

Good morning. Yeah, it's a little unusual, so it's all going to be good. Tim, where are you? I'm here.

Tim's falling apart, right? What's that? You're falling apart a little bit. Okay. You do it gracefully, though.

Can you imagine being a young teenage girl approached by an awesome angel that you've never seen before, probably clothed in bright white light? And he tells you things that you don't understand. You'll conceive while still a virgin, and then you'll give birth to a baby boy named Jesus, who will be called the Son of God and the Messiah. The angel sums up his presentation to Mary, who's pretty puzzled by it all, by saying nothing is impossible for God. And then Mary's ultimate response.

I am the Lord's servant. May it be to me as you have said. Now, I wonder how many times, when challenged and confused, she remembered that divine encounter. And I wonder how many times she had to repeat her humble response back to herself. There's a quote.

There's a quote. There's a quote. There we go. There is a quote John Piper uses that basically goes like this. What God tells you in the light, don't forget in the dark.

Don't question in the dark what God has showed you in the light. Because when darkness comes in, and it will come in, but in the middle of it, when the future looks bleak, the temptation to give up, the temptation to quit, the temptation to sort of forget what God told you, is huge. You will argue with yourself in this that there's no way forward. But with God, nothing is impossible. He's turned more ropes and ladders and tunnels out of pits than you can conceive.

So wait. Pray without ceasing and hope. I guess Mary did something like that. I'm guessing she did that a lot. So this morning, we want to talk about Mary, fearless and faithful.

And she becomes this example of how God uses unlikely people, ordinary people, I believe, to accomplish his will. So the Virgin Mary is, to me, one of the most fascinating characters in the plan of God. We believe she's an ordinary peasant teenager. Maybe 13. Wouldn't be unusual.

She's engaged to an ordinary peasant guy, teenage guy, who is just trying to make a living. And both of them are living out in the country, away from the mainstream of society. So now, fast forward a few months. We're in Bethlehem, and there's no room. In the end, we're in a barn or a cave.

And so there they are with animals. The odor of sheep manure mingles with the lingering scent of perceived sexual scandal. Mary pushes one

more time, and the tiny shoulders and body of the one who will be named Jesus fully emerge. He enters our world as Joseph gently pulls Joseph, lays the baby on Mary's collapsed tummy, cuts a cord with his knife. Joseph and Mary together wipe the blood and the water off Jesus.

They clean him up the best they can. They pause. They gently weep. Joseph, from sheer exhaustion, falls asleep. But not Mary.

She marvels and she thinks back to how it all started. And so do we. So the way it all started is detailed in the book of Luke, chapter one, verses 26 through 38. And here's how it reads. In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David.

The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, greetings, you who are highly favored. The Lord is with you. Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, don't be afraid, Mary.

You have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you're to call him Jesus. He will be great, and you will be called the Son, and he will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever, and his kingdom will never end. How will this be?

Mary asked the angel. Since I am a virgin, the angel answered, the Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the Holy One to be born will be called the Son of God. Even Elizabeth, your relative, is going to have a child in her old age. And she who was said to be unable to conceive is.

She's in her sixth month. For no word from God will ever fail. I am the Lord's servant, Mary answered. May your word to me be fulfilled. When the angel left her, the previous story in Luke's Gospel tells of the miraculous conception of John the Baptist.

Elizabeth was old, way past the age of giving birth, and she had been barren her entire life. Tim talked about that last week. But now what is impossible with man is suddenly possible with God. Elizabeth is six months pregnant. It is then that Gabriel, who had previously spoken to Zechariah, John the Baptist's father, regarding John's conception and birth, shows up in Nazareth.

He's sent from the presence of God, it says where he Normally stands. He finds Mary. Mary, the young teen, the peasant girl. And I think Mary's a pretty ordinary girl, nothing unusual. And Gabriel scares her when he shows up and he speaks and he tells her that she's highly

avored and that the Lord is with her.

Mary's been chosen to receive the grace of God. Mary's a lover of God. I think she's a good girl. People would say that about her, but I think she was chosen not on merit or good works, but rather she was chosen to demonstrate the grace of God and how God can use ordinary people to participate his plan. The greeting confuses and troubles Mary.

And the angel says to her, be fearless, don't be afraid. Mary doesn't know much about having babies, but she knows that you cannot have a baby as a virgin. The angel explains to her that her conception will be unusual. It will be from God and that child, he will be great and called the Son of the Most High. And he will establish a never ending kingdom.

Gabriel explains that Mary's not the only one who's going to have a miraculous birth. Mary's relative Elizabeth is also going to have a baby. And she does, and so does Mary. After Jesus was born, the shepherds come. And then later, I think much later, the wise men come from the east with some wonderful gifts.

And it was after their visit that Herod, out of paranoia, orders execution of baby boys in Bethlehem. An angel tells Joseph to take Mary and Jesus and flee to Egypt. In the middle of the night. Joseph shook me violently. He was terrified, crying, ranting about Herod, wanting Jesus dead.

He said we had to leave town right away. He grabbed Jesus and was out of the door before I could understand what was happening. We left everything behind that night. No explanations, no goodbyes. Life as we know it was over.

