

## December 6, 2009 Luke 1:26-38 “A Mary Heart” by Richard Boatman

<sup>26</sup> In the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a village in Galilee, <sup>27</sup> to a virgin named Mary. She was engaged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of King David. <sup>28</sup> Gabriel appeared to her and said, “Greetings, favored woman! The Lord is with you!” <sup>29</sup> Confused and disturbed, Mary tried to think what the angel could mean. <sup>30</sup> “Don’t be afraid, Mary,” the angel told her, “for you have found favor with God! <sup>31</sup> You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. <sup>32</sup> He will be very great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David. <sup>33</sup> And he will reign over Israel forever; his Kingdom will never end!” <sup>34</sup> Mary asked the angel, “But how can this happen? I am a virgin.” <sup>35</sup> The angel replied, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the baby to be born will be holy, and he will be called the Son of God. <sup>36</sup> What’s more, your relative Elizabeth has become pregnant in her old age! People used to say she was barren, but she’s now in her sixth month. <sup>37</sup> For nothing is impossible with God.” <sup>38</sup> Mary responded, “I am the Lord’s servant. Be it unto me as you have said.” And then the angel left her.

This passage regarding Jesus’ entrance into the earth centers around three things: the angel Gabriel, his profound announcement, and the virgin Mary. Have you ever been startled or flat out scared? The last few days Caleb and I have startled each other twice, just walking in the house. Years ago my uncle John heard a noise in the middle of the night. He got up to quietly explore his home. While feeling his way around in the dark he ran smack dab into a man and a large dog...his son Kent and his black lab had come for an unannounced visit, at 1 in the morning!

I can only imagine Mary’s initial gasp at the appearance of Gabriel. Is it any wonder that after his greeting, verse twenty nine says she was “confused and disturbed”? I guess. She is probably a girl of fourteen or so being raised in Nazareth, a rather insignificant town 16 miles from the Sea of Galilee and 85 miles from Bethlehem. And then suddenly, Gabriel, an **angel on assignment**, appears to her and announces her favor before God.

Why is it that when God announces favor it often spells personal sacrifice and being stretched beyond what we thought possible? Ask Old Testament judge Gideon about being favored by God. His angelic announcement of special status was followed by a call to lead an army against Israel’s powerful oppressors. And then, right after Gideon buys into the deal, God whittles the Jewish army numbering in the thousands down to just three hundred. Favored? It gives us

insight into God's scheme of things, doesn't it? We consider being favored or blessed to be given comfort or prosperity or having great fellowship. But being favored by God means the Lord is actually going to impart himself to us in some way. To become a vessel ready or prepared for God's revelation requires shaping like clay being molded into a cup able to receive that which is poured into it.

Many times I've been asked questions about God that can't be satisfactorily answered until the enquiring person's mind and heart have been prepared to receive it. Like someone asking a calculus question without any mental preparation in the field, the symbols used to answer would seem like gibberish. So when someone says, "Just tell it to me plainly in one sentence," it really betrays a level of spiritual immaturity and a lack of understanding the inner sacrifice and formation involved in being favored by God.

Gabriel gave to Mary, God's favored vessel, an **anointed announcement**, a declaration that in itself contained the beginning of the miracle: <sup>31</sup> "You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. <sup>32</sup> He will be very great and will be called the Son of the Most High."

A few nights ago I was up at 1:30 in the morning. I came back from the bathroom and had just started slipping back into sleep when Larae suddenly said in a loud voice, "I see deer!" (My heart leaped.) She paused and then said it again: "I see deer!" I can handle deer in the road but not in my bedroom.

For Mary, it must have seemed like a dream to have an angelic being suddenly appear and give this incredible announcement that indeed, you are going to be the **Mother of God**. It is a term with which we Protestants are not terribly comfortable. Much of that discomfort is deeply rooted in the Reformation, the "reforming" of the Church under Martin Luther and others who deemphasized any doctrinal stance not clearly spelled out in the Bible. Overtime, the Catholic Church had developed a belief in what is called the *Immaculate Conception*. Protestants often confuse this with the conception of Jesus. But it actually refers to the belief that Mary was conceived in her mother's womb without any stain of original sin. This began as an optional belief and simply celebrated as a feast beginning in 1476 but then became church dogma in 1854 under Pope Pius the IX.

Because I have personally been so enriched by the writings of Catholic contemplatives as well as a whole host of Protestant authors, my tendency is to find balance. Protestants often fear the veneration of Mary, that is the revering of her as one to whom we pray as an intercessor for the Church. Protestants believe

that our prayers are to be directed to God the Father through Jesus alone. This is my conviction. Unfortunately, this has caused us Protestants to regularly reduce Mary to a once-a-year character in a Nativity play, failing to both appreciate her as the Mother of God (a doctrine confirmed in A.D. 431) and as a profound example to our faith, for we too are to have a heart like hers...**a Mary heart.**

The first qualities we see in her are **humility and trust.** Notice these two things go together. Our modern understanding of humility often *keeps* us from trust. “Oh, I could never do that; I’d be too nervous,” someone says. And then we respond, “Oh, he/she is so humble.” But think about that. If God has called us to do something, nudged us in a direction that seems bigger than our mind can fully comprehend, and we say, “Oh, I could never do that” and refuse to follow, is that humility? No. That’s arrogance. God says we can; we say we can’t. That’s what happened in the book of Numbers when Moses sent out spies into the Promised Land. Ten of the twelve came back saying that the land was truly beautiful but the enemies are too great. *We can’t do it.* Scripture says they brought an “evil report.” This wasn’t humility; it was arrogance fueled by fear.

That’s what’s remarkable about Mary’s response. She has to know what this will look like to the village coffee shop...a young girl suddenly comes up expecting. She may be shunned, rebuked and possibly stoned to death because of Jewish law. But she has a humble heart. A humble heart is one dependent upon God, one that is teachable, able to be led and instructed.

Do you have a Mary heart? Has God nudged you in a direction? Is God calling you to something? Perhaps you’ve explained it away or said, “That can’t be done” or “I’m not good enough” or “I don’t have enough money” or “I’m too old” or “I’m too young.” Mary shows us that you can’t have humility without trust. Mary certainly asked for clarification: “How will this be?” But she never focused on *her* ability but on *God’s* ability.

In our book study on *Who Stole My Church?* many of us discovered it’s much easier to discuss and theorize about change and growth than to actually do it. Application is where the gospel is actualized in our lives. There are eight words that capture this: **“Be it unto me as you have said.”** That was Mary’s surrender that is all too often missing from our journey. “Be it unto me...” “Well, I’m just not wired that way” or “I just speak my mind” or “We’ve always done it *this* way.” Well, what if God is coming to us to change that attitude or mindset or cattle path? Will we have an arrogant, stubborn heart or a Mary heart? Let us say with Mary, “Be it unto me as you have said.” For a Mary heart makes for a merry Christmas.