

Mary: A Wise Teenage Girl – Luke 1:26-38; 46-56

The Three Wise Women of Christmas – Week 2

Scripture Reading: Luke 1:26-38

Introduction

Many books have been written with the intention of guiding parents in how to successfully raise their offspring

In 1946, Dr. Benjamin Spock wrote the perennial best-seller, The Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care and for its first 50 years its sales were second only to the Bible

Dr. Spock's book covered topics ranging from infancy to the teenage years and mothers everywhere embraced his insights and advice

But perhaps the best book for parents of teenagers would be a book on the behavior of cats – [teen-cat] because teens and cats actually have a lot in common – think about it...

- * Neither cats nor teenagers turn to look at you when you call their name and neither really care when you come home
- * Both teenagers and cats will occasionally grace you with their presence but will only meaningfully interact with you when they need something
- * Both will occasionally show you affection then suddenly hiss at you and stomp off in disgust for no apparent reason
- * Both cats and teens have the ability to make you feel like a leper if you dare to touch them
- * Both like to stay up all night and both can lie on the sofa for hours without moving during the day

Of course, I say all of that in jest recognizing that teenagers get a lot of bad press and not all of it is truly warranted

Because the pages of Scripture reveal to us that God loves to use godly young people to accomplish his will

Joseph was a teen when God sent him ahead to Egypt in order to provide a way for Israel to survive a terrible famine

God used a teen named **David** to defeat a giant named Goliath and so deliver Israel from the Philistines

Solomon was a teen when God placed him on the throne and used him to lead Israel to its greatest heights

Josiah was likewise a teenager when, as king, he instituted major religious reforms throughout Judah

And God used a teenage girl named **Mary** to bring the Savior into our world

We are continuing our series on the Three Wise Women of Christmas this morning as we take a look at **Mary** who proved to be a **wise teenage girl**

Your Bible should already be open to Luke 1 but, if it isn't, you will want to join us there as we work through the familiar passage that tells of the day when Mary heard the announcement that the long-awaited Messiah was about to arrive

And not only that, but that she was the one God would use to bring him into the world

Before we dig into the passage, though, let me do as I did last week and share some background that will help give us some clarity

I. The Background

This account takes place six months after the angel Gabriel showed up and shocked an elderly priest named Zechariah by telling him that he was about to become a father

Gabriel is one of just two angels whose names are recorded in the Bible with the other being Michael

Michael is an archangel which means "chief angel" indicating that Michael has a high rank in heaven

And Michael is always associated with assignments that require power and strength and when he appears in the Bible there is a battle of some sort involved

But Gabriel is different – he is God’s supreme messenger and every time we see him mentioned in the Bible he is imparting wisdom or delivering a special announcement from God

And surrounding the birth of the Messiah we see him going first to Zechariah and now to Mary and eventually he will go to Mary’s betrothed, Joseph

Gabriel might well be the first to experience the Christmas rush as he made three round trips between heaven and earth in a relatively short period of time to get things set up

Gabriel’s message to Zechariah was delivered in the elaborate Temple in Jerusalem but Mary lived in a small village that lay 70 miles to the northeast of Jerusalem

At this time, Nazareth was not exactly on any tourist maps as it wasn’t a place that people visited as they do today

Today, it’s a city of somewhere around 80,000 mostly Muslim citizens but in Mary’s day it was a small, rural village with a population estimated at less than 500

Archeological excavations show that Nazareth was an agricultural settlement but it was also a bit of a tough town that was known for its corruption and low morals

In fact, such was its reputation that we read in **John 1:45** when Philip found Nathanael and told him *“We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.”*

Nathanael replied [**John 1:46**], *“Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”*

Scripture records two very important facts about Mary at the time of Gabriel’s announcement – she was a virgin and she was betrothed to a man named Joseph

The first thing emphasized is that Mary was a virgin – note that her virginity is mentioned twice in verse 27 [**Luke 1:27**]

Luke leaves no ambiguity about the fact that Mary had never had sexual relations and the importance of that fact cannot be overestimated if we are to have a proper understanding of the incarnation

But we are also told that Mary was betrothed to Joseph and a Jewish betrothal was quite a bit different from our modern day engagement

In first century Judaism a betrothal was legally binding and could only be broken by death or divorce

John MacArthur explains that the Jewish practice at that time was that a girl would typically be betrothed at 12 or 13 years of age and married after a one-year betrothal period

The couple lived apart and did not have a physical relationship during this period but still they were often referred to as husband and wife and if Joseph had died, Mary would have been considered to be his widow

One of the purposes of the betrothal period was to demonstrate the fidelity of both partners and if either was proven to be unfaithful, it would have been considered adultery which was punishable by death under Jewish Law

It was also a time for the two families to exchange gifts and for the couple to get to know each other – marriages were commonly arranged back then – and for the wedding ceremony itself to be planned

A wedding in those days could last a week which helps us to understand how they could have run out of wine at the wedding in Cana where Jesus performed his first miracle

Anyhow, the betrothal period was typically a joyous time and Mary and Joseph would have likely been spending time working and planning to make their future life together a reality

Into the midst of all of this, Gabriel appears with the words, [**Luke 1:28**] *“Greetings O favored one, the Lord is with you!”*

And like Zechariah and like everyone else in the Bible who came face-to-face with an angel, Mary was afraid

Honestly, any one of us would likely be quite startled if Gabriel suddenly showed up in the midst of our daily routine!

