



SERMON NOTES

Mary's Story

Be Available

Bible reading: Luke 1:26-38

 **'I am the Lord's servant,' Mary answered. 'May it be to me as you have said' (Luke 1:38, NIV 1978) .**

The Background

- ◆ Mary was already 'betrothed' or engaged in a binding relationship with Joseph at the time of this story. This was as binding a commitment as marriage – not an unusual arrangement in the context of her culture and times.
- ◆ Even though we now have constant world news and Google Maps, and generally have a more comprehensive understanding of where people live around the world, there are still times when the name of a town or a village becomes well-known only through an incident that happens there or a person who comes from there. On being told that Mary is in Nazareth, it is necessary in the Gospel (v26) to point out the region where this town would be found, reminding us that, although a well-known name now, it was then an obscure place. This itself adds to the wonder of the story and gives encouragement that God does not confine his presence to the 'great and the good'.
- ◆ We are told nothing else about Mary, nothing here that indicates her family was of note, or that she had any outstanding intelligence, or even anything about her character.

Yet it is to this young woman who already has commitments, and to a then little-known place, that God chooses to send his messenger.

The Message

- ◆ Affirmation: Firstly, an affirmation of Mary herself. She is highly favoured. She has worth.
- ◆ Assurance: Then, an assurance of God's presence. A very personal 'The Lord is with you'.
- ◆ Appointment: She is told what being highly favoured is going to mean in reality. This is very clear for her. She is to be involved in God's plan for his world.

In the explanation of who this child will be, there is indication of the way God will give great meaning to her life. She is to be part of an eternal plan.

The Response

- ◆ We should not think of Mary as immediately understanding and therefore giving her unconditional response easily. She enters into a conversation with Gabriel by asking 'How will this be?' (v34). It is reassuring to read this, as how many times have we made an initial response to the Lord of 'what, why, how, when?'

When Mary does give her positive response, it is after she has been reminded that nothing is impossible with God.

- ◆ She is called to put her trust in God himself. When people put their trust in us we might think 'But I'm not really who you think I am'. With God there is no such fear, as he is exactly who he has proved

himself to be. From the Old Testament 'I am who I am' (Exodus 3:14) to the God who in the New Testament knows the number of hairs on our head and acknowledges our worth to him (Matthew 10:29-31).

When Mary does move on from her questioning it is wholeheartedly, not a passive, resigned response but a real 'I'm getting on board with this' kind of response. She could not possibly have fully understood all the ramifications of this message, she could not know the pain and distress that would come through the crucifixion and the deep joy of the resurrection. She must, however, have felt that this 'yes' would influence every part of her future life; this could not go into a compartment. So her acceptance is a full one (v38).

If we continue reading onwards to verses 39-45 we can see that Elizabeth's response when she was filled with the Holy Spirit confirmed for Mary that she had done the right thing.

The Meaning

Mary definitely had a 'why me?', 'what?', and 'surely not!' moment.

What do we do with our 'why?' and 'what?' moments?

- ◆ Do we disbelieve that God can use us and never move on from that, remaining in that 'It just can't be possible!' place? Or can we see, know and believe that God can see all our potential? Does his view on our life find a place in our hearts, in our response? Can we see that we too can be favoured by God as his child?
- ◆ We limit our thinking when we see ourselves only with our own eyes, when we look for our potential without first hearing the assurance 'The Lord is with you!', when we close our ears to the truth that '... nothing is impossible with God'.
- ◆ God places good and godly people in our lives, people filled with the Holy Spirit, to help us confirm God's calling on our life.

What does this mean, then, for us today? If we have been having 'what?' and 'why?' moments, is today the moment to say 'Be it unto me...'? Is this the moment to acknowledge God's affirmation, his assurance and his appointment?

- ◆ When Mary declared that she was the Lord's servant, she was declaring total availability to him and was content to let him be the one who knows the bigger picture, able to let go of the 'what?' and 'why?' questions that limited her availability to him.
- ◆ When we say yes to God, as with Mary it will influence every part of our life. His calling cannot be put in a box, separate from everything else. If it does not influence all, then it is not a true response.
- ◆ If we **are not** available today, what are the implications for tomorrow? If we **are** available today, what are the implications for tomorrow? Just as Mary's life, response and story were uniquely hers and hers alone, so are your life, response and story. So is mine.

God assures us of his trust in us, his presence and his support.

It's a simple response to say 'Be it to me...' but the implications of this are huge:

- ◆ Peace
- ◆ Fulfilment
- ◆ Growth

'Nothing is impossible with God', therefore 'I am the Lord's servant'.

Closing Thoughts

- ◆ Every journey begins with the first step. Today is as good a day as any to take that step.
- ◆ If you are already on that journey, then saying yes today is continuing to place yourself in God's love and allowing your heart to be in tune with his.
- ◆ Mary did not look at anyone else to see what they were doing for God – don't look left or right to see if others are making themselves available, that's between them and God. But do look inwards at your own heart to see if your response is true.
- ◆ If you are not perfect, if you are not all-wise, if you do not feel powerful, that's OK – because God is perfect and he is all-wise.
- ◆ Every calling demands a response – and God has a call for everyone's life.

What an amazing day this would be if we were to say a simple, but profound yes!

Suggested songs

Play a version of 'His eye is on the sparrow' as a reminder that God's call on our lives comes from a place of care and affirmation.

- 🎵 SASB 563 'Abba Father'
- 🎵 SASB 568 'All that I am'
- 🎵 SASB 580 'Dear Lord, I do surrender'
- 🎵 SASB 600 'Kneeling in penitence'
- 🎵 SASB 616 'O love that wilt not let me go'
- 🎵 SASB 695 'Will you come and follow me'