

Time of Grace Ministry
Heroes of Christmas: Mary
Luke 1:26-28
November 19, 2017

Pastor Jon Enter

Welcome to Time of Grace; I'm Pastor Jon Enter. Have you ever wondered what it must have been like for Mary? Sweet girl next door Mary; faithful to God Mary. To suddenly have an angel come and appear to her and tell her the news that God has selected her for this unique responsibility of having the Savior of the world in her womb. What a difficult situation that God asked of Mary! She could have lost her reputation, lost the love of her life, her husband, lost even her life because someone back then who was unfaithful - whether married or engaged - could have been stoned to death. But yet, Mary said, "God, I am yours." She was faithful to that difficult calling that was there but it didn't stop. It got even more difficult. As the story goes along, suddenly Joseph comes to Mary and says, "Sweetie, honey, guess what? We just won a no expense, paid trip, to Bethlehem courtesy of Caesar Augustus who issued a decree. Pack your bags, we are out of here!" Mary was pregnant - capital P - pregnant. The King James version says that she was "great with child," which was code for, "Mary doesn't want to go." When my wife was nine months pregnant, there was no way she would have wanted to go on a trip like that and yet, Mary went.

It gets more difficult - they get then to Bethlehem and the Bible tells us that they had to stay in a stable, a horrible place to give birth, because there's no room for them at the inn. Why are they staying at an inn? This is where Joseph's family is from but they're rejected by all of the family members, kicked to the side. How difficult, how painful that situation was for Mary.

Pastor Mark Jeske is going to dig even deeper. I've only scratched the surface on how hard this situation was for Mary but yet, she's a great hero of faith because she trusted God that even in the difficult situation, God would be there for her. God is the same for you. No matter what difficult situation God has you in right now, no matter what difficult situation you have put yourself in, God is always there to give you strength and to give you comfort.

Pastor Mark Jeske

I invite you to ponder and reflect on a hero of mine and I have a hunch she's a hero of yours, too. But maybe after a little Bible study, maybe even a bigger hero of yours and that is the mother of our Lord Jesus, a woman named Mary. You might think that she had the most fabulous job and what an awesome, amazing hero she was for getting to be the mother of the Savior of the world and all the honor and glory she gets. I tell you what - she never saw much honor and glory. Most of that was invisible; that all came later. In fact, she's more famous now. In fact, Time magazine called her the most famous woman in the history of the world, which is kind of cool. I think she probably is!

But at the time, her life didn't look so hot. Think about it – Gabriel jumps into her life, scares her to death the way he scared Zechariah. “Don't be afraid,” the first words, “Fear not, Mary. Don't be afraid; I'm not going to hurt you.” And then lays out this incredibly implausible scenario for her to listen to. Okay, so Mary believes that she's – that this is all really true and she maybe had a slight advantage over Zechariah. See, the guy is never aware that there's a pregnancy until his wife tells him, right? We are clueless waiting for info. Maybe Mary knew, “I'm not feeling quite right.” You know, when you get pregnant – as it's explained to me anyways – your hormones completely start changing and you can feel that something's different. And maybe that gave Mary a little extra boost to help believe the unbelievable.

But look at her life right now; look at what's going to change. She's going to be pregnant and was not married. So the peanut gallery in Nazareth is going to be given her the eye like, you know, “Oh, yeah,” giving her the eye roll and like, “Oh, boy,” and the whispering. It's a little town; everybody in a little town is in everybody else's business. This is going to be going on. She's going to have to bear with that.

Second, what about her fiancé? She loves this man. Her whole relationship with Joseph is at risk. For all she knew, he was now going to dump her. Even if it's divine intervention, there is something in a man's head that gets messed up when the woman he loves is carrying a baby that's not his. God had already envisioned a beautiful Christmas carol and it didn't go like this: “Oh little town of Nazareth, how still we see thee lie.” God said, “No, no, no, no, no.” He needed to move her at the moment and get her down in Bethlehem.

It was so important to God to use King David as his representative of the entire old covenant in this moment and link him up with Jesus that having the birth in David's town meant everything to God, even if it meant having a nine month pregnant woman make like a 60 to 80 mile journey. She did that for you and for me because God needed to move her to get her there and arranged – perhaps the inspiration to take this census of Caesar Augustus under the regional governor, Quirinius, the governor of Syria – that census might have been like prompted by God to happen just at this time so that he could get his two key people where he wanted them. Makes her a hero in my book. And she didn't go into some birthing center, some sweet place where they fuss over you and play sweet, soothing music and give you all kinds of helpful council and are training you and you're surrounded by this medical team and giving you your epidural and holding your hand and go taking you through all the training videos. Suddenly, labor comes upon her and she's grunting in the dark with her fiancé, who may or may not ever have delivered a human baby before; possibly never even seen it – he's a carpenter; he's not an animal tender. I don't know if he had ever attended even the birth of an animal and watched how this process works.

