power of the Most High. You can have godly confidence." And that is the third gift that God gave Mary-confidence. This is confidence not in yourself but in God and what he can do in and through you.

Gabriel also told Mary about Elizabeth at this point. There are at least two reasons why. First, it was a concrete example of his power to do great things. But beyond that, a lesson we can learn from this is the importance we have in each other's lives. We will find when we read Elizabeth's song that God truly blessed Mary by this sister in the Lord. She was able to affirm for Mary these same three gifts that God wants to give each of us.

Because of these three gifts, Mary was able to be very bold in verse 38:

**"I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May it be to me as you have said." Then the angel left her.**

Mary had walked intimately with God. She was ready at this point, because of his grace and mercy in her life, to walk with him by faith as a servant; to say, "Lord, be it done to me as you will." There were fears that could have gone through her mind. She didn't know what Joseph's response would be to all of this. She didn't know what her family's response or the community's response would be. But I'm sure she constantly reminded herself, "God said through the angel, 'Do not fear.'" Regardless of these unknowns in her life, she heard the clear voice of the Lord to walk down this path, and she was willing to do it.

## A GIFT WE CAN GIVE ONE ANOTHER

Verses 39-40 tell us that Mary hurriedly made the four-day journey to visit Elizabeth. I'm sure she was excited to get together with this relative, to be able to share these experiences in their lives. God ultimately used this relationship for them to affirm each other. The gift that we can give to one another during this season and all

year long is the gift that we see Elizabeth give Mary in verses 41-45. Elizabeth broke out in joyous song of both praise to the Lord and affirmation of what had been happening in Mary's life.

**When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. In a loud voice she exclaimed: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! 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. Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished!"**

Elizabeth affirms God's three gifts to Mary. First she confirmed Mary's value by saying, "Blessed are you among women..." The term "blessed" here means "honored of God," one who is eulogized or greatly honored for their position. Elizabeth used the same word to refer to Mary's unborn son.

Then the second gift, perspective: Elizabeth said, "But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" Elizabeth acknowledged immediately that this was the Lord. There was no question in her mind. God had confirmed in her heart and through the leaping of John the Baptist within her womb the perspective that what Mary understood from the Lord through Gabriel was indeed true. This child in her womb was the Lord, and he was going to do amazing work to redeem us all into relationship with him.

Elizabeth's next statement confirmed that sense of godly confidence, the third gift: "Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished!" If it was of God, it was going to happen. I myself received that gift when I realized that if it was of God, I was going to preach this sermon.

What a gift we can give to each other all year long in affirming one another's value. We don't need to hold a high position. We don't need to be alumni of the best colleges. We don't need to have a certain level of income. We don't need to be of a certain race or gender. God values each one of us as he has created us. What a gift to affirm the perspective that he wants us to have, not only as we enter the holiday season when we have great opportunities with family and friends to be a witness, that aroma of him, but all year long. God has a miraculous plan for the people who dwell on this earth, and we're part of that plan. We can help one another understand the role he wants us to play. And then what a gift it is to affirm that if it is of God, it will happen. Ron Ritchie use to say, "Just show up." Let go and let God work in your life.

## BECOMING A SERVANT

In verses 46-55 Mary sang a song of response. Let's look at just three points where we see that Mary made these three gifts her own. Verses 46-48:

**"My soul glorifies the Lord  
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,  
for he has been mindful  
of the humble state of his servant.  
From now on all generations will call me blessed..."**

Mary realized in her humble station and her youth that God was mindful of her. She was probably between ages thirteen and sixteen. What maturity she had at this young age to be able to stand before the Lord and say, "You are mindful of me." I don't know about you, but when I was that age I thought I was the best thing in the world. I thought I understood it all. I thought my parents knew nothing. What a humble attitude Mary had. Yet in that word "mindful," she showed that she understood the value that God gave her. That had become real for her.

Verses 49-50a:

**"...For the Mighty One has done great things for me-  
holy is his name.**

**His mercy extends to those who fear him..."**

Again, she had come to the point of understanding that it was God at work in her. He was the one who had done mighty things in her life, who had helped her to live a godly life and had preserved her character so that she was still a virgin as she entered her marriage with Joseph. And she came to a point here of understanding that he would do great things through her as well. She was going to give birth to his Son, to the Savior and Lord.

She then went on to give a history of God's whole plan, past, present, and future. In this we see teaching from the Old Testament that she had sat under and memorized, and now she sang it in confident worship to the Lord. Verses 50b-55:

**"...From generation to generation.**

**He has performed mighty deeds with his arm;**

**he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.**

**He has brought down rulers from their thrones**

**but has lifted up the humble.**

**He has filled the hungry with good things**

**but has sent the rich away empty.**

**He has helped his servant Israel,**

**remembering to be merciful**

**to Abraham and his descendants forever,**

**even as he said to our fathers."**

This is a testimony of God's character, of God's plan for mankind, of his eternal reign. He is the God of victory, the righteous Judge, the merciful Lord, not only in her life but in all lives.

Mary's life was probably very intimate with the Lord her God; that's what allowed her to not be fearful when the angel appeared. It was common for her to be in God's presence through prayer, to sit at his feet. Mary had bathed herself in the word of God. She understood it. She allowed it to change her life. She was told she had favor from the Lord (verse 28), and then she *found* favor with the Lord (verse 30). She found her identity, her worth, her significance, her purpose in him. She said, "I am your servant, Lord. May it be to me as you have said."

That servant heart is what God desires from all of us. He desires that we would set ourselves aside for his perspective, his purpose, to do his will. And he desires that we understand our value in his eyes, and have the confidence that he is going to do great work in and through us.

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