

## **Saying Yes to God**

Crossroads Christian Church

Luke 1:26-38

Luke 1:46b-55

Dec. 21, 2014 Advent 3B

One night, after the birth of our Savior, it is said that Mary “committed these things to memory and considered them carefully,” or, as in the older translations, “treasured all these things, pondering them in her heart.” What might she have treasured? What might she have pondered?

She may have thought about being a small-town girl from Nazareth. It wasn't much of a place. Nazareth didn't have a good reputation. Later people would ask, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Maybe before the angel visit, she had assumed that she would just grow up to be a small-town wife and mother; that her life would be like the lives of the other girls her age.

She may have been amazed at how young she was when all this happened. Chances are that she was a young teenager, part child, part adult.

She may have thought about faithful, caring Joseph. She had been betrothed to him. That was something like being engaged. It was the first phase of an arranged marriage. What had he gone through to bring them to this point? He had every right to break off the marriage, since the child she bore wasn't his.

She was a young woman who was of good family stock, but probably rather poor. Later, when she went to have her child dedicated at the temple,

she gave the poor person's offering; doves rather than a lamb.

Of course, she remembered and pondered that strange and wonderful visit from an angel. Gabriel. Now God saved Gabriel for the really important messages. He was an archangel—God's press secretary. How amazing it was when the angel greeted her, saying that she, Mary, had found God's favor. What an incredible, totally unrealistic thing that God was offering to do through Mary—through Mary, a child would be born who would save the world, who would turn the world on its ear. Mary responded, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" She wasn't objecting, just clarifying the details. "The Holy Spirit will overshadow you, and the child you will bear will be called holy," responded Gabriel.

Looking back, she remembered how she had accepted this amazing, audacious proposal. "I am the Lord's servant. Let it be with me just as you have said." Mary said yes to God. Mary obeyed God. She could have said no. She probably knew that rumors would fly, that people would assume the worst, but their opinions didn't matter—God's will was all that mattered, and her chance to be an agent in God's plan.

And how joyful it was to know that she had a friend, a dear friend, one who would understand. Gabriel had told Mary that her cousin Elizabeth was carrying a son, one whom we know would grow up to be John the Baptist. Mary traveled several days journey over difficult terrain, so they could share in each other's good news. They were an odd couple in a way, a very mature woman 6

months pregnant, wife of a priest, who had thought she was too old to bear a child, and this teenaged girl, this child carrying a child—but they both knew the joy that came from discovering God wasn't working through the kings or high priests, but through them. Two poor, powerless women would help God initiate a world of peace and justice. Fred Craddock said of Elizabeth and Mary, "The one is old, and her son will close an age; the other is young and her son will usher in the new."

Later, though, how disturbing it must have been, in the last stages of her pregnancy, to have to travel the long and difficult journey from Nazareth in the north to Bethlehem in the south, just so that the Emperor Caesar Augustus would have better data for gathering taxes. The pain and uncertainty of that journey must have been overwhelming. But wasn't there a larger purpose behind it, a purpose that the emperor could not have known? Wasn't the Messiah to be the Son of David, and wasn't Bethlehem the city of David?

But there wasn't room for Mary and Joseph in Bethlehem. They ended up sheltered only by a stable, perhaps in a cave. A feeding trough, a manger, would become a cradle. The stable was a dark and dirty place, for God had chosen to come in a way that he would identify himself with all the poor, the homeless, the dispossessed of the earth.

But then shepherds came, wanting to see and worship the child, for they had heard from angels in the sky—could one of them have been Gabriel?—about the birth that had taken place.

Mary pondered. She couldn't know all that the future would bring. But she could only trust the God who had chosen to work through her to bring salvation to the world. In that odd place, in those odd circumstances, in giving birth far from home, she could still treasure this wonderful gift of God, this child, who would redeem the world.

An angel came, bearing God's request. Mary could have said no, and her life would go on in an ordinary, uncomplicated way. But Mary said yes. And then she sang a song, a beautiful song, a song of triumph. She sang, not just of her own joy and glory, but because she knew that through her, Christ would come, and through Christ, God would save the poor and downtrodden. Her joy would be the world's joy. Her joy is our joy.

Mary said yes to God, and became God's handmaiden. Through a young girl, God changed the world. All the old values were turned upside down. Although the rich and powerful, the high and the mighty still seemed in control, although a ruthless dictator's armies still held the power of life and death over the citizens of Judea, things were different. God had chosen to enter the world as a tiny, vulnerable infant, born into a refugee family, in a livestock barn. Through Mary's willingness to say yes, peace and light would have a chance; the whole world would have an opportunity, eventually, to hear of God's love, to accept God's gift of salvation.

Mary said yes to the angel, and accepted her role as the bringer of God's new life into the world. She said yes and then later she sang a song of triumph, for God would use her to give humanity the

greatest gift of all. She said yes, and something beautiful happened.

And do you know what? God still gives ordinary people like you and me the opportunity to say yes. Dr. Delmer Chilton puts it this way. "We, like Mary, have been called to carry the gift that is Christ into the midst of that hurting world. The lowly still need lifting up. The hungry still need to be fed. The poor still need a chance to live. The world still hungers in its heart for true goodness to reign supreme."<sup>i</sup>

(unquote) We aren't invited to give birth to a Savior, but we are invited to let the Savior, Jesus Christ, Mary's child, into our hearts and lives, and to let his love work through us and touch the lives of others. We are invited to be like Jesus, though in a lesser way, to be beacons of God's light in a dark world. We are invited to say yes to God by offering Christ to the world; through mission, through evangelism, through witness, through our stewardship, through day-to-day acts of friendship and service to those whom Christ came to serve. God is inviting you to make Jesus Christ present in the world. Will you say Yes to God?

By Michael E. Dixon

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<sup>i</sup> Delmer Chilton, "The Fourth Sunday of Advent for Year B," [lectionarylab.com](http://lectionarylab.com)