

“The Announcement To Mary”

Luke 1:26-56

Series: “Announce His Coming!” [Advent, #2]

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Introduction

It’s 16 days until Christmas, and the sand is flowing rapidly through the hour glass. Preparation and celebration are moving into overdrive. As things are revving up, have you taken time to reflect and plan the why, what and how of your Christmas this year? Have you made any changes?

One woman, reflecting on the previous Christmas decided to do some things differently. She expressed it this way, “’Twas the night before Christmas and all through the house roared the flames from my kitchen, too many to douse. My oven exploded, I started to run, then I realized it just meant my cookies were done. My hot apple turnovers also looked grim, after seven whole hours of flame-broiling them. My mince pie looked great, an out-and-out hit. But, it took a chain saw to cut into it. And I thought my hot bread had reached a new high ’til the flies took a whiff and dropped out of the sky. My gelatin mold seemed to never get done, and my homemade pound cake, well, it weighed more like a ton. And what did my cranberry coffee cake lack, that so many ants would bring the crumbs back? So, maybe I’ll pass on cooking this year. And let all my friends have a *healthy* new year!”

During this Advent season we are preparing for Christmas around the theme “*Announce His Coming!*” We are looking at the announcements of Jesus’ coming in the gospels; the background and lessons from them; and also *our* opportunities to clearly “*Announce His Coming!*”

Last week we began with the Announcement to Zacharias. Today we move on to “*The Announcement to Mary.*” The familiar portrait we have of Mary in the Bible does not have all the detailed brush strokes we might want. But it does have a number of clear and insightful features.

Today we are focusing on one feature, her spiritual life. We can learn some lessons from her about *true spirituality*. What picture comes to your mind when you think of a person who is truly spiritual? Some see an older person with gray hair and wrinkles; with stiff and sore knees from all the years of praying. This description, of course, does not fit Mary as we meet her in Luke chapter 1. She is young, perhaps in her mid or later teens. Yet she had true, vital spirituality.

True spirituality is not measured by age, nor is it so much a set of lessons learned as it is a life lived. True spirituality is essential to letting our light shine brightly, to effectively “*Announce Christ’s Coming.*” We see a portrait of true spirituality in Mary through her encounter with the Angel Gabriel.

A Portrait Of True Spirituality

The first feature is reverence and humility before God. To revere or have reverence means to have and give respect to another; to be in awe of that other person. And it often has an emphasis on love.

Revering God means to recognize His uniqueness as the eternal, sovereign God; and so, then, to think of Him and relate to Him with the respect, awe and love that is due Him. True reverence begins with who God is and then it moves to His actions that flow from who He is. Real reverence for God is an attitude that flows from our character developed from our relationship with God which, then, permeates all areas of our life. It will not be relegated to, nor can it be contained in the box of church services or religious activities.

Humility before God is closely connected to reverence of God. Negatively, it means not to be proud, not to think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think. Positively, it is seeing ourselves accurately. Then accepting that—thinking and living accordingly. God is God; we are His creations, created by Him with love and in His image.

Let's look at these marks of spirituality in Mary. God sent the angel Gabriel to her. His opening statement, "... Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you" (28). Her response was not casual nor was it self-seeking. She didn't rush to "It's my lucky day!" or, "Finally! Finally I'm getting some recognition!"

Rather, we see reverence and humility before God. Verse 29 says, "...she was very perplexed at this statement, and kept pondering what kind of salutation this was." She was "very perplexed." This is an intensified form of the word used to describe Zacharias' response to seeing Gabriel earlier in verse 12, meaning to be stirred up, disturbed, thrown into confusion. But again, this is an intensified form ... *very* troubled, *very* perplexed.

She "kept pondering" what this kind of greeting meant. This term "pondering" pictures an ongoing reasoning, consideration, thinking it through. Luke uses this term in chapter 3 of the crowds around John the Baptist who were "wondering (*i.e.*, reasoning, considering) in their hearts" whether or not he was the Messiah (15).

Yes, Mary took God seriously in this most unusual event. She did not rush ahead to imagine all sorts of great things for herself. She knew her place and responsibility to understand what God was telling her.

It is one thing to feel a sense of awe of God when you come into a church, when you are in a church service or some other religious activity, but often quite another thing in other times and areas of your life. Mary was not at the temple or synagogue. She was at home in her normal routine.

With at least a week or two of the Christmas season already behind us, it is a good time to stop and examine the place we are giving to God and our attitude toward Him; to evaluate what is occupying our thoughts; to make sure that we are humbly revering Him in this season.

Mary also displayed fellowship and frankness with God. Clearly, the angel Gabriel's appearance startled Mary, as it would us. But, after Gabriel announced his message and Mary had quickly thought about it, she came back with a straight forward question, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" (34).

Her question is so familiar to us that we can rush by it without taking in how unbelievable and shocking Gabriel's words were that she had "found favor with God;" but even more unbelievable and shocking, was the news that she, being a virgin, would conceive, have a son, and that her son would be the long-awaited Messiah.

