

**Sermon:** *Mary's Lessons*  
**Text:** *Luke 1:26 – 38*  
**Date:** *December 14, 2008 AM*  
**Place:** *Jesup First UMC*

Have you ever had something so remarkable happen to you that you just couldn't believe it? I was ordained into the United Methodist ministry in June 1994 and I remember standing in line, getting ready to go inside the auditorium. I was so nervous and so excited at the same time. I kept thinking to myself, "*This isn't really happening. It's all a dream and I'm going to wake up any minute.*" And then, I thought, "*Any minute somebody is going to walk up to me and say, 'Tucker, we've changed our minds and we've decided not to ordain you.'*" I just couldn't believe something like that was really happening to me.

I was standing there in the front of Estes Chapel with my dad by my side, looking back down the aisle toward the front door. And the longer I waited the more I began to think: "*Maybe Lori has changed her mind. Maybe she finally realized she didn't want to marry me after all.*" Hey, even after Lori was standing next to me, holding my hand, I want you to know I held on with dear life just in case she decided to turn and run at any minute. It was happening; it was real, but it was too good to be true.

I wonder how Mary felt. I'd like to think it was an ordinary day. There were chores to do and friends to see. Maybe she would even get to see Joseph. You know, their big day wasn't too far off. It was quiet in the house that morning ... just the soft sound of the broom sweeping across the dirt floor. Then, suddenly a bright light filled the room and in the midst of the

light, the form of a man became visible and Mary was scared. She even thought about running away, but suddenly, the man spoke: “Greetings you who are highly favored by God. The Lord is with you.”

Well, this doesn't happen every day, especially to teenage girls and before Mary could figure out what was happening, the angel spoke: “Do not be afraid Mary for you have found favor with God. You are going to have a baby boy and you will name Him Jesus.” Now, Mary was having the experience of her life. She had never been visited by an angel before and on top of that, the angel had brought her a message she just couldn't believe. So she said to the angel: “How can this be since I am a virgin?” And the angel responded: “The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.” And Mary said: “I am the Lord's servant. May His will be done in my life just the way you have said it should be.” And the angel left her.

What a fantastic story! I mean, Hollywood could not have written a better script. It's a great story, but what's it all about? Why is this story included in the Bible? And what can we learn from it that will help us live in relationship with God? There are two different ways of looking at this story. We can look at this story to learn more about God; and we can look at this story to learn from Mary's example.

#### **1. What can we learn about God from this encounter?**

*First, we discover that God is gracious.* The angel said: “Do not be afraid for you have found favor with

God.” Now, scholars have scratched their heads and searched the scripture for some evidence to would explain why Mary was chosen. Maybe she was pure and innocent, a virgin. Maybe she was really devoted to God. But as I read the story, I don’t see anything special about Mary at all. I believe Mary was just like every other teenage girl of her day.

But while Mary is normal, God is not! You see, this is a story about the grace of God not about the worthiness of Mary. The word we translate “*favor*” is the same word we translate “*grace*.” Grace isn’t something we earn; it isn’t something we deserve. It is God’s free gift. So Mary was chosen, because God is gracious, not because Mary was special. In fact, it is the fact that God chose her that makes Mary special. She was chosen according to God’s grace.

***Second, we discover the overwhelming power and presence of God.*** You see, this is no ordinary story. The Son of God didn’t come into the world like other children. And that’s what had Mary so confused. She couldn’t understand how she, a normal teenage girl, was going to have a baby. She said: “*How can this be since I am a virgin?*”

But again, this isn’t about Mary and Joseph. It’s a story about the power and the presence of God. “*The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore the baby will be great and will be called Son of the Most High God.*” No other conception in human history was as special as this one. This isn’t a story about physical intimacy; it’s a story about the power of the Holy Spirit. This

isn't a story about human ability; it's a story about the power of God.

You see, this is where we make our mistake. We receive the call of God; maybe we're asked to serve on a committee of the church or we're asked to accomplish a certain task for the church and immediately we shift from God's call to our abilities. *"Well, I can't do that. I don't have the skills and the talents that are required to accomplish that."* But you see it's really not about your abilities; it's about God's power. It's not about what you can do; it's about what you allow God to do through you.

It's about the power and the presence of God.

Now, before we just write Mary off as a passive little girl who was just totally overwhelmed by the fact that she was chosen and totally overpowered by the power and presence of God, we need to understand that Mary did have an important role in this story too. You see, God is all-powerful, but He never forces Himself on anyone. So, that brings us to our second question:

## **2. What can we learn from Mary from this encounter?**

*First, Mary was receptive.* A visit from an angel is a frightening thing. And yet, Mary listened to the message of the angel. She was fully aware of what was being asked of her. You know, I'm convinced that above all else God wants us to be receptive, to be open, willing vessels He can use. Many times, the reason we never hear God speak to us and the reason we are never chosen to do great things for

God is – NOT because He doesn't speak, but – because we aren't listening. We don't have the kind of heart that seeks to know God and seeks to know His will, especially His will for our lives. Mary listened; she was receptive.

**Second, Mary was inquisitive.** When Mary didn't understand, she asked a question. She didn't rush out and seek her own answers. She listened to hear God's answer.

When I finally surrendered to God's call to enter the ministry, I was so excited. I didn't know what God was calling me to do, but I knew I had to do it. God impressed upon my heart that I was to be His servant and that I was to be in the ministry and I said: "*Great! Now, here's what I'll do for you, God.*" Did you catch that? I said, "*Here's what I'll do for you,*" instead of saying, "*What do you want me to do for you?*" I could have avoided a few stupid mistakes along the way if I had been like Mary.

This is the mistake that Abraham and Sarah made. God said: "**You will be the Father of many nations.**" And Sarah said: "*Okay. God has promised Abraham children and I can't have any. So, here, Abraham take Hagar and have children with her.*" Trying to do God's will your own way, just doesn't work!

Mary didn't fully understand what was happening and she had enough sense about her to ask a question.

**Third, Mary submitted to the will of God.** Mary said: "*I am the Lord's servant. May it be done to me as you have said.*" God chose Mary for a special task and Mary

submitted her will and her life to the will of God. *“Yes Lord, I’ll do anything you want me to do.”*

The hardest thing you and I ever do is to set aside our will, our desires, our goals and dreams in order to follow God plan. It’s just not natural. You see, God gave us a tremendous gift: free will. And we can do anything we want to do. We can be our own gods. Yet, God simply asks that we adjust our wills to His will. That’s what Mary did; she said: *“Whatever you want me to do, I’ll do.”* She submitted herself to the will of God.

And after all this, Luke says the angel went away and left Mary alone. She was left alone to ponder these things in her heart. For nine months, she pondered over what was going to happen. Then, came that long trip to Bethlehem and while they were there, she gave birth to Jesus, the Son of God. And she wrapped Him in bands of swaddling cloth and laid Him in a manger.

The most remarkable story the world has ever heard. How God chose an ordinary girl to be the mother of His only Son. The story of how God became man all begins with a young girl who was receptive, inquisitive, and submissive AND with a God who doesn’t look at us for our abilities, but who has chosen us because of His amazing and abundant grace.

In the name of the father and of the son and of the holy spirit.