

An Unmanageable Mess
A Story of Faith's Journey
Luke 1:26-38

One day Mary woke up, engaged to a young man – and by the time she went to bed she had been told that before she married she was going to be impregnated with the Promised Messiah, the Son of God. After one conversation with an angel, her life as she knew it was forever altered.

On one level the announcement of Jesus' birth could not have been more untimely and disturbing.

- Mary was a Virgin – She was pledged to Joseph. For at least a year they were to live as husband and wife – except without sex. A pregnancy would mangle her reputation.
- Her Child would be considered Illegitimate – He would always be subject to all kinds of ridicule – always known as a bastard.
- She was a Believer – and we all know what the Church often does with its wounded. Can you imagine the discussions at Bible Study and in the Office? In fact, the Rabbis would probably have asked her to leave town.

Have you ever been in a place where everything God led you to seemed to make matters worse or more confusing? Well this was the case with Mary.

In a way Mary and Joseph's pilgrimage to Bethlehem is a picture of the Faith. God enters our lives and begins to take us somewhere

we had not planned on going – some place we would not choose to go – for all kinds of reasons:

- Too Unknown
- Too Costly
- Too Risky
- Too Demanding
- Too Painful

What did Mary do?

- She was Shocked – vs. 29 – ‘greatly troubled’ – Who wouldn’t be? Yet there seems to be some aversion to human reaction at times in the Christian Community. Not with Mary though – she heard shocking news so she was shocked. And I think that Luke puts this here to remind us that we can only deal with real life by being real people.
- She Engaged with God – vs. 29 – ‘she wondered...’ – ‘dialogued’ – Her shock turned to talk and reasoning. She began to talk this through with God – wondering out loud how this could take place – I have learned that God is big enough for my doubts, confusion, and questions – in fact He invites them.
- She Trusted God – Mary never did understand what was going on – but she believed God – enough to register her questions. She couldn’t wrap her arms around what He was saying: How could God’s Spirit cause her to conceive of a child? How could she be pregnant and yet a virgin? God reminded her that He had already visited her cousin, Elizabeth. Once Mary realized that this was a ‘God Thing’ that was good enough for her. Trust isn’t so much about blind faith.

Proverbs 3:5-6 – It is, ‘to be unsuspecting’ – it is really about believing in the character of the One we are called to follow.

- She Sang – vss. 46-53 – Somehow God turned Mary’s shock into Worship. Put another way, she was liberated to celebrate the new life God had given her.

What does this mean?

2. It means that you are not yet where God intends for you to be – This isn’t to say that your life is incomplete or that you shouldn’t be satisfied with who and what and where you are right now – it is to say that your story is never static – it is always unfolding – ever-changing – ever-‘becoming.’ And even your darkest moments are part of the story – you wouldn’t be complete without them, in fact. The thing is that when we are comfortable we feel ‘set’ and we don’t like the thought of things changing.
3. It means that God is at work in you – We tend to measure life by successes and failures in the moment – a bad decision, a tough year, a foiled pursuit – but God sees our lives from eternity to eternity. This means that nothing we experience is ever big enough or terrible enough or confusing enough to derail God’s purpose in your life – everything is about God’s unfolding plan – everything good, bad and in between. The question... accept this. Are you willing to accept yourself as an imperfect vessel that God is shaping on His terms?
4. It means that we can always Rest in and Return to the Gospel – Your daughter won’t ever come home pregnant with the Son of God, but she may come home pregnant. And there’s no telling what will happen to you while in college or in your career, or any number of variables in which life takes us.

These things remind us that we are not in control. And we can despair beyond hope – or, after the shock and grief take their places, we can believe that God has set us on a journey – a good journey – and that this is just something to work through and find new mercies in as God leads us through whatever challenges we face.

What was true for Mary is true for you. Because you are His, you are indwelled with Jesus. You bear the Son of the Most High. He is enthroned within you – He reigns over your house. And because of this, for you, His Kingdom will never end. And this is Good News. This is the Christmas Story. This is the Gospel.