Why didn't God remove Herod instead of us? It hurt me so much to leave everyone behind. I kept thinking, if only my family and friends could see Jesus grow up. And why Egypt? Why did God send us to the land that represents bond for our people?

Are we going to die here in the wilderness like our forefathers? They stayed there about a year. Finally, God spoke to Joseph again in a dream. Herod was dead. This time it was I who grabbed Jesus and ran out the door with Joseph trailing behind.

We couldn't get home fast enough. Things eventually settled down, but mothering Jesus was always a challenge. Once, when he was 12 years old and we were returning in a large group from a festival in Jerusalem, I realized he wasn't with the other children. We frantically returned to the city to look for him in the temple. I wanted to ground him until he was 21.

Jesus turns 30 and is baptized. When I was in my 40s, life changed dramatically from Jesus in me. He started bringing home a ragtag bunch of fishermen to dinner. Then at a wedding, he changed water into wine. From then, he moved in.

Amazing signs and wonders and huge crowds followed him everywhere. The excitement grew daily as Jesus walked among the people, bringing revival. But I still don't understand why he meant what he said. Who is my mother? In Mary's eyes, things started to take a turn for the worst.

The anger, the hatred, the mob. The screams and demands of crucifixion, the spit, the scourging, the abuse, the. It was almost beyond belief. Mary knelt in the shadow of the cross, weeping in anguish as her firstborn son hung above her, bloody and naked. The ominous roar of thunder was crowded out by his agonizing cry.

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? She looked up through her tears. Why didn't you defend yourself? I saw the raw power of God move through you. At your word.

Demons fled. Blind eyes were open and leopards were cleansed. Why didn't you command the angels to save you? You were going to be the king of the Jews. It was prophesied.

I didn't make it up. The angels of Gabriel, the angel Gabriel visited me. And everything happened as he said. It wasn't supposed to end like this. Why, God?

Why? Why have you forsaken me? Why have you forsaken me? He was supposed to deliver us. He was our salvation.

And now he's gone. If you really loved us, why have you allowed this to happen? Hours of sobbing and silence. Days of confusion and frustration and even anger. Then suddenly, someone burst through the door of Mary's house, announcing that Jesus was alive.

Mary ran. He's alive. I thought I'd cry, cried all my tears on Golgotha. But when our eyes met, it was like a flood. As I ran into his open arms, he scooped me up and spun me around in a joyous laughter.

The times we shared after the resurrection were the most precious of my life. They made it easier to release him again. As I watched him ascend, I prayed again. Lord, let it be unto me, according to your word, for the rest of my life. So we look at Mary's life and we wonder, does it have anything to do with mine?

Does it have anything to do with yours? Does it have anything to do with ours? And I'm going to say that it does. I think our life is a

lot like hers because she tried to live on the promises of God as a foundation and I think she did. But even when you stand there, there's so many challenges, there's so much confusion, there's disappointments, there's just all kinds of things that are hard to understand.

But Mary stood faithful to God from beginning to the end. And her story ends in Acts 1 where she is one of the hundred and twenty that stayed with Jesus and became the church, the beginning of the church. Thank you, Zara and Tim for helping tell the story. What do you guys think? What do you take away from all that?

Well, I don't know. Mary is just an ordinary 13 year old and somehow managed to hold the Savior. It was faithful through it. She might have doubted God, but she never stopped doing what he said. Okay.

I think we tend to. There's a temptation to in a sense idolize some of the people that God uses. I. It's hard to imagine Mary getting a little sassy with her mom. You know, it's hard to imagine Mary sort of.

You mean Jesus getting sassy? Mary getting sassy with her mom? Oh, okay. We tend to, yeah, we tend to think Mary is somehow this. We see her with the blue little dress on and the white thing and we think she is like that's how she was, but she wasn't, you know, she was an ordinary girl dealing with a bunch of ordinary stuff.

And God said, I can use you to display my grace and my favor and my goodness and my plan. I think that's a lesson for all of us to say. Okay, yeah, I can get a little sassy too. But, but, but God, I have seen you, I've seen you be satisfied. I mean, God can use us in our imperfection.

That's not, that doesn't disqualify us from being used by God. I like that. And, and she didn't understand. I don't think she understood. I don't know if she ever understood it all, but she didn't fully understand it till after the resurrection.

Right. Because she. It had to be so confusing when her. I think she had other children, of course, in scriptures and they thought Jesus was nuts. So as a mom, how do you try to hold that all together?

How do you tell your five year old, hey, this is the son of God. Chill.

There's some things to really imagine there. But what do you think the big takeaway is for us then? For me it is for me, the big takeaway is that God doesn't That God isn't afraid to use ordinary people to do extraordinary things. And that's. This is always the reminder for me.

The scripture is full of people like this. You think about Noah, who ends up having an issue with alcohol. You talk about, you know, Joseph, this little entitled teenager in Egypt who God decides to do amazing things with. These are all people that, I mean, think about Peter and even Paul. These men who were Peter abandoned Jesus, Paul actually killed.

