

Sunday 29th November 2020
Glynde Lutheran Church
Sermon on Luke 1:26 – 38
Theme: “The obedience of Mary”
“Live your life in faith and obedience to God”
(No. 1 in “The values of Christmas: obedience”)

Question: “How does God want me to live out my life as His child in this pre-Christmas period and in my life as a whole?”

Introduction:

Well, Christmas is well and truly on the way!

I'd like to focus this morning on how God wants us to live our life as His children in this Advent-Christmas season *and beyond into the New Year and onwards....*

Well, what values and priorities does God want us to have in this Christmas season? How does God want you to live in this Christmas season and beyond? All around us people are focusing on getting things for themselves, and having a good time, and doing what their mates do. How does God want us to live out our life?

I'd like to suggest to you that Mary, the young girl in our Bible reading is 'pretty' good guide for us on how to live our life this Christmas season and beyond. In fact, I'd go as far as saying that she is “our model of the obedience of faith”, *our model of what it means to live as God's child following Jesus.*

Part 1: The obedience of Mary

When the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary, maybe Mary was pondering her life as she sitting in the orchard *as it is in the movie “The Nativity story”*, or out somewhere on her own in her home town of Nazareth, up near Lake Galilee in the north of Israel. If she was pondering her life, she was probably thinking that she had her life all planned out. She was engaged to a local young man named Joseph, and I guess that she was looking forward *to her marriage*, and to a future in her village, around her family and relatives, as the wife of Joseph and the mother of several children....

Mary is described as a “virgin”, who is “pledged to be married, *that is, betrothed*, to a man named Joseph” (*Luke 1:26-27*). In other words, she is a young girl who is engaged to be married. How old is Mary? Probably about 12 or 13 years old, or maybe 14 years old at the oldest. Joseph on the other hand was probably about 18 years old or so (*Rops, Daily Life in the Time of Jesus, p. 118*).

So reading between the lines, it seems that Mary probably thought that she had her life all nicely planned out ahead of her. And then, guess what!? God well and truly disrupted her plans, *as He is prone to do with our plans too* 😊

Luke tells us that God sent the angel Gabriel to Mary and said to her: **“Peace be with you! The Lord is with you and has greatly blessed you!”** (*1:28*).

Luke tells us that as a result of these words: **Mary was deeply troubled...and wondered what his words meant** (*1:29*).

Well, little wonder that she is “deeply troubled”? Why has this angel appeared to her, and what’s he going to say about what’s going to happen to her in the future? How are things going to change in her future?

Well, let’s listen again to what the angel goes on to say to Mary. The angel says to Mary:

“Don’t be afraid, Mary; God has been gracious to you. You will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will make him a king, as his ancestor David was, and he will be the king of the descendants of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end!” (*1:30-33*).

Mind-blowing stuff! The angel tells Mary that she is going to become pregnant with the King, *the Messiah*, that God has promised again and again in the Old Testament that He would send, and who God promised would reign forever (*e.g., Isa. 9:7; 11:1-9*).

Mary naturally responds by saying:

“I am a virgin. How, then, can this be?” (*1:34*).

In other words, she is saying:

“Hey, hold on! I’m not living with Joseph yet! How can I possible become pregnant and have this child!?”

Let’s hear again what the angel Gabriel, God’s messenger, says to Mary in reply:

The angel answered, “The Holy Spirit will come on you and God’s power will rest upon you. For this reason, the holy child will be called the Son of God” (1:35).

In other words, the angel is telling Mary that she will become pregnant in a supernatural way, by God’s Spirit planting the child there as “the Son of God”, *the One begotten in her womb by God (Marshall, Luke, p. 71).*

And then the angel gives Mary a confirmation of that his message is from God. He says to Mary:

“Remember your relative Elizabeth. It is said that she cannot have children, but she herself is now six months pregnant, even though she is very old. For there is nothing that God cannot do” (1:36-37).

In other words, He is saying to Mary:

“If you doubt what I’m saying, or if you don’t think that it’s possible, check out your aged cousin Elizabeth. She is going to have a child in her old age”.

Do you hear what the angel is saying overall to Mary? He is telling Mary that it is God’s will that her whole future be changed. The future that Mary anticipated, *that of being Joseph’s husband, and having children by Joseph, surrounded by the support of her family and relatives,* seems to have been changed.

After all, what will Joseph say when he sees her pregnant? Who will believe her when she says that she is pregnant by God’s Spirit? What will happen to her? Will Joseph cast her off and “divorce” her? Or worse still, will she be stoned to death for being an “adulteress”, *as the Law commands (Deut. 22:20-21; cf. Brown, p.127).*

So how does Mary respond to God’s call to her to be part of His revolution by bearing the child who will be the long promised King, *the child who would set up God’s Kingdom?*

Listen to Mary's response to the angel's message:

"I am the Lord's servant. May it be *done* to me, as you have said" (1:38).

What a wonderful response of faith in God, *and of obedience to God!*

Part 2: Faith and obedience in the Bible

You know, the "the history of Israel *in the Old Testament* can be treated as the story of Israel's hearing or failing to hear God's Word". So says one writer in his article on "obedience" in the Bible (*IDB*, 3:580-581).

