

Adventure -From Sorrow to Joy

Ice Breaker: What is your earliest Christmas memory?

Pastor Brian began introducing the sermon by reminding us that though Christmas is supposed to be a happy season, for many people Christmas can be a very hard time to be happy. Pastor Brian mentioned stress from financial pressures, personal loss and loneliness, as well as parties, at which we are supposed to feel happy. Everyone has their sources of unhappiness. This time of year can bring them out. The story of Mary, the mother of Jesus, can move us from sorrow to joy.

But there were problems in-

Israel: For the nation of Mary's people, it had been generations since they were a nation on their own. Israel had been conquered by the Roman empire. The Romans had appointed King Herod the Great, a man who ruled Israel with an iron fist. Roman soldiers were everywhere; they were brutal towards anyone they felt was getting out of line. First century Israel was a pretty sorrowful place.

Nazareth: Was a small rural town of no more than 150 people. Nazareth was about four miles from a Roman garrison. There was nothing quaint or picturesque about Nazareth. It's only claim to fame was that it had a red-light district for Roman soldiers. Nathaniel, one of Jesus' disciples, said snidely, "*Can anything good come out of Nazareth?*" (John 1:46)

Luke 1:26-38 *In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, **27** to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. **28** The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you." **29** Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. **30** But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. **31** You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. **32** He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him*

*the throne of his father David, **33** and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end." **34** "How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?" **35** 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[a] the Son of God. **36** 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 in her sixth month. **37** For no word from God will ever fail." **38** "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled." Then the angel left her.*

Mary:

For Mary, everything was new and not understood. She was a young girl no more than 14 years old. She was engaged to Joseph. It is safe to say, she shared in the dejection and humiliation of her people. There was a lot to be sad about being a girl in Nazareth-Pastor Brian.

1. We come to this story, understanding that the angel came to Mary announcing the birth of the Messiah, Jesus. We understand the complete story. Mary was living the drama and uncertainty. What would Mary find difficult to understand?

2. What was Mary's reaction when the angel first appeared? (Luke 1:29)

3. How did the angel address Mary? (Luke 1:28) The word for highly favored means "to be shown great grace or kindness" What do you think the Angel was saying about Mary and his favor?

4. How has God shown you “great grace or kindness”?

5. How did the angel comfort Mary? (Luke 1:30)

6. How did the angel describe the son that Mary was to birth? (Luke 1:32-33)

7. What would Mary have understood about the Messiah? (Genesis 3:15, Isaiah 7:14, Micah 5:2,)

Genesis 3:15 *And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.”*

Isaiah 7:14 *Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.*

Micah 5:2 *“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.”*

8. Was there anything in the description of Israel or Nazareth that would indicate that this is the time for the appearing of the Messiah? What does this indicate about how God works in troubled times?

9. What would you imagine would be Mary's concerns being single, engaged, and being told she will become pregnant from the Holy Spirit?

10. What was Mary's attitude about this assignment? (Luke 1:38). What does this attitude reveal about Mary?

11. How does Mary's response differ from the response of Moses? (Exodus 3:10-12, 4:13). Has there been a time that you felt God prompting you and how did you respond?

Exodus 3:10-12 *So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt.” 11 But Moses said to God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?” 12 And God said, “I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain.”*

Exodus 4:13 *But Moses said, “Pardon your servant, Lord. Please send someone else.”*

Luke 1:39-45 *At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, 40 where she entered Zechariah’s home and greeted Elizabeth. 41 When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. 42 In a loud voice she exclaimed: “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! 43 But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? 44 As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. 45 Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!”*

12. Who was Elizabeth to Mary? (Luke 1:36)

13. What role did Elizabeth play in Mary’s life? (Luke 1:42-45). Why was this important to Mary?

14. Who would you consider an “Elizabeth” in your life and why?

Luke 1:46-54 *46 And Mary said: "My soul glorifies the Lord 47 and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, 48 for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, 49 for the Mighty One has done great things for me— holy is his name. 50 His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation. 51 He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. 52 He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. 53 He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty. 54 He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful*

15. What is the focus of Mary's song or speech?

16. How do you think Mary's focus on God helped her deal with the issues of being young, unmarried and pregnant?

Pastor Brian contrasted Joy and Happiness. He said the words joy and happiness are used interchangeably, but they are not interchangeable. Happiness is what we feel when something good happens. Joy is a deep sense of wellbeing in spite of what is happening.

"She (Mary) is about to embark on the journey of a lifetime, which means high stakes, and high adversity and lots of uncertainty, but it was a journey of joy because now she knew she was favored and the Lord was with her."- Pastor Brian

17. How is our journey, a journey of joy rather than happiness?

18. How does knowing that you have God's grace and favor encourage you?