And yet God says, I can use you. I can use you. Yeah, I think it is remarkable. We talked about genealogy of Jesus. There are these women in there that there's a lot of very, very flawed people, but surprising women in there.

And then Mary, if you really think about it, is a huge surprise. There's a Fred Buechner, I know you like Fred Buechner quote about Gabriel saying as he delivered the message, he hoped that she didn't see his wing shaking because he was wondering, what in the world use this girl to do this? And so it's just the surprising nature of God to use the ordinary and just the unusual things. And the magnificat of Mary, the song that Mary sings is pretty cool, too. It just talks about the unusual nature of God, the reversal of what you would expect.

And so humility and those sorts of things are what God honors. And that's how he works. And it's not through power or might. So I think that's good. I know when I was.

I'm young, but when I was very young, like preschool, I feel like we always talked about how perfect each character in the Bible was. We didn't really touch on their faults, but I feel like as I'm older and I learn more about who they really were and what they dealt with and how God still uses them and still loves them, and they still make such a huge impact. Makes me feel good because I don't have to be perfect to be part of God's plan. And none of us do very good. So I think there's a couple things, and then we're going to turn it over to Tim for communion.

I think the key to Mary's success and our success is the exchange that she has with the angel where he says, nothing is impossible with God. Nothing is impossible with God. And she says, I am the Lord's servant. I think she's saying, I don't really understand. But then she says, may it be to me you've said, I don't know how you're going to do it, but I believe you can.

So to me, for all of us to say, I don't see it. God says, nothing's impossible. Our posture is to say, here I am. I'm your servant. Just let it unfold.

Right? That's right. All right, Tim, take it from there. Hey, thank you, guys. Thank you, Zara.

That was. That was. That was very impacting. I liked hearing her voice be the voice of Mary this morning. I don't need to keep sitting, but I'm comfortable, so that's where I'm going to stay.

I mentioned a few of the ordinary people that God used. Talk about Joseph again, this kid who grows up with an immense amount of privilege that God says, yeah, I can use. You talk about Noah, but I think about others. I think about Jonah, who he ran away from God's call, and yet God still managed to use him.

There's this beautiful Christmas song that we sing. It's a French song, and I want to belabor this, because this is not really the point, but this song was written by a French wine cellar, not a basement, but a person who actually sold wine. And the music was put together by a Jewish friend of his.

The guy who wrote the poem originally got crosswise with the church and was actually expelled at some point. As far as I know, the guy who wrote the music to it never surrendered his life to Jesus. For many years. The song was sort of put in the back, and because it wasn't written by approved people, it wasn't allowed to be sung. But in the middle of the last or the early part of the last century, it was rediscovered by someone, or I guess two centuries ago, rediscovered by someone here in the United States who heard the song.

And he was an abolitionist. And of course, an abolitionist is someone who wants to do away with slavery. And slavery at the time was part of the American culture. He heard the song, says, man, there's some beautiful stuff in there. And so he brought the song back, and it became very popular in northern churches.

Now, you may think, what song is this? The song is O Holy Night in French. It's minuet Christian, meaning it's nighttime Christians. And the song calls believers to recognize something that is sort of amazing, that there's some very ordinary stuff happening here that is really super extraordinary. In fact, the writer says, fall on your knees.

Because this is absolutely astounding what God is doing with a little baby. Many of you know the story of the. The New York violin player who set up his little violin in a subway, and he played some beautiful classical pieces. And in the busyness and the hurriiness, of the day. Thousands upon thousands of New York transit workers just passed by him, ignoring him.

A few threw some coins in his guitar, his violin case. But for the most part, they walked right by, little knowing that later that evening, a ticket to hear this guy perform would run into the several hundred dollars per seat. We sometimes miss some amazing things because we don't take the time to stop and really look and listen. And

we sometimes miss the amazing things God can do for us when we don't take the time to say, here am I, Lord, let it be according to your will. A song by very ordinary people changed Christmas for me.

When it says, chain shall he break. The slave is our brother. It changed the direction of Christian thought towards slavery. A little violin player who plays his violin changed the perception of what it means to just hear a musician play for me. And now when I hear a musician playing in a subway or playing in the parking lot at Walmart, I'm like, hey, I wonder who that is.

I wonder what his story is. And when God sees you, he doesn't just see an ordinary person with some issues. He sees someone that he can use in incredible ways. So today, as we take the bread, as we take the cup, this is a time just to say, I want to look, I want to listen, I want to be aware of what God can do right here with me and with the people around me. We don't look like much, and by the world's standards, we don't count for much.

But God sees amazing potential in someone who's willing to say, here am I, Use me. Heavenly Father, we thank you for Mary who said yes to you. So today we want to stop and we want to be thankful for all the people that you use. Some who don't even recognize you, and yet you use them to impact and change the world, to bring us closer to your glory. Lord, we want to be those who do recognize you, who do throw our arms and our hands wide open and say, lord, here we are.

Use us. So in this moment, as we take the bread and the cup, we reiterate and we say again, Lord, here we are.

We give thanks. We give thanks to you for using us in Jesus name. Amen.

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