

Sunday December 12, 2021  
 Lesson 2: Mary's Pondering  
 Scripture: Luke 1: 26-38, 46-55

**Context:**

The new winter Adult Bible Studies Curriculum begins in Advent and continues through the season of Epiphany. The focus of the unit is on how we can engage in practices and means to connect to God. As we participate in the communities we live in, we discover God is already at work and invites us to continue to lend our gifts and graces to the good work God does.

The first unit looks at waiting and how patiently waiting can lead us to places we could never go on our own. God has a way of giving us surprises as we wait as found in the season of Advent. The second lesson focuses on Mary, whose faith gives us hope and a paragon for our own walk with Christ.

The lesson comes from the gospel of Luke, one of the most detailed accounts of the birth of Christ. These two passages focus on the story of Mary, one detailing the revelation of her role and the other in an interpersonal exchange with her cousin Elizabeth. The second passage begins with dialogue and then moves to a song of praise of God.

Mary's encounter begins with an angel and this exchange has become known as the Annunciation. The word "angel" is a transliteration of the Greek *aggelos*, "messenger."<sup>1</sup> Angels are found throughout the gospels and the Old Testament. They are known as the ones to announce, instruct, guide, and protect.<sup>2</sup> The angel Gabriel does as much with Mary telling her of how she is chosen to give birth to the Son of the most high God. The angel is patient as Mary asks questions and is given instructions of how it will occur. After reassuring her, Gabriel departs as Mary goes to see her cousin Elizabeth, who is six months pregnant with John the Baptist.

The meeting between the two women is joyful as Elizabeth feels a kick in the womb even before Mary can explain the encounter. Elizabeth blesses Mary and there is rejoicing over the event to change all of their lives. Mary's response to follow the blessings has become immortalized and is known as Mary's Magnificat.

The Magnificat is a praise for God. Yet the power of the praise is how the pronouncement is not just autobiographical as Mary announces what God will not only do for her as God will do for the poor, the powerless, and the oppressed.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps of the greatest note is how Mary also pronounces the blessings in the past tense. It speaks to what is timelessly true: past, present, and future without differentiation.<sup>4</sup> Mary is

---

<sup>1</sup> Craddock, Fred B. "Luke," *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2009), 27.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 30.

convinced of how just as God has acted in the past, so too will God act in the future. Mary has the gift of faith.

### **Application**

When I went to the Holy Land several years ago, I found there were places I visited which would stand out and continue to inspire me. Some were expected, while others were unexpected places where I did not know I would feel the presence of the Holy Spirit so strongly. The Church of the Annunciation in Nazareth was one of those places where I saw the story from the biblical story transform.

While it is difficult to know the exact place of where Mary was visited by Gabriel as all the text only specifies is the place as the town of Nazareth, the formation of the cathedral invites you to imagine it taking place in a cave. While the space itself is majestic there is a little alcove of bricks where in a tiny space you can imagine the angel Gabriel visiting this young woman to tell her she would be the mother of the most high God. As you look at the rest of the cathedral and then think about this being a tiny village, you realize how surreal and audacious this story can be.

Yet the space continues to transform as you go around the cathedral and see how each country has presented their interpretation of Madonna and child in various paintings, sculptures, and tapestries. Mary, and the Christ child, come in all shapes, sizes, and variations. And then it strikes you of how Mary said yes to delivering the one who would embrace and love millions of people around the globe of all backgrounds.

We will never know what Mary truly felt or what the experience was like for her. What we do know is Mary said yes and then sang of God's faithfulness in the host of so many unknowns. Mary showed to us the gift of faith and how God's promises stand the test of time.

A young peasant girl in an unknown, tiny village to the majority of the ancient world shows to us the power of faith. Her faith and yes to God did not mean she was not afraid, full of questions, or even a little nervous. It means in spite of those things, she believed God would be up to something bigger than she could imagine. After all, this is the same God who in the past has thrown down the rich and exalted the lowly. Who was to say Mary's son would not do the same?

During the season of Advent, Mary especially gives so many of us hope because we too might struggle with some of the same things found in the Magnificat. Why are the rich allowed to do whatever they want without any repercussions for their poor behavior? Why is there so much hunger and pain in this world? Where is God when all the bad things in life go down? How did God miss the memo we needed God to follow a timetable and tell us exactly what we want to know when we want to know it?

You fill in the blank with your questions. We all have them, whether we say them aloud or speak them to our own minds. It is human for them to come about and weigh on our hearts and minds.

Yet the actions of Mary tell us that while we may not get all these questions answered in the here and now, we know God will act. And God might even invite us to say "yes" to when it comes to being a part of the change in the kingdom of God. God gives us the chance to have faith, to trust God by word or action on how God will once again come and show us the way.

God wants us to engage with the world, as dangerous and overwhelming as that

may sound. God wants us to have faith God will be God and will be with us no matter what comes. God invites us to say yes to God and to see how the world might be turned upside down as a result.

How do you picture the scene between Gabriel and Mary? Do you possess the spiritual gift of faith and if so, how do you share it with others? Why do you think God wants us to say yes when God calls us to something as crazy as it may be? Does the Magnificat give you hope for the world, for your life? Where are places where you feel faith and hope come alive?

Rev. Dr. E. Hunter Pugh  
Pastor of Brantley – Brunson Chapel Charge  
PO Box 71  
Brantley, AL 36009