

In today's scripture story we hear what is for some a very familiar message. About Mary and her visit from the angel Gabriel. In this brief snippet of the larger story about Jesus being born I think it's safe to say the focus of this story is Mary and her dedication to God. Which stands in stark contrast to our scripture just a few weeks ago, and Abraham's dedication to God and what that looked like. It is however, no less life threatening in many ways.

Though Abraham was putting Isaac's life on the line for his dedication to God, Mary is putting her own life on the line here. Mary is betrothed to Joseph, they are not yet wed. We the reader know she is bearing the child of God conceived not by mortal understandings of sex, but by some greater power of God's holiness taking shape. But for her and for the world around her, she is an unwed mother who is pregnant.

Now I am not sure how many of you have had the experience of having a child when you are not yet married, but there is a great amount of tension that you just carry with you wherever you go. Worried that someone might flip on a dime, or suddenly shift their attitude towards you when they discover that you have a child and are unmarried.

That's just a modern feeling around having a child out of wedlock, for Mary it very well could have been a death sentence. Perhaps not a literal one, if they could not prove adultery it might be difficult to stone her in the street. However, women especially in Jewish households weren't really allowed to hold land or jobs. A woman's income would have been dependent upon her husband, and her lively hood chained to her care of the home and the amount of children brought up.

Having a child that is not the father's biological child, is usually a problem whenever it turns up in the old testament. And was true for Mary as well. It would have essentially marked her as someone who should not be married, and who would essentially need to be whisked away to be taken care of in disgrace by her own family or taken care of with the widows and the orphans.

Despite knowing all of the baggage and the difficulties that come from such a life experience when God tells her what the plan is, she does not falter. She is confused, not frightened, by the presence of the angel as most people are. When the angel tells her of God's plan for her in contrast

to Zechariah from last week she does not respond with doubt asking for proof, instead she responds simply by asking how?

An honest question given that she has never had sex before. How could she bear a son? And the angel answers her honestly, that the Holy Spirit will come upon her and that God's power will overshadow her. Some vague instructions at best, but to a greek listening audience who is used to hearing about greek god's having sex to impregnate mortals this would have stood as a stark contrast. That God does not require normal means to inhabit this earth.

So having all her questions answered, the Spirit goes to reassure her of God's commitment and power by explaining that her cousin Elizabeth in her "old" age whatever that might mean, is having a child as well.

Mary responds by saying I am the Lord's servant.

She hears the risk, she knows the danger, and by all historical information she was probably 14 at the time, and yet despite all of it she trusts in God to deliver on God's promises and acts on them in the way that she can.

Today is there second Sunday of advent and our theme is peace. I think at the moment probably most of us are chasing a sense of peace. And even though it's the season for things like hope, peace, joy, and love, we often struggle to grasp them during the busiest time of year.

So how does may's story fit into our lives and our advent experience? I think her experience here, though shortly explained, is a strong example for us as christians. When she is faced with a difficult task given to her from God, she asks a few reasonable questions, then trusts in God and decides to dedicate herself to God's plan for her.

I think, this can be a good model for us in our own lives. God often comes into our lives and asks things of us both big and small. Sometimes we don't realize it's God asking, or an angel serving as an intermediary, but we are given choices throughout our lives. To commit ourselves to God, or to follow the way of the rest of the world.

When we are faced wit those tasks, asking a few reasonable clarifying questions of God seems entirely fair to me. How am I going to afford

moving to Scotland? Sometimes, God is kind enough to answer in the moment as with Mary, and other times we just need to be patient for God to deliver the answer.

So, we hear the call, we ask reasonable questions, then the big difficult word comes into play. Trust. Mary trusts God. And says I am your humble servant.

Now, we do not know if Mary says this because she has heard the news about Elizabeth already and has seen God's work in the world already. We don't know if she simply hears the angel's reasoning and immediately trusts him.

I once again think this is a very high bar for us as Christians. Mary has not been given very much time to consider the task set before her and she steels her resolve by the end of the conversation.

It took Alicia and I a few weeks before we were committed to coming to Scotland, and then it was a two year process after that to see it to fruition.

So what are we to take away from this part of the conversation then? I would say we should take our eyes and focus them on the miracles that God has delivered into our lives and continues to deliver to us. I think we should focus on the word of Jesus Christ and his messages to us. I think we should take ourselves at our own word, and see the incredible things that God has done, in the same way that Mary saw what God was doing through Elizabeth.

And take those experiences and not simply write them off as something that can happen to other people. To put value in ourselves, and to trust that God too will take an interest in our lives, and through God anything is possible.

God made use of Mary a child, an unlikely choice for the one to bear the savior. And God will make use of us too. To deliver peace unto the world through our own actions as Mary delivered peace in the form of a Jesus Christ.

This is the word of our Lord.
Thanks be to god. Amen