So Gabriel sought to allay her fear before telling her about God's choice of her to give birth to the Messiah

And Mary's response to this amazing news was to question how this was going to be carried out

And the question Mary asks in verse 34 [**Luke 1:34**] sounds roughly identical to Zechariah's question

But her response was actually quite different than we saw from Zechariah last week

Basically, Zechariah had denied what God had said through Gabriel

He had, in effect, scoffed at the news saying, "That can't happen because my wife and I are too old."

But, while Zechariah was skeptical, Mary was merely curious and her question is a logical one

Mary didn't question that God could do this thing she just wondered *how* it was going to happen because she was not sexually active

And there was nothing wrong with that because God invites our honest questions

God knows when we don't know or when we are simply confused by what he is doing so we may as well ask him for clarification or for more information

Remember, we just recently saw that Jesus urges his followers to ask, seek, and knock

God delights in hearing our sincere requests for information because when we ask him we acknowledge that he is the source of all knowledge and in the process of asking and awaiting his answer, we engage in active fellowship with him

And in verse 35 [**Luke 1:35**] Gabriel answered Mary's question –

"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 called holy—the Son of God.

The Greek word translated as "overshadow" means "to cover with a cloud" like the cloud of Shekinah glory that indicates the presence of God like we see described in **Exodus 16:10** which says –

And as soon as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the people of Israel, they looked toward the wilderness, and behold, the glory of the Lord appeared in the cloud.

Or the bright cloud that overshadowed Jesus, Elijah, and Moses during the transfiguration of Jesus that we see described in **Matthew 17:5**

The wording here also calls to mind the creation account where in **Genesis 1:2** we see the Holy Spirit hovering over the face of the waters

The cloud is a visible expression of the glory and presence of God and God is now going to be present with Mary to do a unique work in her life

What Gabriel announced was that that the same God of creation who said "Let there be light" and there was light will be manifestly present and will say "Let my preborn Son be in your womb" and it will happen

This understanding dispels the crude idea of the Holy Spirit "mating" with Mary as some have tried to claim

God's choosing of a poor girl from a despised town to birth and then raise the Messiah seems counterintuitive to us and causes us remember the words of **Isaiah 55:8-9** where God says –

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

What God did can only be fully explained by recognizing God's exercise of his sovereign grace but as we are going to see next, Mary exhibited attitudes that are prerequisites for God's choosing to use anyone to do something great

And in those three attitudes we will see a pattern of wisdom from a teenage girl that we all would do well to emulate

II. Mary Had the Right Attitude About:

The first thing Mary had the right attitude about was herself

A. Herself

Mary was the antithesis of the prototypical self-absorbed teenager

Mary was humble as evidenced by the fact that she was “greatly troubled” by the honor that Gabriel announced God had bestowed upon her

She wasn’t immediately convinced that she deserved to be favored by God

And we continue to see Mary’s humility displayed as she sang her song of Christmas in verses 46-55

In verse 48 [**Luke 1:48**] she sings that God “*has looked on the humble estate of his servant*”

Then in verse 52 [**Luke 1:52**] she continues “*he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate*”

Obviously, Mary doesn’t think she is anyone special and she never brags about her estate either before or after God blesses her

God is the only one she credits and praises in her song which she begins with the words “My soul magnifies the Lord”

This is so very critical because God does not want or use proud people

Proud people are prone to thinking that God is lucky to have them and of course he would use *them* it only makes sense

But as we see in **James 4:6** - *God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble*

And God’s choice of Mary shows us just how much importance God places on humility

As a matter of fact, God’s selection of the region, the village, and the people of this account, this all-important chapter of history, reveals the same thing

God’s choosing Galilee, Nazareth, Mary and Joseph, Zechariah and Elizabeth all powerfully illustrate his reversal of human ideas about what it means to be great or small

The Christmas story is the embodiment of **1Corinthians 1:27-29**

But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.