What fear! You know, we look back at it now and say, “Well, relax, relax. God had it covered; it all worked out great. All is calm.” Don't we sing this? Isn't this in the Bible? “All is calm, all is bright.” The heck it was calm and bright! She's screaming, Joseph's going, “I don't know what to do!” She's saying, “I don't know! Get it out. Get someone to help.” It was a mess in there; it was a chaotic crazy night with a lot of fear. You just imagine the mental and emotional mess this woman was going through this. This is not supposed to be happening here, this is not supposed to be happening now. She did this for you and for me. What a great woman!

And then crazy King Herod is so terrified of a baby that is announced to be the new dynasty that he issues a genocidal order against all the boy babies in Bethlehem. What? She has to run! This is gently called, in Scripture, the flight to Egypt; as though you were saying the flight to Sarasota or the flight to San Diego or the flight someplace warm at a cold time. It wasn't an airline flight; they were running for their lives. In fact, it's my personal theory that it was a good thing that the Magi came with gifts because they had to cash that stuff in to run and they had to hide in Egypt. As far as they knew, they'd never be able to come home; that the death sentence would hang over their heads as long as they lived. So now they're cowering and trying to hide and become invisible. How do you become invisible when you're foreigners? They're trying to hide in one of the big cities in Egypt; trying to find some corner where Herod's agents wouldn't find them. What a heck of a way to start your married life together, to start your family – hiding; wondering what you're going to do when your money runs out.

Joseph, poor guy – talk more about him next week – but his business is being wrecked. All his clients are finding other carpenters to do business with. So this was a really miserable time to go through and don't look back at that and patronize her and say, "Oh, wasn't this all cute? How much you must have loved being the mother of the Savior of the world." It was a hard job. Hard on her physically, hard on her emotionally, hard on them relationally – she and Joseph had to figure out how do you make this crazy kind of family life work? How do you raise a kid who's God? Do you scold your child? What do you do if he doesn't make his bed? Do you yell? Do you yell at God to make his bed? What a strange mental mindset she had to get herself into to know how to deal with this.

But the biggest – I've mentioned only the outward and obvious things – the biggest of them all was getting, wrapping her head around, the paradox and contradiction of God made flesh. No matter how you try to explain that, you can't! There's no explanation. The only possible response is to simply accept what God said and try to believe it. The harder you try to make it make sense, the less satisfying that's going to be.

I'd like to invite you to just ponder it with me. The gospel of St. Luke in chapter one invites us to hear what Mary did with God's message. And of all the things to love and admire about this incredible woman, this is the best; the best of it all. And it's something you need in your own mind and heart, as well. Let's take a look at it.

Luke 1, starts at verse 26: "In the sixth month," meaning the six month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, "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." Ironically, Mary was a descendant of David, as well; they both were. They both were blood descendants of King David, though not through the same sons of David. You know, David had a bunch of children and so his line branched out and there are two completely separate lines of descent but both Mary and Joseph were fully blood descendants. So Christ had the blood of King David in his veins through his mother. Joseph bestowed upon his stepson the right to call himself a king because in Joseph's line were the blood of all of the kings of Judah; starting with David, through Solomon, and all the rest. And Joseph conferred that, you might say, dynastic legitimacy upon his stepson, Jesus.

“The virgin’s name was Mary,” Miriam, Mary-am; same word – this, of course, she’s an Old Testament hero, as well. “The angel went to her and said, ‘Greetings, you who are highly favored!’” Favor of God is not something you earn or deserve; it is grace. You’ve been graced, is what the angel said. Grace is always unilateral; it’s always 100 percent God’s doing. It’s why your sins have been forgiven – not because of your awesome performance. Not because of all your efforts, your noble financial gifts, your personal volunteerism or strenuous efforts. Not because of your aggressive, lengthy prayer life. Not because of how you can belt out hymns and sing in church or your awesome church attendance; you know, you get the perfect attendance. Not any of that is what is the direct cause and effect of your forgiveness. You are forgiven of your many sins and given the gift of immortality through God’s grace. It is his gift to you. And your response, starting with faith and then continuing with changed behaviors, are nothing more than your response to grace; they are not the causes of this favor. His favor is simply given. So Mary was freed from the mind game of, “Why me?”

The only answer to that is the same answer I would give to you if you’d say, “Why am I a believer and how did I happen to get here if it’s not my own choices?” And I’d say it is God’s gift to you. Just accept it and do not dip into the game of, “Well, then why not somebody else?” Why Mary? Because God chose her. Why not any of the other women in Nazareth or the big city of Jerusalem? Or why didn’t he pick one who lived in Bethlehem already so you wouldn’t have to make that insane nine month pregnancy journey right at the point of being three centimeters dilated? Why would he have her hiking that distance that close to the end? Because he chose to. Why am I a believer? God, you are merciful. And leave it at that. If you take one step beyond that, you will twist yourself up in logical knots and you also will be standing in a zone of false doctrine. Leave it alone. Thank God for his favor and leave it at that.

