

A Sermon for Dayspring Baptist Church
By Chris Fillingham
“Becoming the Home”
Luke 1:26-38
The Third Sunday of Advent.
December 13, 2015

“How can this happen?” Mary asks the angel.

I imagine this is the last thing Mary had ever imagined would happen to her for all kinds of reasons. Of course there’s the whole pregnancy thing. Back then, they might not have understood the technical details of it all quite as well as we do. They didn’t know about X-chromosomes’ and Y-chromosomes. But they got the basic biology.

Mary knew enough to know that baby making is a two-person gig and the math didn’t add up. So, of course, the last thing on her short-term radar was diapers and bottles. Sure that was part of the long-range forecast. She was betrothed to Joseph, after all. But the way that process worked back then, it could have still been years before anything happened on that front.

Mary hasn’t been browsing the parenting magazines at Barnes and Nobel. She hasn’t been thinking about baby names or talking to her friends about when they plan to start trying. She’s not taken a second glance at the Sunday ads for Babies-R-Us... you know “just for fun.”

Nope. None of that.
Pregnancy is not on the radar.

Which makes you wonder what was, doesn’t it? After all, ***we all*** have some picture of what the next year will bring, don’t we? Sure, the details are fuzzy, but the outline is there.

If you’re a teenager, like Mary probably was, then you’re probably thinking about finishing this grade and moving on to the next, maybe moving on to High School... maybe college.

Maybe you’re teenage years are long gone, so for you it looks different. You’ve set some professional goals at work, or personal goals at home.

Maybe there is some real struggle you know you’ll have to face next year.

Of course, I have no idea what Mary imagined the next year would be like. Maybe wedding planning? Maybe helping out at home. Maybe just the normal rhythm of life in Nazareth as a dedicated young Jewish women... honoring the Sabbath, worshipping God, doing chores, putting up with her brothers, trying to not get caught up in gossip, loving your neighbor as yourself.

We have no idea what Mary **thought** her life was going to be like. But one thing we can be sure of, **it was not this**. And the pregnancy is just the tip of the iceberg. There's the scandal. Her reputation would be permanently ruined.

People would assume that the whole **"Gentle Mary, meek and mild"** thing was an act. She could just hear the neighbors whispering. **"More like Temptress Mary, hot and wild,"** they would say. That's not the reputation she'd worked all these years for.

And then, of course, there's Joseph.
This does not bode well for their engagement.

"How can this happen?" Mary asks the angel.

It's the second time that Gabriel has shown up in Luke chapter 1 and told someone they are going to have an impossible child. The first, of course, being Zechariah. And that whole exchange was pretty similar.

Zechariah's question, **"How can I be sure?"** sounds an awful lot like Mary's **"How can this be?"** But Mary doesn't get in trouble for her question, which seems a bit sexist if you ask me.

I'm not sure if Gabriel was in a better mood that day or if he just has a soft spot for Mary, being that she was going to be the mother of his Lord. Or maybe, by the second time around Gabriel has just resigning to the fact that it's a fair question.

"How can this be?" It's the only thing you can say when you get news like she's just gotten. **"You're going to be pregnant. And by the way, the child is going to be called the Son of God, and he will sit on David's throne."**

And Mary's thinking, "Wait, what?"
This doesn't **at all** fit in the picture she has of "How things can be" for her.

Yes, she's shocked. And no, it's not just the baby. It's the whole package. It's the appearance of an angel. It's the prophecy of who this baby is supposed to be. None of it is anywhere in the possibilities of what this next year is supposed to look like for her.

The closest I can come to getting this kind of topsy-turvy news was the day I was standing in Dr. Sandy's office, while she was giving Jessi a sonogram. You all know the story. We'd already had two textbook pregnancies... about as boring and straight forward as could be... just the way you want them.

We were now into our third pregnancy and we knew the ropes. In fact, we didn't even go into see the doctor right away. No need to. We knew what to expect when you're expecting; we could have written the 2nd edition. We were pros.

As Dr. Minchow-Proffitt started the sonogram, I look over to the screen. I knew how to read sonograms by now. I'd been through this with the other two. If you seen one sonogram, you've seen a thousand.

