

Text: Luke 2:1-20  
Theme: "God's Surprising Choices"  
#984

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Christmas Eve C  
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"But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart."

It had been quite a year for this person we call Mary, the mother of our Lord. She began the year as a young girl living in her parents' home and doing the things that a young girl would do some 2000 years ago in Israel. We can assume Mary led a rather normal life; that is until she met up with one of God's great angel-messengers—Gabriel.

Gabriel came before Mary and announced that she was the one God had chosen to carry a child—a very special child. She was to be the mother of God's Messiah who would save God's people from their sins. Mary believed Gabriel's message and yet she asked how this could be. She was told the Holy Spirit would come to her and she would become pregnant with the child of God—to be called Jesus.

From that point on Mary's life became a whirlwind. Her emotions ranged from uncertainty and fear to joy and expectation. How would her parents and her fiancé Joseph receive this news? How would the people of Nazareth respond? How would anyone believe the story she had to tell?

Mary found a companion on her journey through pregnancy by going to stay with an older relative, Elizabeth, who had conceived a child well-

past her child bearing years. When Mary returned to Nazareth she faced the ridicule and derision of her parents, Joseph, and the villagers who were ready to stone her to death for adultery.

But the Angel Gabriel appeared to Joseph and told him Mary's incredible story. Joseph believed and took Mary as his wife. He protected her and together they made the dangerous journey to Bethlehem where they would fulfill Biblical prophecy by responding to the Roman order for a census.

So as Mary rested with her newborn baby, Jesus, she had a lot to think about--ponder. When the shepherds appeared and told them of Gabriel's visit and of the heavenly host that accompanied him, Mary and Joseph must have just looked at each other knowingly and smiled. It had all come to pass as Gabriel had told them. God Almighty had chosen, not the rich and mighty, but two seemingly insignificant people—a young girl and a carpenter—to be the parents of a child who was actually the Son of God!

The whole story of God working in this world is a story of God choosing the common, ordinary folks of the world to do powerful and amazing things. Think of Noah, Abraham, Joseph, David—the list could go

on and on. Now through the lineage of David, God has fulfilled His promise to bring salvation.

Nobody would have expected God to act in such a fashion, choosing a young girl to be the mother of God incarnate. This fact makes Mary so appealing to us. She stands for all of us, all who have no right to expect God's attention and favor yet are the recipients of this amazing story of God's love. There's a scene in the movie "The Nativity," where Mary and Joseph have stopped to rest and eat along their journey to Bethlehem. Mary turns to ask Joseph about his visit from the angel, and asks "Are you afraid?" Joseph replies, "Yes, are you afraid?" "Mary answers "Yes." They chuckle as they share the moment.

When we realize how God works in the world through ordinary folks it becomes clear that God, in turn, works through US in this day and age as well! All who gather in sanctuaries and homes this Christmas to share the story of Emmanuel—God with us—can be certain that God continues to work in, with, and through people like you and me. We don't have our lives all together as we should, or even as we'd like. We come with a mix of hopes and fears, moments of faith and an equal number of moments of failing. We come with little to boast about and in all truthfulness, much to confess. We come here to worship and praise God with no more right to

expect God's attention or favor than the lowly shepherds, the wise men, or Joseph and Mary.

But tonight as we worship and praise God for what God has done in Jesus Christ, we can be assured that we receive the greatest gift we could ever imagine. It's a gift we do not deserve, and truth be told, it's a gift we do not fully appreciate. We simply cannot fathom an Almighty God who came to us, to give His very own life on a cross for us.

The story of God in the flesh is a story of infinite love and promise. It is a story of great joy that has come to all people. It is a story of love over and above anything we have ever experienced or ever will experience.

We are God's own beloved children, and the whole Christmas story—the story of Jesus' life and death and resurrection—is a story intended to assure us that the promises of God are indeed kept. God has come! God **HAS IN FACT** sent His Son to save us from our sins.

This is a story that we have heard many times before. It's a story that is near and dear to the hearts of all Christians because it is a story of an infinite love that surpasses all our human understanding. And so we come. We come to worship. We come to praise God. We come to hear once again the story of unending love and forgiveness.

So as Mary pondered all these things, we wonder along with the deeply moving words of the song, “Mary did you know...?”

*Mary did you know that your baby boy will someday walk on water?  
Mary, did you know that your baby boy will save our sons and daughters?  
Did you know that your baby boy has come to make you new?  
This child that you delivered, will soon deliver you?*

*[2] Mary did you know that your baby boy will give sight to a blind man?  
Mary did you know that your baby boy will calm the storm with His hand?  
Did you know that your baby boy has walked where angels trod?  
And when you kiss your little baby, you have kissed the face of God.*

*[R] The blind will see, the deaf will hear, the dead will live again.  
The lame will leap, the dumb will speak, the praises of the Lamb...*

*[3] Mary did you know that your baby boy is Lord of all creation?  
Mary did you know that your baby boy would someday rule the nations?  
Did you know that your baby boy is heaven’s perfect Lamb?  
This sleeping child you’re holding is the great I AM...*

Mary had a lot to ponder as she held baby Jesus. We have a lot to celebrate as we worship our newborn King and share the joy and promise of God with a world that still needs the gift of God incarnate.

Merry Christmas! God bless you this Holy Night and hold you in His loving arms for all eternity.

AMEN

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