“You are highly favored! The Lord is with you.” Man, in more ways than one! “Mary was troubled at his words.” This doesn’t sound good. She’s scared, doesn’t know what on earth is leading to this, wondered what kind of greeting this might be. Man, I’d wonder that, too. In fact, I’d probably be running. But the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid. You have found favor with God,” in case she didn’t hear it the first time, he says it again. “You will be with child and give birth to a son and you’re to give him the name Yehoshua,” Yoshua or Yeshua, three variants of the same Hebrew man’s name. It’s not a unique name; there are other Yehoshua’s and Joshua’s in the Old Testament, just as there are Jesus’ today. But the name is significant because it means the “Lord saves;” this is his saving, Savior name.

“He will be great.” No kidding. “And will be called the Son of the Most High,” meaning the Son of God. So right there is a mind-blowing contradiction. He’s going to be your Son, he’s going to be David’s Son, King David’s Son, and God’s Son, all bundled up together. And those are all mutually exclusive. This is not possible, frankly. “The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David.” That’s why he needed to be in David’s bloodline. That’s why God wanted him to enter planet earth in Bethlehem, the hills where King David once was a shepherd boy tending sheep. “The Lord will give him the throne of his father David and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever.” This is the fulfillment of the monarchy and that line of kings – whose

value was not just in the moment of governing, but to set up a pattern of the divine king who would rule over all believers and over all things. “His kingdom will never end.”

“How will this be,’ Mary asked the angel.” A question, I hasten to add, of curiosity not unbelief. How do I know it’s not unbelief? How do I know it’s different than Zechariah’s question of, “This can’t be!” He got whacked with a discipline, with a timeout, and went into the silent and dark phase of his life; nine months of timeout. Mary’s question got a completely different reception, which shows that her question was intended out of curiosity not unbelief - “Since I’m a virgin”. The angel said, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you.” That male seed is not going to be provided by any human being but only by God himself. So this child will be divine and human; “the power of the Most high will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.” Wow! Wow. “Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age,” although your birth is even more amazing and miraculous than hers. “She who was said to be barren is in her sixth month. Nothing is impossible with God. Mary answered, “that’s not possible; no way. I don’t believe it and I’m out of here. I’m leaving.”

No, that’s what I would have said. My hero said, “I’m the Lord’s servant. May it be to me as you have said.” Wow! Had she just taken on a massive job! What was going on is that she was going to be holding her God in her arms. How do you wrap your head around that? When she was going to be nursing this baby, she’d be nursing the one who provided her every bite of food. How do you wrap your head around that contradiction, that paradox? The divine and human child of Mary – Mary became the mother of God; of God himself – took on our flesh and entered this world through this amazing woman. She gave us our Savior.

This little baby is what was going to be standing between Mary and the punishments of eternal hell. Mary in her song said, “My spirit rejoices in God my Savior.” She was going to hold her salvation in her very arms and then give that Savior to you and to me. She is God’s vehicle for the one who personally will broker to you the mercy and favor of God so that all of the unworthiness, dirt, and foulness of your past will not be able to take away that favor and take away our immortality and invitation to eternal life in heaven. What an extraordinary experience!

But it sure did look ordinary! Most of the time, in fact, Jesus dialed down his divinity for three decades. Mary needed to keep believing even while everything looked so ordinary. Her family looked so ordinary the other people in Nazareth blew Jesus off as a prophet because they said he’s just a kid; a hometown boy. Jesus had to leave Nazareth because of the intensity of hostility. They tried to kill him three years before Calvary and Mary had the heavy responsibility of keeping the faith, though outwardly everything looked so ordinary and she couldn’t see anything changing. God walking the face of the earth? He didn’t look much like God, did he? He looked like just another of her kids. The neighbors could not tell any difference between Jesus and his sisters and his four brothers. But Mary held on and believed in things she could not see, believed the life-changing impact of this message from the angel and the life-changing impact of the life and work of Christ our Savior.

