

## A Giving Faith

### Luke 1:26-38

A number of years ago one Saturday afternoon there were a very conspicuous black Ford van spotted in Winchester, TN. As it drove through town it created quite a stir. People in their cars followed it. Law enforcement officers kept their eye on this suspicious eye-catching vehicle. On the side of the van there was a very large sign that read, "Publishers Clearing House Sweepstakes Grand Prize Winner Prize Patrol."

Much of the town was watching as the van pulled into the driveway of a local resident, a young couple who had married only a few months earlier. We can only imagine the excitement they felt when they saw several well-dressed people step out of the van. One was carrying a television camera another was carrying a six foot long check. It was made out in their name for the amount of \$15,000,000.

When the front door was opened the wife streamed over and over again, "I can't believe this. I can't believe this. This is unbelievable! It is just unbelievable! Oh my, this is unreal! Let me sit down!"

The feeling that young lady had as she experienced that unbelievable news must have been something like the feelings that a teen-aged girl named Mary felt that first Christmas.

Now I don't know imagine that Mary felt like she had won a sweepstakes contest. But I would say she probably had to sit down when the angel, Gabriel, had come to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you!"

Mary probably thought to herself, "Is this real?" Am I hallucinating?

And then as Gabriel continued, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God."

She probably said, **"This is just unbelievable!"**

When Gabriel proclaimed, **"Mary 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 will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there shall be no end."**

The bewildered 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."**

Mary, chosen to have a child out of wedlock, chosen to endure the snickering and rumors, chosen to face her fiancé.

An unmarried woman with child was subject to stoning-at least that was the penalty on the books. Yet here she was being called "favored."

Yet Mary's answer to all this news is: **"Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word."** Wow! What a story. What a miracle.

And the angel says to her what is the key to this whole event, even the key of life: **"For nothing will be impossible with God."**

One of the most amazing parts of the whole Christmas story is that Mary believes through faith in God, what the angel Gabriel has just told her.

Now I want to finish the story about that young couple in Winchester. After a few minutes two more people got out of the van. It was some of their friends. They informed the couple that this was all a joke and that they really did not win the Publisher's Clearing House Sweepstakes. In reality, it was a cruel joke.

However we can rest assured that the Christmas story is for real. It is THE truth.

Martin Luther said that there were three miracles that occurred at Christ's birth:

God became human,  
A virgin conceived,  
And Mary believed.

And maybe, the greatest miracle was that Mary believed.

Mary's response to the angel of God is full of faith. She proclaims, "**Here am I, the servant of the Lord: let it be with me according to your word.**"

And in time she goes to visit her cousin Elizabeth, about to have a baby in her old age. And Elizabeth says to her, "**Blessed is she who believed there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.**"

And Mary breaks out in song with what we know as the Magnificat, a beautiful song of praise.

Despite the fact that she would be a poor, not yet married mother, despite the tremendous stress and upheaval this must have caused in her life, **Mary felt blessed.**

**Blessed to be an instrument of God's work** before Jesus was ever born, the very first gift of Christmas was Mary's gift. She gave of herself to be used by God.

Mary demonstrated a giving spirit, and in doing so set the example for us. We often think of Christmas as a season of giving. And certainly it is.

Besides all of the gift-giving to friends and family, it is a time of the year that we reach into our hearts as well as our pocketbooks and are a little more generous. We are a little more sensitive to those in need around us.

We think about giving. ...ELABORATE A LITTLE.....

Mary gave the gift of herself, she gave her ALL and it was much.

Mary is an example of giving for us, not only in this season but in all seasons. **Mary not only demonstrates a spirit of giving, she demonstrates for us that so often, God's gifts are given through us and our gifts.**

If Mary had said, "No, I don't want any part of this, it's too risky, it will ruin my future," she would not have been the mother of Jesus.

The witness of the Bible is that God gives us freedom. We are free to say no to God. But Mary said YES to God, and because of her YES, She gave birth to Jesus.

If we took seriously the fact that so often it is through our gifts that God is able to work, we might think about things differently.

The fact is God uses sinful, fallen, fallible human beings like us, every day, to accomplish his work.

What if Mary had said no?

What if John the Baptist had said no? What if Joseph had said no?

Where would you and I be today if all of the important people in our lives had said no to God?

God uses all kinds of people in all kinds of situations, people who say yes.

It's not that God is limited by what we do for God has ways of accomplishing his will without. But time and again, God chooses to work through people like us.

Things would be different if all of these people had said no. But then again, how would things be different if more people would say yes?

Humanly speaking, Mary was the first one to give at Christmas, Mary was the one who got the ball rolling but Christmas has

come to be a time of giving, and if we had to boil the meaning of Christmas down to one word, that word might be **"giving."**

**"For God so loved the world that God gave..."**

God gave Jesus and we continue to respond to God's gift through our own giving. **It's that spirit of giving exemplified by Mary that demonstrates the spirit of Christmas.**

We often learn the most from our children. There is an old story about a man who punished his 3-year-old daughter for wasting a roll of gold wrapping paper.

Money was tight, and he became infuriated when the child tried to decorate a box to put under the Christmas tree. Nevertheless, the little girl brought the gift to her father the next morning and said, "This is for you, Daddy."

The father was embarrassed by his earlier overreaction once he realized the gift was for him. He opened the gift, but his anger flared again when he found that the box was empty.

He yelled at her, "Don't you know that when you give someone a present, there's supposed to be something inside of it?"

The little girl looked up at him with tears in her eyes and said, "Oh, Daddy it's not empty. I blew kisses into the box. All for you, Daddy."

The father was crushed. He put his arms around his little girl, and he begged her forgiveness. He kept that gold box by his bed for years. Whenever he was discouraged, he would take out an imaginary kiss and remember the love of the child who had put it there.

In a very real sense, each of us has been given a gold container filled with unconditional love and kisses from God.

Through the sacrifice of Jesus, God's "one and only Son," we have the access to eternal life.

While there are those times when it seems as if He has left us to make it on our own, and there are those times when it appears as if we cannot go any further in life, there is no more precious possession anyone could hold than the gold box filled with the love of God.

God gave the greatest gift of Christmas in his son Jesus. But that gift would not have been given in the manner that it was if not for Mary's gift.

When approached by God's messenger, Mary said, "**Let it be unto me according to your will.**" Mary said yes to God.

God desires to give a gift through you. Like Mary, will you say yes to God?