Her question is amazingly frank and straight to the point. The reason for this becomes apparent from the picture of the entire record. It was her relationship with God. Building and maintaining a close relationship with God in reverence and humility enabled her to frankly express her questions to God.

Let's apply this to ourselves. First, fellowship with God is a two-way street, as it is with any meaningful relationship. If I came to church today expecting God to encourage me, to lead and challenge me, to touch me deeply without preparing and opening my heart to Him; without confessing my sin and turning from it; without expressing my adoration, thankfulness and praise to Him; then my experience here will be shallow and casual.

If this is my normal way of living, I will not be growing spiritually. And, if I live this way in this Christmas season, I will not be drawing closer to God; I will not be celebrating the greatest gift ever given as I could and should be; and, I will not be *Announcing Christ's Coming* as clearly as I could and should be.

Secondly, let's think about "frankness with God." There's frankness and then, there's *frankness*. Like most other famous pianists and composers, Paderewski had a constant stream of people wanting to audition before him. He once reluctantly granted an audition to a very persistent young woman. He came to the audition without the best attitude and was bored with her performance. When she finished and asked, "What do I do now?", he answered with two words, "*Get married!*"

Never forgetting who God is and who we are, in our relationship with Him we can frankly express our concerns, questions and doubts. After all, He knows them better than we do.

The next quality we see is faith in and obedience to God. We see this very clearly in Mary. In verse 38 she said, "...Behold, the bondservant of the Lord; may it be done to me according to your word." Let's update that, "Okay, I am God's servant. Let Him do what He wants in the way He wants in my life."

Now, again, don't rush by this because it is familiar. Think of some of what was involved for Mary as she trusted and obeyed God in this, what some of the ramifications were. To begin with, her dream of a beautiful, festive wedding with all her family and friends was shattered. There would be suspicion and embarrassment. Then there would be the gossip, raised eyebrows and dirty looks, the cruel, cutting comments. Family, friends and the

community would label her, look down on her, and even reject her. All this, and more, would last not just for a few weeks or even a few years, but it would be ongoing from some for the rest of her life.

Mary had faith in God. She trusted His wisdom, love, power and grace to overcome the pressure of all these things that loomed ahead of her and so she could say with honesty and conviction, “Okay, I am God’s servant. Let Him do what He wants in the way He wants in my life.”

How are we doing in the area of faith and obedience? If you have placed your faith in Jesus Christ as your Savior, faith and obedience are not optional. Dietrich Bonhoffer wrote, “Only he who believes is obedient; only he who is obedient believes.”

Yet we can excuse and rationalize our failure to trust and obey God, in little and big things alike. A clear example of rationalization is found in King Saul’s battle with the Amalekites in 1 Samuel 15:1-26. God gave Saul clear instructions to destroy all those wicked people and all their possessions.

But Saul looked at the situation and rationalized a way to spare the Amalekite King and keep the best of their flocks, herds, and other possessions. When the prophet Samuel met Saul the day after the victory, Saul claimed he had fulfilled God’s orders. But the bleating sheep and lowing oxen gave him away. Saul quickly answered that “*the people*” saved the best to sacrifice God.

Of course, that rationalization did not work. Samuel responded by saying that, even if this were true, “to *obey* is better than sacrifice.” And he went on to spell out the consequences: since Saul had rebelled and rejected God’s directions, God had rejected him as king.

A mark of true spirituality is faith in and obedience to God.

The last mark we will note today from Mary is praise to and joy in God. Mary praised God and found joy in His plan and work for her. Look at verse 46,

“... My soul exalts the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior. For He has had regard for the humble state of His bondservant; for behold, from this time on all generations will count me blessed. For the Mighty One has done great things for me; and holy is His name” (46-49).

Her role went far beyond what she understood at the time, and even later throughout her life. But she saw the overall picture with the great, amazing significance of her giving birth to *the Savior of the world!* And, even with so much she did not understand, she praised God, and was joyful in what she did understand.

How about us? God is love. His plans and provisions for us are good. He showers us with His love, grace and mercy. These are facts that do not, that will not change. Even in your deepest, darkest night, God is love; His plans and provision for you are good; He showers

you with His love, grace and mercy ... even when you don't see or feel it.

This is not some sort of denial of real tragedies that really do hurt. If we are reverent and humble before God, if we have close fellowship and open frankness with Him in faith and obedience, *then* there can be praise and joy in God regardless of the situation.

Be very clear on this: as a child of God you have a choice of perspective. You can focus on the trouble, problems and losses and harvest a crop of negativism, gloom and doom. Or, you can focus on God, His unchanging love, care and goodness and harvest a crop of hope, joy and praise in Him.

Mary gives us a good, practical portrait of *True Spirituality*.

God's Response To True Spirituality

In this section of Luke's gospel we also see God's response to true spirituality. Let's note three ways in which God responds to His people growing spiritually. First, there is His reassurance and acceptance.

Gabriel's appearing to Mary was startling. Remember the opening part of the message, in verse 28, "... Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." These first words to her from God were words of reassurance and acceptance.