And here is what I present to you to claim on and to grab on to yourself. Hang onto this tight with all your strength. Believe what you cannot see. Believe this incredible message for here

alone, this is your connector to the favor of God. Christ alone is your connector to the forgiveness of sins that you need. Christ alone is your hope of immortality and rising from the dead; of busting out of your coffin alive and well and immortal. Christ alone can bring you that smile from heaven and connect you to the life force. You and I are born disconnected; we're outcasts and outsiders by birth. You need to be reconnected and that reconnecting happens through faith. So by filling your mind and heart with the words and promises of God – especially now, in the craziness of commercialism and materialism going on around us and everybody pressuring you to run faster and do more and buy more and decorate more and do, do, do. Carve out some quiet time to ponder what a hero this woman is who filtered through all of the chaos and mess in her life and hung on to the angel's promise and keep saying along with Mary, "I, too, I am the Lord's servant. I'm happy to carry out the role, whatever it is that you have given to me, dear Lord. I am the Lord's servant. May it also be to me as you have said." Amen.

Pastor Jon Enter

Karisa Bugal gave birth to her first child just a couple of years ago and everything was going incredibly well throughout the entire pregnancy. But then when she was giving birth, suddenly everything in Karisa's body started to break down and shut down. Doctors rushed to figure out what was going wrong and they found out Karisa had a rare condition called amniotic fluid embolism and basically what that means is all of her major organs are shutting down; too much taxation on them because of the birthing process and that put her child, her unborn child, at risk.

Well, Karisa didn't want to lose that baby and so she did everything she could so that an emergency C-section could happen but the normal process for the body was going to be too long. So Karisa said, "Just put the gas on me. Take me into anesthesia immediately to get that child out," and the baby was born. A healthy baby boy, seven pounds, four ounces, an absolute miracle. But Karisa never breathed again. Her love was poured into that child. That child was so vulnerable, all that child needed was someone to care about him more than they cared about themselves.

Pastor Jeske just opened up Scripture to you and we marveled at Mary; the love that she poured into her son Jesus. But the reason why that's noteworthy is because who her son was; that Jesus is our Savior. That he came into this world through the womb of Mary, willing to wrap himself in the weakness of human flesh to be one among us. To save us and redeem us. Jesus didn't just come through the womb but then he went to the tomb. That he died for us so that every single sin, every single wrong that you've ever done in your life, gone. Forgiven by the Almighty. We marvel at Mary; this great faith that she had. But we also marvel at Jesus and the faith that was poured into our hearts, the Holy Spirit, to trust in him that he is our God come to save us.

Let us pray.

Christ Jesus, thank you for coming into this world. Thank you for coming in such a unique way. Thank you for coming through the womb of Mary so that human flesh was upon you so that you could relate to us, that you could be tempted as we are. Yet Jesus, you are without sin. Lord, you put your life on the line, your eternity on the line. The devil was after you trying to destroy you, trying to tempt you to fall into sin. And if you had, you'd have ceased to be God. You would have lost your perfection as the angels did, as Mary and Joseph did, but you remain perfect and you gave us that perfection.

Thank you, Jesus. Your love, your perfected love, is in our hearts. So when God the Father looks at us, he doesn't see our sins, he doesn't see our failures. He just sees you. Thank you for being with us and guiding us. Guide us now to trust in you, God. Guide us in our lives with whatever problem is upon us to know that you are there, that you're strengthening us and that, Lord God, you'll always be with us. Give us confidence in you, give us strength in you, and help us to do what we might seem to be impossible; to know that you will guide us. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

For Time of Grace, I'm Pastor Jon Enter. It all starts now.



TIME OF GRACE®

Grace notes

guides for personal Bible study

Heroes of Christmas: Mary

Luke 1:26-28: ²⁶“In the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, ²⁷to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. ²⁸The angel went to her and said, ‘Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.’ ²⁹Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. ³⁰But the angel said to her, ‘Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. ³¹You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. ³²He 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, ³³and he will reign over Jacob’s descendants forever; his kingdom will never end.’ ³⁴‘How will this be,’ Mary asked the angel, ‘since I am a virgin?’ ³⁵The angel answered, ‘The Holy Spirit will come on 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. ³⁶Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. ³⁷For no word from God will ever fail.’ ³⁸‘I am the Lord’s servant,’ Mary answered. ‘May your word to me be fulfilled.’ Then the angel left her.”

Points to Ponder

1. Read Luke 1:28. Did Mary do anything to earn God’s favor?
2. Just as Mary’s favor from God was God’s gift, what is also true about you and your faith?
3. The angel said to Mary, “Don’t be afraid.” Can you think of several other times in Scripture when these words are spoken? What reassurance do they bring you?

4. Read Luke 1:38. Mary could have doubted and had lots of questions and worried about her reputation and losing her fiancé and on and on, but how did she show tremendous faith here?

5. How was Mary's "How can this be?" question different from Zechariah's "How can I be sure of this?" in Luke 1:18?

Mary is a spiritual hero for all of us because of her humble attitude and great faith. She was given an unbelievable message from an angel that she would be the mother of God's Son! And despite the hardship that would bring to her, she humbly accepted the job by faith.

What else does God say?

Hebrews 11:1: Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.

James 4:10: Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.