As I reflect on the Old Testament, many examples of Israel's, *God's people's*, lack of faith and obedience come to mind.

For example, I think of:

- * The people of Israel grumbling against God even after God had rescued them from slavery in Egypt *by sending a whole heap of plagues to Egypt:*

They said to Moses, "Weren't there enough graves in Egypt? Did you have to bring us out here to die? Look what you done by bringing us out of Egypt! Didn't we tell you before we left that this would happen? We told you to leave us alone and let us go on being slaves of the Egyptians. It would be better to be slaves there than to die here in the desert (*Exodus 14:11-12*).

- * And that grumbling, *that lack of faith in God and obedience to his leading through Moses*, continued on, didn't it, even after God parted the Red Sea to allow them to escape from the pursuing Egyptian army led by the Pharaoh:

They all complained to Moses and Aaron and said to them, "We wish that the Lord had killed us in Egypt. There we could at least sit down and eat meat and as much other food as we wanted. But you have brought us out into this desert to starve" (*Exodus 16:3*).

But there are equally many examples of faith and obedience in the Old Testament. The writer of the letter to the Hebrews in the New Testament in a section on "Faith" lists some of these examples of faith: Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Joseph, Moses, and so on (*Heb. 11:1-40*). Let me read just one: what he writes about Noah. He writes:

It was faith that made Noah heed God's warnings about things in the future that he could not see. He obeyed God and built a boat in which he and his family were saved... (Heb. 11:7).

Let's jump ahead in our thinking to Mary's faith and obedience in our Bible reading, and think of all the people in the New Testament who committed themselves to following Jesus' God's Son *in faith and obedience*....

Think of Peter and Andrew, James and John, Thomas, Matthew, and Mary Magdalene....

I'm watching "The Chosen" on my iPad and on the TV, *when I can get Chromecast to work*.... Their faith in Jesus, as God's Son and our Rescuer, led them to obey Jesus' summons to them, "Follow me"!

Yes, faith and obedience go together "like a horse and carriage". If your doubt this, listen to Paul writes in his letters:

- * **Through him, *Jesus*, God gave me the privilege of being an apostle for the sake of Christ, in order to lead people of all nations to believe and obey, *Lit.* "to bring about the obedience of faith" (Rom. 1:5).**
- * **Now, however, that truth, *the truth about Jesus Christ...is known to all the nations, so that all may believe and obey, Lit., "for the obedience of faith" (Rom. 15:26).***

Of course, our best example of faith and obedience is Jesus himself. He trusted God, his Father, and faithfully obeyed him, even the point of going to cross to suffer and die for us, *in obedience to God*. Listen to what Paul writes *as he quotes an early Christian hymn*:

**The attitude you should have is the one that Christ Jesus had:
He always has the nature of God,
but he did not think that by force
he should try to remain equal with God.**

**Instead of this, of his own free will,
he gave up all he had,
and took the nature of a servant.
He became like man
and appeared in human likeness.
He was humble and walked the path of
obedience all the way to death –
his death on a cross.**

**For this reason, God raised him to
the highest place above
And gave him the name that is greater
than any other name... (Phil 2:5-11).**

Or what the writer of the letter to the Hebrews says at the start of chapter 12:

As for us, we have this large crowd of witnesses around us. So then, let us rid ourselves of everything that gets in the way, and of the sin which hold on to us so tightly, and let us run with determination the race that lies before us. Let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, on whom our faith depends from beginning to end.

He did not give up because of the cross! On the contrary, because of the joy that was waiting for him, he thought nothing of the disgrace of dying on the cross, and he is now seated at the right hand side of God's throne. Think of what he went through; how he put up with so much hatred from sinners! So do not let yourselves become discouraged and give up.

Yes, our best example of faith and obedience is Jesus himself. He trusted God, his Father, and faithfully obeyed him, even the point of going to cross to suffer and die for us, *in obedience to God*.

Yes, faith and obedience go very much together... Can I ask you what is God calling you, *His child*, to do in this pre-Christmas time, and in your life in general? God called Mary *through the angel Gabriel* to be the mother of Jesus, God's Son, and Mary obeyed....

What is God calling you, *His child*, to do? (cf. *Matthew 25:31-46*). Maybe it is to:

- * **Be a listening ear to someone who is struggling with life, and who just wants someone to share her or his troubles with.**
- * **Visit the lonely or the sick or the dying or the grieving around you**
- * **Invite people into your home, and to share a meal with them.**
- * **Give generously to the needy and the hungry this Christmas (e.g., ALWS "Gifts of Grace", Barnabas, LCC Appeals)**

- * **Use every opportunity that God gives you this Christmas season and into the New Year to share with others the peace, and the joy, and the love and the hope that you have through Jesus**

Will you respond like Mary, like Jesus himself, like the many people of God we have mentioned *with faith that shows itself in obedience?*

Conclusion:

May God bless you and me as we follow Jesus and live as God's children in faith and obedience *under the loving, forgiving arms of our dear Father....*