

Living the Story : Confusion (Advent Series)

Pastor Derrick Hamre

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Text: Luke 1:26-38

NOTES

A. Introduction:

1. "Advent" means "coming, arrival."
2. Our Advent series this year is "Living the Story." **Pastor Derrick:** "Because Jesus entered a real story 2000 years ago, real people experienced emotions of joy, trouble, difficulty. The coming of Jesus changed things. We too open our hearts to Jesus in our particular lives. The weeks of Advent are an invitation to live the story today—a story that intersects our lives, hopes, dreams, and disappointments of today."
3. Kevin & Julia Eckert Video: Part 1: The Eckerts felt called to a ministry in Ireland. They quit their jobs and uprooted their children to respond. But they were refused entry into Ireland, instead deported. There were understandably confused: "God, what are you doing?"

B. Setting for Mary's story:

1. Mary was a teenager, perhaps 13-14 years old, and betrothed to marry Joseph.
2. Betrothal was binding. Virginity was valued. Betrothal meant no sexual relationship allowed between the couple (and of course with anyone else).
3. During this time of betrothal, an angel came to her with a disturbing message from God (Luke 1:26-38).

C. Mary's confusing situation:

1. The angel told Mary God's grace (undeserved favour) was on her (Luke 1:30). **Pastor Derrick:** "You too can receive God's grace / favour on your life, experience His mercy, love, and embrace."
2. Mary was troubled / confused, and wondered (Matthew 1:29).
 - a. Spiritual confusion was the reality of that era. Greeks and Romans had a pantheon of gods; the Jews were looking for a Messiah but missing lots of information. Now the angel from God cleared up much of that confusion about Messiah (Matthew 1:31-33).
 - b. Our times are also filled with spiritual confusion. But the coming of Jesus offers an exclusive answer: Jesus: "I am the way, the truth and the life" John 14:6.
 - c. But the angel's message also brought confusion to Mary: Luke 1:34.
 - d. Our lives also have their segments of confusion as did Kevin and Julia Eckert's and Kevin and Julia Garratt's.
3. Mary made peace with her confusion.
 - a. Making peace with confusion often comes in stages, not unlike the stages of grief: 1] Denial; 2] Anger; 3] Bargaining; 4] Depression; 5] Acceptance.
 - b. Here we see Mary's acceptance – Luke 1:38: "I am the Lord's servant. May it be to me as the angel has said."
 - c. **Pastor Derrick:** "May all of us learn to walk in a way that declares the lordship of God over our lives even in the tension of the moment."
4. Mary also pondered / meditated on these things – Luke 1:29; 2:19.
 - a. On "pondering" – **pastor quoted Ronald Rolheisen:** "In the Gospels, which exhibit more a Hebrew way of understanding things, to ponder is less a question of intellectually contemplating something as it is of patiently holding it inside of one's soul complete with all the tension it brings... Thus to ponder biblically is to stand before life's great mysteries the way Mary stood before the various events of Jesus life – including the way she stood before the cross... We are better persons when we carry tension as opposed to always looking for its easy resolution" (from *The Holy Longing*).
 - b. Just as pastor watched his father stare out the window pondering the business challenges of the early 1980s, so now he ponders the challenges of ministry.
 - c. Mary's pondering is well summed up in the lyrics of the song "Mary Did You Know?" by Mark Lowry. (Hear it sung by Lowry and others here: <https://youtu.be/3fbgWa5pH3g>)

DISCUSSION:

1. What does "Advent" mean? What is the purpose of celebrating or acknowledging it?
2. What was Mary's situation? In what ways did the angel's message confuse her? How did the angel's message bring answers to questions of the time? How did it bring uncertainty, especially to Mary? Our lives may also present us with confusing circumstances. Share your stories of past & present confusions.
3. What are some of the steps we take as we come to terms with confusing circumstances? How did Mary express her acceptance of the angel's message to her? Discuss how the lordship of God has played out in your life? What might He be asking of you now?
4. Mary also pondered / considered / meditated on God's message to her and how it came to pass in her life (see Luke 1:29; 2:19). What does it mean to ponder? Does pondering lead, necessarily, to certainty and answers? Discuss the role of pondering and meditation in the midst of our confusions.

PRAYER:

Dear Father, we pray for those amongst us going through circumstances they don't understand. May we all find the grace Mary was given to trust You even in confusing times. Please take us to places of productive pondering. Help us not to panic but to grow our faith in You. Amen.