It’s not the arrogant or the proud who have places of prominence in God’s kingdom

Rather God delights in elevating those who know they don’t have their act together; those who know they haven’t arrived

God exalts those who humbly acknowledge their deficiencies and hunger for him realizing just how much they need him in their lives

Remember, how we saw in our Sermon on the Mount series, one cannot even get into the kingdom without having a clear picture of himself or herself that results in a poverty of spirit and a recognition of their sin that results in mourning

But even after we become Christ-followers humility remains a necessity because God will not use us unless we bow to his will and humbly place our lives at his disposal the way Mary did

And when we humble ourselves we will find, as Mary did, that nothing is impossible with God

With God it was possible for an old couple to conceive and bear a son and it was possible for a young virgin to give birth to a baby who was and is the Son of God

And, with God, it is possible for sinful people like me and you to find forgiveness in Christ and have a new abundantly meaningful and incredibly significant life

Because if God could use a humble young girl from a backwater village, he can use anyone – including you

Mary had a proper attitude concerning herself and so must we if we want God to use us in his kingdom work

Mary also had a right attitude about God's Word

B. God's Word

We could easily overlook the evidence that shows how much Mary valued God's Word

But, in examining her song found in verses 46-55, we find that Mary directly quoted at least 15 Old Testament passages

Clearly, Mary knew her Bible and knew it well but we can easily miss how difficult this would have been for her

In Mary's day, a Bible was a very pricey luxury and a poor girl like Mary would not have had an actual written copy

That means Mary would have likely memorized passages from the Old Testament by listening as her parents taught them to her orally over the years

Mary had actually practice **Psalms 119:11** and hidden God's Word in her heart

It makes for a pleasant image to picture Mary on her four-day walk to visit her cousin, Elizabeth, thinking about Gabriel's announcement and going over all the passages concerning the Messiah that she had learned

And as she did we can imagine her fear subsiding and her excitement growing because Mary didn't just memorize God's Word and meditate on it; she believed God's promises recorded there even when others didn't

Sadly, most people in Mary's day had given up on God's promised Messiah – after all, it had been 400 years since God had spoken to the Jewish people

And as decades and then centuries passed with no prophetic word most grew tired of waiting and they concluded with bitterness that God had forsaken them

Some set about trying to bring about their own deliverance through political and religious reform while others just got busy with day-to-day life – after all, they had kids to raise and bills to pay

But there was still a remnant who continued to believe God's promises and watched and waited for their fulfillment and Mary was one of them

When it comes to important assignments, God uses people who believe his Word and determine to live according to it

There's a popular saying in Christian circles that goes, "God doesn't call the qualified; he qualifies those he's called"

And in the sense of some kind of particular training or experience that is sometimes true

But that is no excuse to fail to "*Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth*" [2Timothy 2:15]

Because when the assignment is vital, God calls on his workers who are prepared – those who love his Word, know it, and live by it

Mary demonstrated wisdom by having a right attitude about herself and about God's Word and also because she had the right attitude about God's will

C. God's Will

I've encountered many Christians who have a rather strange attitude toward God's will – in fact, it's been the prevailing attitude that I've run into

They say they want to know God's will but they won't commit to obeying it until they know what it is

It's like they want God to reveal his will so they can debate with God about it and negotiate until it's to their liking

But Mary's attitude to God's revealed will for her life was an immediate and unqualified "Yes"

When Gabriel revealed what God was going to do, Mary answered [Luke 1:38] "*Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word*"

She was completely receptive to God's plan regardless of the cost to her

And we want to be sure we don't trivialize her answer because it was an incredibly courageous response

We read the account today and we think it would be the supreme honor of all time to be chosen to be the mother of the Messiah – and any Jewish woman would have agreed

For ages, girls had been dreaming and fantasizing about being the one who would be chosen from among all women for this high calling

So we would rightly conclude that, on one hand, Mary would be thrilled at Gabriel's announcement

In fact, her song in verse 47 [Luke 1:47] reflects her joy

But Mary also had to know that to accept this privilege was going to also mean personal pain and hardship for her

Remember, she was betrothed to Joseph and he had the legal right to divorce her

Her parents and friends would likely reject her

At the very least, her reputation would be shot because she was going to be branded a loose woman and at the worst, according to the religious laws of her culture, Mary could face being stoned to death

This was no light decision and she had to know her life was not going to be easy if she said "yes"

But being gossiped about and having her name dragged through the mud when it her pregnancy became obvious long before her wedding day were to be minor pains compared to the agony she would experience later

Mary was to be the mother of the Man born to die for the sins of the world

Her first-born was not going to be the son who would grow up to take over the family business, marry, and fill his mom's arms with grandchildren

It was going to be as Simeon later said to her in the temple "*Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also)*"

Nevertheless, knowing all of that, Mary answered "*I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word*"

Mary was just a teenager but she somehow recognized the blessings and rewards of a willing spirit – a heart that is committed to unconditional and unconcerned obedience

Not much more than a child, Mary proved to be a wise woman who had a willing heart

Conclusion

How about you? Are you ready and willing for God to use you for some amazing purpose?

If not, are you ready and willing to be made ready and willing? That's a first step isn't it?

We need to pray that God would fix our attitudes cause us to make a right assessment about ourselves and replace any prideful delusions we are under with Christ-like humility

That God would help us to not take his written Word for granted but that we would truly love it, study it, memorize it, and order our lives by it

And that God would take whatever steps are necessary to mold us into willing servants ready to do his will

Let's pray