She was troubled by this and tried to think it through, and then came the next words from God through Gabriel, in verse 30, "Do not be afraid, Mary; for you have found favor with God." Here is more reassurance and acceptance.

God does not change. This is how God is. God *always* responds to those who are living in fellowship with Him with reassurance and acceptance that is both appropriate and sufficient for the circumstances they are in at the time.

Are you in startling and troubling circumstances? Look to God. Get close and stay close to Him. In His grace He will give you the reassurance and acceptance you need.

Then, God also provides knowledge and confirmation. He provided this for Mary. She was walking with God, following and obeying Him by faith. Through Gabriel, God gave her the information she needed, and sufficient confirmation that this was true. Go to verse 35. Gabriel begins by providing information, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy Child shall be called the Son of God." Now he moves to confirmation, "And behold, even your relative Elizabeth has also conceived a son in her old age; and she who was called barren is now in her sixth month. For nothing will be impossible with God."

There is still more. As we know, Mary then went to Elizabeth's. God not only enabled Elizabeth to have a child (which certainly was a demonstration to Mary that with God nothing is impossible), but the Holy Spirit moved within Elizabeth to reveal His plans for the Savior—that He was coming, that Mary was the mother. Here was clear confirmation of what God had told Mary earlier through Gabriel.

God responds to us in the same way. Yes, Mary's case was unusual, to say the least—both in God's plans and the striking method of response by sending Gabriel. While our situations vary from her's and each other's, God never leaves you or me out there on our own. I read a news report once about an incident involving a couple of commercial air planes. A controller at the Atlanta airport went on the air, "Flight 407, you are cleared to land on runway B." A few moments later, the same controller went on the air to another plane, "Flight 36, you are cleared to land on runway B." The first pilot caught this and went on the air, "Tower, this is flight 407. You cleared me to land on runway B, and now you cleared flight 36 to land on the same runway. What are we supposed to do?" After a few seconds of silence the controller responded, "Well, uh, ... ya'll be careful now."

God isn't like that. He gives and will continue to give the step by step knowledge and confirmation He knows we need—not necessarily all that we want or think we need, but all of what He knows we need.

God also gives His favor and ministry. Of course, we see God giving favor and ministry to Mary. As all of this began, we saw her spirituality recognized by God, starting in the initial greeting from Gabriel. Because of this, God gave her a truly unique role and ministry. God spoke through Elizabeth, verse 42, who said to Mary, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And how has it happened to me, that the mother of my Lord would come to me?" No one questions that Mary received favor and ministry from God.

When it comes to ourselves, however, we can see that as an entirely different matter, and have questions, serious questions about God's favor and ministry. Listen to one man's experience.

"I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because He considered me *faithful*, putting me into service, even though I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor. Yet I was shown mercy because I acted ignorantly in unbelief; and *the grace of our Lord was more than abundant*, with the faith and love which are found in Christ Jesus. It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all. Yet for this reason I found *mercy*, so that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience *as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life.*"

The apostle Paul, 1 Timothy 1:12-16.

Mary, Paul, so many others in the Bible, and countless more in every generation are proof. When we allow God to work in us, to make us more like Christ, to grow in spirituality, He showers us with His favor and ministry for Him that will count and last forever, even if no one knows about and we don't see much of the results.

Conclusion

More sand has slipped through the hour glass, and Christmas is a bit closer. My challenge to all of us is to make sure that we are close to God and focused on the right things during this season.

On a brisk winter day, three boys were lined up ready to race for a prize. The prize would not necessarily go to the one who crossed the finish line first, but to the one whose tracks through the snow were the straightest. There was a man standing at the finish line. He gave the signal and they took off. One boy kept looking down at his feet to see if his steps were straight. The second kept looking at the other two boys to see how they were doing. The third ran with his eyes locked on the man at the finish line. That third boy was the winner, because keeping his eyes on the goal kept him on track.

The writer of Hebrews tells us, "... let us ... lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, *fixing our eyes on Jesus*, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."

As you spend a few moments with God now, quietly reflecting on the truth we have seen this morning and responding to God, Ask yourself,

- "Do I have, do I display genuine spirituality?"
- "Is my relationship with God growing, deepening, broadening?"
- "Am I taking advantage of the season to explore and deepen my relationship with God?"

Also, thank God that He does not change. Just as He provided all Mary needed to take her next steps, so He has and will provide for you.

Then also ask God to point out any changes you need to make. Yes, that may include some of the busyness and activities of the season. But deeper than that, you may need to make some changes in your heart: changes in allegiances, changes in priorities, changes in goals and changes in values.

- It may be that you have never come to God on His terms, that you have never confessed that you are a sinner and accepted His everlasting gift of forgiveness and life through Jesus. Now is the time to do that. We would be happy to talk with you about it.
- It may be that you have drifted away from God, and need to come back to fellowship with Him.
- Or it may be that other things have crowded in and taken over priorities that God should have.

Let's go to God now, thanking Him and dealing with what He points out to us.

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