

"Mary's Christmas"

Pastor Rich Knight

Trinitarian Congregational Church

Dec. 4, 2011

Luke 1:26-45

This week and next week we're going to look at the two most important human beings in Jesus' life - his Mother and Father, Mary and Joseph. We do them and all parents a disservice when we ignore their influence upon their son, who would grow up to be the Messiah. And while it's true that the Gospels tell us that Jesus had a special relationship with his Heavenly Father, it's also true that he had an incredible earthly Father and Mother. So this Advent we're going to give them their props, the proper respect and honor they deserve. Let's take a look at Luke 1:26. This text includes *the Magnificat* (from the word "magnify"), the Song of Mary which begins at vs. 46. Most scholars believe that Mary was about 16 years old when these events occurred.

Luke 1:26-45

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God." Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, "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? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord." And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. 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. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever."

Oh Mary. Oh Mary. What a beautiful example of faith you are! Oh, Mary, what we can learn from emulating you. Oh, Mary, forgive us Protestants for minimizing your influence upon our Savior. Oh, Mary, what a deep faith you had at such a young age. Oh, Mary.

I love that phrase, "*deep faith*." I first heard it several years ago from a parishioner. He was remarking that some folks he knew seemed to have a deeper faith than his. He felt his faith was more like wishful thinking to him. He noticed others whose faith seemed more like conviction than wishful thinking, and more experiential than theoretical.

I remember another parishioner named Pearl. Pearl had a deep faith. When she was near death I asked her if she was afraid, which is only natural. She replied, "No. God has been good to me. He won't let me down now." A few days later she could barely speak. I was reading some scriptures to her and I glanced over and noticed that her lips were moving. She was saying the scriptures right along with me. She had absorbed the scriptures and they served her well.

Mary did the same. Mary had absorbed the scriptures, scriptures that spoke of the coming Messiah. In the Magnificat over and over again she quotes several passages from her Bible, the Hebrew Scriptures, what we

call of course the Old Testament.

- *"My Soul glorifies the Lord" is a quote from Psalm 34.*

- *"He has filled the hungry with good things." - Psalm 107.*

- Much of the song parallels the Song of Hannah from I Samuel ch. 1. But

- Mary also uses sentences found in the books of Genesis, II Samuel & Deuteronomy. Some scholars count 9 different Old Testament texts that Mary borrows from. If this poem indeed came from Mary or if it is descriptive of her faith it tells us that she had absorbed the scriptures by a very young age, at least by our standards.

She knew about the promised Messiah. *"All generations shall called her blessed,"* because she is to be the mother of the Messiah - every Jewish girl's dream. She knew about the Messiah because she knew her scriptures. She knew about the character of God - holy, merciful, compassionate. She knew the heart of God - a heart for the poor - he fills the hungry with good things. He brings down the proud. She knew God keeps God's promises from generation to generation, a phrase from the book of Exodus. God remembers the covenant made with Abraham & Sarah. All these things she knew because she knew her Bible. And she knew how to relate to this God - with humility and obedience and praise. Mary was a person of praise. That was part of her deep faith as well. *"My soul glorifies the Lord! My spirit rejoices in God my savior! "The Mighty One has done great things for me. Holy is his name!"*

Mary had a heart that knew how to worship. In fact, there's an interesting contrast between Mary & her cousin Elizabeth in this passage. Elizabeth praises Mary. Mary praises God. Elizabeth is ecstatic, overwhelmed. Mary is reflective and profoundly grateful. Elizabeth is caught up in the moment. Mary is caught up in God. Remember that Jesus said that the first and greatest commandment is to love God. Mary loved God and she expressed that love directly through praise.

A few weeks ago we talked about spiritual pathways - various ways of relating to God and experiencing God. From Luke 1 it looks like Mary's pathways were worship and study. She naturally praises God and she seems to have done quite a bit of study of the scriptures. You could also make the case that Relationships was also one of her pathways, since she goes to see her cousin Elizabeth to confirm the amazing news from God.

What these pathways led her to was a deep faith. You see that deep faith in how she responds to God. She responds with instant obedience. When the angel tells her that she's to be the mother of the Savior, she doesn't request time to think it over. "How much time do I have? Can I get back to you on this? Will you check back with me later please?" We might handle it this way, but she didn't. *"Let it be done to me according to*

your word." Her son would put it more succinctly - *"Thy will be done."*

I think I told you about the missionaries who were walking through a jungle in Brazil. The Father turned around and saw danger. He cried out to his son, "Son, do as I say this minute. Get on the ground and crawl to me." And the son did, which was a good thing since a snake was hanging above his head ready to attack. Instant obedience made all the difference. Mary demonstrated that.

One last thing about Mary. She was a person of praise. She had absorbed her Bible. She was obedient to God, eager to do God's will. And finally, her deep faith had produced in her a quiet confidence. You know, some people have confidence but very little humility. And other people have humility but lack in confidence. Mary had both. The angel tells her she's to have a child who will be the Son of God. And she says, "OK. You've chosen me, a humble servant. That's ok. Actually that's great. We can do this."

Consider the following:

A. When God called Moses he said, "No, Lord, I don't speak very well. You should talk to my brother, Aaron."

B. When God called the great prophet Isaiah, he said, "No way, I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people with unclean lips. You don't want me."

C. When God called the prophet Jeremiah, he said, "No, I'm much too young. You've got the wrong man. I'm not even a man."

D. But when God called Mary, she said, "Let it be done to me according to your word, and from now on all generations shall call me blessed."

Do you see the greatness of Mary? At the time of her calling she had more confidence than Moses, Isaiah & Jeremiah combined! Oh Mary!

Mary is a wonderful example for all of us, isn't she?

At a young age she had a deep faith,
- a quiet confidence,
- a heart yielded to God,
- a mind filled with scripture and
- a spirit that soared in praise.

Oh Mary, not only were you blessed, but our Savior was blessed as well .
. . to have you as his mother.

Thanks be to God.

Let us pray:

Eternal and Loving God, give us hearts like Mary's.

Amen.