



YOUTH RESOURCE

Mary's Story

As part of the Candidates Sunday material we will be using Mary's story to help us think about what it means to be available and obedient to God's calling. Candidates Sunday is an opportunity for everyone, from the youngest to the oldest, to be provided with the space and the opportunity to listen and respond to God's call on their life right here, right now.

Welcome – ice breaker

Idea 1: Play a simple game of Yes/No, where the object of the game is not to say the words 'yes' or 'no' when answering a series of questions from another person.

Idea 2: What would you say yes to?

Come up with a list of tasks the young people could be asked to do. They can be realistic or unrealistic! For an added element of surprise you could ask the young people to think of some tasks too. Write them on pieces of paper and put them in a bowl. Read out each task and ask the young people whether they think they would say 'yes' or 'no' to each one. Here are a few ideas to start you off:

- ◆ Go on a space mission to explore life on Mars (How long would it take? Would you come back?)
- ◆ Give a speech in front of the whole school
- ◆ Do the washing up after dinner
- ◆ Look after an older person who isn't feeling well
- ◆ Look after a neighbour's pet snake for a week while they are on holiday
- ◆ Run a marathon

BEING AVAILABLE

SAYING YES TO GOD: MARY'S STORY

Today is Candidates Sunday and the Bible story chosen for today is Mary's encounter with the angel Gabriel who told her God had called her to carry and give birth to Jesus, God's Son. When she was told this she replied with 'I am the Lord's servant... May your word to me be fulfilled.' Then the angel left her. (Luke 1:38 NIV)

Watch a clip from the BBC Nativity series or from the film *The Nativity* showing Mary's encounter with the angel.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Q1E06v5oBo


www.youtube.com/watch?v=KT_cHi8QJMw

We don't always understand why God would choose us, or what his mission will entail. But just as Mary did, he wants us to say that we're ready and available.

Here is the background to Mary's story...

Mary is thought to have been a young woman, a teenager. I wonder why God chose Mary in her youth to be the mother of Jesus? If this is how the story happened, then Mary, being unmarried, would have faced utter shame, could have been disowned by her family and even been stoned.

Read Mary's response from *The Message* paraphrase:

 **'And Mary said,
Yes, I see it all now:
I'm the Lord's maid, ready to serve.
Let it be with me
just as you say.
Then the angel left her.'**
(Luke 1:38 *The Message*)

ACTIVITY: THREE WORDS

Mary said these three words 'Let it be' as part of her response to God's message from Angel Gabriel.

- ◆ What three words would you like to say to God?
- ◆ What three words do you think God might want to say to you?

You could print out a range of words to choose from on pieces of card, or use magnetic poetry, Scrabble tiles, or simply give out three small blank pieces of card to be written on.

Here are some suggestions to get you started:

- | | |
|--------------------|-------------------------|
| ◆ Come follow me | ◆ Come to me |
| ◆ You are loved | ◆ Nothing is impossible |
| ◆ I love you | ◆ I choose you |
| ◆ Will you follow? | ◆ Here I am |

VIDEO CLIP: AN UNLIKELY CANDIDATE

Clip 1 - 10:30 to 14:00

Clip 2 - 1:01:32 to 1:05:30

Film Clip: Show two clips from the Star Wars film *The Force Awakens* which introduces Rey as an unlikely candidate who will help save the galaxy from the First Order. The first clip introduces Rey trying to survive as a scavenger in her home of Jarfur, apparently unknown and unimportant. The second clip shows Rey discovering her destiny and calling as a Jedi and how at first she resists it (though later she accepts it).

Star Wars and the Gospel narratives may be worlds (or galaxies!) apart, but ask the young people whether there are any comparisons they could make between Rey and Mary. (For example, Rey is a young girl, she is from a small backwater place, she is unknown, she is poor, but she is called to something greater and – eventually – makes herself available, she is ready to take part in an important mission and give up her existing life, despite the danger.)

There are plenty of films about unlikely heroes which you could substitute if Star Wars is not your thing! Or if getting hold of these clips and/or having the facilities to view them are too difficult, then spend some time as a group discussing different unlikely heroes that you can all think of from any number of films/books etc.

Discussion Question: If it was your job to save the world from evil forces, how would you do it? What kinds of people would you choose to carry out the mission? Ask the group to come up with their own ideas.

Now ask them to come up with all the good reasons why choosing to come as a baby to a poor teenager

in a tiny village doesn’t seem like a good idea. Suggestions might include:

- ◆ the huge risk it was
- ◆ Mary wasn’t anybody special
- ◆ people wouldn’t listen
- ◆ Mary comes from Galilee, the poor part of Israel
- ◆ Mary wasn’t even married
- ◆ Mary was far too young

What sort of risk was God taking by pinning the hope of rescuing the world on someone like Mary?

NOT BEING AVAILABLE

Mary is an inspiring example of someone who responded to God’s call by saying yes. But what about those who say no?

EXCUSES GAME

Play the excuses game as a fun way to introduce the idea of making excuses as to why we can’t do what God asks us to do. Each person take a turn to be given a situation and they need to come up with an excuse – not necessarily the truth. The rest of the group should ask questions to see whether the invented story checks out, prompting the excuse maker to stick to the false scenario. If after three questions the excuse still holds up, the person wins their point.

Example:

Situation: You don’t have your homework and the teacher won’t believe the same old story. What’s your excuse now?

Student: It was raining on the way to school and my homework got wet and the pages fell apart so I had to throw it away.

Questions from the class: Wasn’t your homework in your bag? It wasn’t raining when I was on my way to school, so where do you travel from? Why didn’t you just hand in your soggy homework?