And there it was, the nice black circle... and something white appeared on the left side of the screen. Then it faded away and something white appeared on the right side of the screen. And back and forth it went as Dr. Proffitt moved the wand across Jessi's belly.

"That's odd," I thought to myself. **"Why is the imagine flipping like that? It's like a mirror image of itself, or something"** And then came the news: Well, looks like there are two in there.

I won't tell you some of the really dumb things I said about how often she was going to be feeding... or how big she was going to get... or about the procedure that I needed to get signed up for. Let's just say, it wasn't my brightest moment. My only defense is that I was in a complete daze like none other. **"How can this be?"** I honestly couldn't get my head around it.

So, I can only imagine how disorienting this moment must have been for Mary. At least the angel announcing to us was someone we new, and she didn't throw in a ringer like **"by the way, you've got to parent the Savior of the world, so don't mess this up."**

"How can this be?" Mary asks. Of course she does. It's the question almost anyone would ask when you find out *that God is about to birth something completely unexpected in your life.*

Just so you know, when it happens to you, it could be all kinds of things. It probably won't be a baby. Chances are, it won't be that obvious. And you probably won't know it's coming. It's likely to be the last thing you'd ever expect.

And it can come in all kinds of packages.

There might be some surprising invitation,
a completely unexpected turn of events and next thing you know you hear it, **"Greetings, favored one, the Lord is with you."** And then, in an instant, what seemed like a very ordinary life you've been living will get turned upside down on it's head... because you've just found out that God is about to birth something all together new in you!

And in that moment if you ask **"how can this be"** you may just get the same answer that Mary received, ***"That stirring inside of you, is the seed of the Holy Spirit planting within you. And that shadow over you, that's the power of the Most High coming upon you."*** (Barbra Brown Taylor)

You see, what happened for Mary is both the completely unique story of the incarnation, and at the same time, a paradigm for us all, a paradigm of the coming of God into our lives... with an announcement and an invitation to allow God do something completely unexpected with us,

something we might have never imagined,
something that might toss all our well made plans up in the air.

Mary's story is the picture of what it looks when your life, your body, becomes the womb that will grow God's salvation for the world. Yes, that announcement is all together confusing and unbelievable. But here's the good news. You don't have to understand it. *You simply have to allow it.*

That's the movement that Mary makes. And maybe that's the real difference between her and Zachariah. She didn't ask for proof or assurances. She simply asked for understanding, and in the face of the great mystery, she simply surrenders herself : **"I am the Lord's servant,"** she says. **"Let it be so."**

This is the great moment of faith at the beginning of the gospels. All that is about to happen in the life of this coming child, flows from her **"Let it be so..."**

...her surrendering

...her allowing what God would do in her and through her.

As she says "yes" to God in this moment, the life of God begins to grow within her. And when it grows to it's fullness, it becomes the very salvation of the world.

It's this same **"allowing"**, this **"let it be so"**, that God is waiting to hear from us. There is a significant shift that happens here. It's a movement from simply preparing a place for God in our lives, as if God could be contained to just one area of our lives, to joining with Mary in becoming, ourselves, the very home in which God dwells.

This can happen for you. It is the invitation that God is making for you this Advent season. It is the announcement that Gabriel is whispering in your ears.

Your stomach, rolling with your own version of morning sickness, is most likely the stirring of the Spirit within you and the power of the Most High overshadowing you. All you have to do, is allow it, let it be so, as God would have it be.

To do that, I want to invite you into a kind of prayer, a meditation, this morning. We're going to adapt Mary's words as our own, and we're going to repeat them again and again... so that we might allow them to gradually become our prayer this day.

This will feel strange for some of us. That's OK. I want to invite you participate with me anyway. Try and surrender to this practice this morning.

Start by closing your eyes,
take a deep breath,
and repeat after me,

“I am the Lord’s servant.”

“Let it be so.” [repeat 3 times]

Open yourself up to what God wants to birth within you. Allow the Seed of the Spirit to be planted within you.

Breath in:

“I am the Lord’s servant.”

“Let it be so.” [continue repeating 4-5 more times]