

GRACE BEYOND HER YEARS (v. 38)

In order to experience the gravity of what God asks of Mary, we need to remove the passage from the warm tableau of the Christmas story as we have come to know it. While the birth of our Savior was a joyful event, it would exact an enormous toll on Mary. Whenever Joseph and Mary present Jesus in the temple, the godly Simeon warns her, "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too (Luke 2:34-35)." You sense Mary knows bearing this child will be costly, but she has no idea how costly it will be. All of this makes her response even more remarkable.

³⁸ *"I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled." Then the angel left her.*

1. How would the birth of Jesus call for Mary to rearrange her life?
2. What would be the ultimate cost?
3. How does Mary respond?
4. How does her response mirror her son's response as he was faced with the prospect of the cross?
5. What are some ways God has called us to rearrange our lives?
6. How should we respond?

**WHEN GOD ASKS**

LUKE 1:26-38

Have you ever had someone make an ask so big that it took your breath away?

It may have been a child asking you to bail them out of financial ruin. Or your family asking you to leave a successful career and move across country to care for an ailing parent. Or maybe you've considered taking someone into your home that is so emotionally crippled that it will call on all of your emotional reserves to nurse them back to health, with no guarantees they will ever get better.

Some asks call for little more than a simple "yes, sure, I'd be happy too!" Others are so big that they require us to look deep inside and consider if we are really up to the task.

When Gabriel appears to Mary, he makes a huge ask. It's really more of an announcement than an ask. Whatever nice, neat, comfortable life Mary might have imagined for herself, all of that is about to change.

When God asks, it almost always requires us to rearrange our lives and give our all to follow him.

GABRIEL GOES TO NAZARETH (vv. 26-27)

Luke expends more ink on the birth announcement of John the Baptist than he does on Jesus. The two birth announcements are studies in vivid contrast. John will be a prophet of the Most High. Jesus will be the Son of the Most High. There is a vivid contrast between Zechariah (John's father) and Mary. Zechariah is in Jerusalem. Mary is in Nazareth. Zechariah is a distinguished member of the priestly class serving in the inner courts of the temple. Mary would have been at the opposite end of the social ladder—she is a small town girl, doing whatever it is that teenagers do in Nazareth. Zechariah is described as a man of impeccable character. Mary's story is yet to be written. God's choice of Mary tells us a lot more about him than it does about her.

²⁶In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, ²⁷to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary.

1. Paul wrote, "God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, ²⁹so that no one may boast before him (1 Corinthians 1:28-29)." How does Mary fit this description?
2. What does this tell us about the kind of people God chooses in general?
3. What do you think it means to be "highly favored?"
4. What are some ways we are "highly favored" by God?
5. In the Old Testament whenever God reassures someone of his presence it is usually because he has called them to a specific task.
 - a. What is the task God has called us to?
 - b. Why is it important to remember he is with us?

THE ANGEL MEETS HIS MATCH (vv. 28-37)

It is hard to imagine how you and I might respond to an angelic appearance, but Mary responds with incredible poise and dignity. She is not taken back by his presence, she is troubled by his words. She does not question God's word, she simply wants to know how it will impact her life. She wants to know what she is getting herself into, before she says "yes."

²⁸The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you." ²⁹Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. ³⁰But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. ³¹You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. ³²He 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, ³³and 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?"

³⁵The 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. ³⁶Even 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. ³⁷For no word from God will ever fail."

1. How does Mary respond to Gabriel's appearance?
2. How does Gabriel respond to Mary's concern?
3. Take the time to list and number all the descriptive phrases that apply to Mary's child?
4. Which of these is most meaningful to you? Why?
5. Taken as a whole, what do they tell us about this child?
6. How does Mary respond to Gabriel's announcement?
7. Zechariah responds to the announcement of John's birth by asking "How can this be?" Mary asks, "How will this be?" How would you describe the difference between the two responses?
8. What does the way that this child will be conceived tell us about the child?
9. Why is his humanity important?
10. Why is his divinity important?
11. How does Gabriel reassure Mary?