Other possible scenarios:

- ◆ I asked you to take the dog for a walk. Why haven’t you done it?
- ◆ You were supposed to go to the dentist today and they called to say you didn’t turn up. Why?
- ◆ Weren’t you supposed to tidy up your room today?
- ◆ Why haven’t you got any credit left on your phone?

BIBLE STORY

Read the parable of the Great Banquet in Luke 14:15-24. Each invited guest makes excuses for why they can’t attend the banquet. What excuses do the people give for not coming to the banquet? Have you ever given an excuse for not going to a party or event? What did the master do when his invited guests told him they weren’t coming? Although this parable may be more about people not accepting God’s invitation to be part of his Kingdom, it could equally help us to reflect on the excuses we make to God for not living the life or accepting the things he is calling us to. I wonder what God does when we don’t make ourselves available to him?

Alternatively, you could look at the story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). The Samaritan made himself available to help the victim in the road even when it was dangerous and costly. However, the Jewish religious leaders (the priest and Levite) decided not to make themselves available. What excuses might they have made? It could have been that they had strict religious purity rules which meant they

couldn't touch anyone unclean. They may have been fearful for their own safety in case the robbers were still lurking somewhere. Or they may have just been too busy.

'Hot seat' activity

Depending on your group, these stories could work well as a 'hot seat' activity. After reading and discussing the story together, invite volunteers to take on a character from the story, sit in the 'hot seat' and be interviewed about the excuses they made or why they acted the way they did.

RESPONSE TIME

Mary was not important in the eyes of the world or her society. In her song, the Magnificat, she says that God has lifted the humble and poor and put down the rich and powerful. God's way seems to be to choose those who, in the eyes of the world, are unimportant. Before we say yes to God, God says yes to us – 'Yes, you're OK – Yes, I love you – Yes, I can use you – Yes, despite how you see yourself or how others might view you – Yes, even though you mess up.' This is one of the big messages of the Bible! God's plan for the world rests on a simple 'yes' from ordinary people like you and me.

HOW CAN WE SAY YES TO GOD?

Someone once said that we are all called, like Mary, to give birth to God in the world, to be God-bearers. Not by physically giving birth like Mary but by thinking about how we could 'birth' or bring God into the world we live in (eg in our community, school, friendship groups, other groups we are part of). What do you feel God might be calling you to do as part of his mission to love the world, bring about justice and heal its brokenness?

Invite the group to think about the two questions below. You may like to discuss these together as a group, and/or invite each person to write down their thoughts on paper. Some ideas are given to help the discussion.

1. How can you be available to God in your life right now?
 - ▶ Being available to friends in need by going the extra mile for them
 - ▶ Being available to get involved in social justice issues
 - ▶ Being available to try something new in your community or corps/church that you may not be sure about, eg a new kind of ministry, becoming a leader
 - ▶ Being open to God about your future
 - ▶ Saying yes to God's call to do something, explore something, go somewhere
2. What excuses do you make?
 - ▶ I'm not old enough
 - ▶ I'm not good enough
 - ▶ I don't have the right skills or confidence
 - ▶ I'm too busy right now to give very much time to God
 - ▶ My priority while I'm young should be to enjoy life with my friends
 - ▶ I can do more for God when I've done the things I want to do

If the teenage Mary could travel forward in time and speak to you, what do you think she might say? What do you think she learnt about God from her experience? It may be important to acknowledge that, as well as excuses, there are also real pressures on young people as they make decisions about their future, and that following God should not be an extra burden, but a source of love and strength and guidance in all that we are facing.

CREATIVE PRAYER IDEA: OPEN TO GOD

You will need: A large shallow bowl or large deep tray filled with water, origami (or thin) paper, scissors and pens or pencils (you may want to practise this beforehand to see which shapes work best). For a video of this prayer idea visit flamecreativekids.blogspot.co.uk/2014/10/floating-prayers.html

This is a visual and reflective way for the young people to make a response to God. Give each person a sheet of origami paper and invite them to cut it into a simple shape that represents them, eg heart, person, hand or anything else that they can think of. They may want to write their name or their prayer in the centre. Then they need to fold the sides into the middle – for example, the fingers on a hand shape could be folded in, or the head, arms and legs of a person could be folded in, or the sides of a heart. As you listen to some reflective music together, invite each person to place their folded paper on the surface of the water, with the folded bits facing upwards. The shapes should slowly unfold as the young people watch. This can be a symbol of our hearts and lives opening up to God to say ‘yes, I am available to live your way and follow whatever you call me to’. The slowness of the unfolding may be a good way to illustrate that becoming open and available and responding to God’s call is a process, something that can take many years.

REFLECTIVE MUSIC IDEAS:

- 🎵 ‘All that I am’ by Rend Collective from the album *The Art of Celebration*
- 🎵 ‘I belong to you’ by Bethel Music from the album *You Make me Brave*

PRAYER

Father God,

Thank you that you choose ordinary people like us to make your world as you want it to be. Teach us how to become available and open to what you call us to do and to be in this world. Thank you for the example of Mary, who so loved and trusted you that she was willing to be available and say yes to your plans for her life, even though she was probably scared and uncertain of what her future would hold. Help us to be available to you every day – in prayer, in learning more about you, in being ready to help and serve others – especially when we feel like making excuses. Make us into the people you created us to be so we will be ready to say ‘Here I am, ready to serve, let it be.’

Amen.

Extra idea: Why not ask one or two people you know to share their story of how God called them to something and how they responded.