

Mary's Commitment
Luke 1:46-55
December 24, 2017 (9a.m.)

(2) Taylor Swift, Katy Perry, Selena Gomez, Carrie Underwood....

If you recognize those names it is likely that you have a teen or young adult in your home. These are the celebrities who fit into the category of "I wanna be her!" They are pretty. They are successful. They are famous. We all agree, who wouldn't want to be like them?

But watch that list and you will find that it changes overnight. Names come and go so quickly it can make your head spin. While a few stars have staying power, a girl who is popular today may be forgotten tomorrow.

(3) I want to tell you about a teenage girl who will never be forgotten. She has been popular with every generation and every culture where people have gotten to know her. Her name is Mary, and she tends to get a lot of media exposure every year around Christmas.

Christmas will soon be gone, but that doesn't mean we should forget about Mary. Today I want to spend time thinking about Mary. There's something about Mary... and that "something" is FAITH. For it was her faith that made Mary stand out from all the other contenders in the pageant to select the mother of the King.

(4) Mary's Commitment was Faith.

So let's remind ourselves... who was Mary?
(BRING OUT "MARY". Have her grinding wheat.)

Scholars Van Pletzen and Neething did quite a bit of research on Mary of Galilee. Mary was a teenager perhaps around thirteen years of age.

(5) Her daily responsibilities as part of a rural Galilean family would have included grinding wheat and barley into flour, preparing dishes of vegetables, nuts and mutton, baking bread, spinning wool and making clothes, and fetching jars of water from the well for cooking and washing. There would also be a few chickens and maybe a donkey to feed.

In a culture where women were barely noticed, except as a wife and mother, around the age of 13, Mary's parents took the customary step of arranging her marriage. The man of their choice was Joseph, the carpenter of Nazareth. Then she is found to be pregnant, which meant she could be stoned for adultery. But when she tried to

explain to them that God was the Father of the child, she could be stoned for blasphemy! And yet, what did Mary do? Mary obeyed The Lord. WHAT FAITH!!

(6) Mary's Commitment was Faith.

Mary responded (Lk 1:38) "I am the Lord's servant. May it be to me as you have said."

(7) Writing in a blog for The Christian Century a few years ago, Christian Coon told the story of a children's Christmas pageant at the church where he was pastor. Dozens of children had come for the chance to sing and dance and dress up as wise men and shepherds, as sheep, donkeys, and camels. None of the boys were fighting over the chance to play Joseph, because he didn't get any lines. But then the director asked, "Now, who wants to be Mary?"

Hands shot up and eyes danced as all the little girls jumped up and down. Every one of them wanted to be Mary. Hers was the starring role!

But then Coon asked this question: "Do you think Mary wanted to be Mary?" What do you think? Knowing the scandal and potential punishment for conception outside of wedlock, knowing that her hopes and dreams for a traditional wedding would come to an end; do you think Mary wanted to be Mary?

(8) Mary's Commitment was Faith.

Knowing the enormous price she was about to pay, Mary surrendered herself first to the Lord and then to His plan. Notice that although there is much to be said of the cost to Mary, she says not a word of it! With absolute trust Mary bows herself to the will of God and declares herself to be His servant. Mary showed great faith!

It is amazing to me that this girl, of 13 years old, had such a mature faith. We can learn from this story that faith is not age-dependent! You don't have to wait until you are old to become a hero of the faith. In fact, age will not guarantee anything at all. Even at a young age and a great weight upon her shoulders, Mary had great faith!

It is easy for us to just dismiss Mary's actions by saying that people in that time had more faith. But I want to remind us that Mary is 13. When we think of Mary, we might see this (point to "Mary").

(9) But what would it all look like today? (Take Bethlehem clothes off.) That's a little too modern. Let's try again... **(next slide)**

(10) Here is Mary... Almost 13... In 7th grade at the Middle School. Her favorite sport is basketball. She likes to dance jazz and modern. She likes to read, loves her friends, and adores cats. This is our Mary. Not some unknown, abstract,

long gone, young girl. What if this situation happened to her today? She is very real. She is almost 13. And she is being asked to take on very adult issues... worries... problems.

Yet she replies with, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your Word."

(11) Mary's Commitment was Faith.

Christmas will soon be gone, and to my husband's great relief, so will the Christmas music. Today in our Gospel lesson we have a great example of a Christmas song. Today we heard the words of the very first Christmas song ever sung.

(12) This song doesn't talk about jingling bells, holly, or reindeer. It has nothing to do with snow or sleigh bells or Santa. This song has everything to do with what really makes Christmas, Christmas. This song was all about sin and salvation, the free Gift of God's Grace sent to a fallen human race. This song was all about Jesus.

This song was not sung by angels, or priests, or prophets. No, it was sung by a humble young woman whom God had chosen to bear His Son. It was sung by Mary. Her song, the Magnificat, the first Christmas song ever sung, is a reflection of her faith. Faith that God is with us. Faith that believed that He could even love and use an ordinary girl like her.

(13) We call Mary's song the Magnificat. That word, Magnificat, is a Latin word which means "he, she, or it glorifies or magnifies". The title of this song is simply, "She Glorifies", an appropriate name for this wonderful song of praise from Mary to her God.

Let's take a closer look at this song of praise.

(14) Modern Magnificat by Joy Cowley

My soul sings in gratitude.
I'm dancing in the mystery of God.
The light of the Holy One is within me
and I am blessed, so truly blessed.

This goes deeper than human thinking.
I am filled with awe
at Love whose only condition
is to be received.

The gift is not for the proud,
for they have no room for it.
The strong and self-sufficient ones
don't have this awareness.

But those who know their emptiness
can rejoice in Love's fullness.
It's the Love that we are made for,
the reason for our being.
It fills our inmost heart space
and brings to birth in us, the Holy One.

For Mary, a very real 13 year old girl, it is true what Hebrews 11:1 says, "Faith is the assurance of things hoped for and the conviction of things not seen." How about us? Do we have the faith of Mary?

(15) Most of us are older than Mary was. Most of us are not confronted with her situation. No matter what we've done wrong or what is the difficult road ahead of us, the result is probably not stoning. And yet true faith, a rich, sustaining faith can evade us.

Yes, Christmas will soon be gone... But Mary's faith rings true all year long. It is wonderful to speak of the shepherds, the wise men, and Mary and Joseph in December... to have great faith during Christmas... But we need to have faith like Mary's all year long!

Christmas will soon be gone, as will the Christmas songs. But there is still a song to sing. This Christmas and every day of the year, the song of Mary is our song as well. We rejoice with the same faith she had. We have been given the same promises. We share the same Savior.

(16) Mary responded by saying, "I am the Lord's servant. May it be to me as you have said." And you and I are here this morning and have a living hope, a steadfast faith, and the experience of God's eternal love because she said "Yes". Mary's song is one of hope and faith.

Our hurting and broken world awaits your response. Will you have the faith of Mary? Will you let Mary's song become your own? Amen.