

Christmas Eve 2018

I didn't have a typical sermon for this service. Instead there were "mini-messages" at various points in the service. - Bruce

WELCOME

I'm no mind reader, but my guess is that you're probably a little distracted right now. You're thinking of the 95 things you have to get done before tomorrow morning. And this service is just one of the things on your to-do list: buy food, wrap presents, go to church, prepare food, etc., etc. You may have had difficulty getting away to even come here tonight.

That's OK. Life is like that. Now that we're here, let's focus ourselves on Jesus, the one whose birth we have come to celebrate. Tonight we'll hear the Scriptures being read, telling of his coming. We'll ponder what they mean to us today. We'll sing about the good news of God's love for us coming to us in the flesh.

As we worship, let us not merely hear the message of God's truth. Let us experience it.

Let's begin with prayer. But rather than repeating words together, let's eavesdrop on Kim who is praying. Maybe her prayer can be your prayer, too.

OPENING PRAYER

Here I am, God, reporting for duty.
No, not really. Sometimes it feels like that, though. I come to church, go through the motions, go home again. Is that what religion is all about?
There is a part of me which longs for something more than that. I'm just not sure what it is. And if I ever find it, how will I know that I've got it?
I'm hungry for something more... more substantial, more meaningful, more real. Not just in worship, but in life itself.
More of you, I guess. Yeah, that's it. You can't get any more substantial than God.
I say that I believe in you. I pray to you. I try to follow your commandments. But I'd like to, you know, *know* you. What makes you tick. What ticks you off. (Do I tick you off?) Whoa, that's scary. So, Lord, tonight I'm not going to sit back and watch. I'm going to participate. All these people have taken time tonight just to be here with you. There must be something going on. I want to be part of it. I want to be part of you. Amen.

BIBLE READING: Luke 1:26-38 Mary's story

Introduction to Mary

Bible scholars tell us that in this era, the typical age for marriage was fourteen or fifteen. A Jewish boy would go through his Bar Mitzvah at the age of twelve; that meant that he was now a man. It would be similar for a girl. They would usually be engaged to be married by age fourteen, and a year later would come the marriage ceremony.

That means that when Mary received this message, she was probably about fourteen years old. Can you picture yourself being fourteen years old, and learning:

- I'm going to be pregnant. I'm going to have a baby.
- But I'm not married yet, and Joseph and I haven't touched each other in that way. Who will believe me if I say the baby is from God?
- This is not an ordinary baby. He will be the Messiah, the Saviour of our people. And I'm to be his mother.

Let's listen in to what Mary might have been thinking after learning what God has planned.

1) Mary: How do I tell them? ¹

Mom, I know you have a hard time with change, so this will be especially difficult for you. I don't really know how to tell you this. Let me just start by saying that I love you. I really love you and...

(to herself) No, she'll panic if I start with the "I love you" lines. What am I saying? She's going to panic sooner or later.

(then back to the mirror)

I just have to tell you that I'm expecting.

I'm pregnant.

I'm going to have a baby.

I'm a mother.

I will be a mother.

Guess what?

I'm great with child.

I'm in a family way.

You're going to be a grandmother.

(to herself) Absolutely not that one!

¹ "Mary: How do I tell them" is a resource from Lifeway. Used with permission.

(to herself) I can't just come out with it like that. I'll start from the beginning.

(to the mirror) Mom, I was visited by an angel. I had a vision. I'm telling the truth; the truth is here.

(to herself) I sound like a lying witness in a courtroom.

(to herself) Maybe I should start by telling Joseph. If I could convince him, maybe we could both sit down and tell Mom and Dad. They respect Joseph. Sometimes I think they respect him more than me.

(in the mirror) Joseph, I love you with all my heart. You know I do. I'd never be unfaithful to you. You've been away at college, and we haven't seen each other much over the past couple of weeks. But you have to believe me. *(takes a deep breath)* An angel visited me and told me that I am pregnant with God's baby. *(to herself, as if still amazed by the words)* God's baby

It's the truth. *(to God)* I guess that's all that matters now, Lord. I'm going to have to wait. I need to tell them and wait, even if they don't understand. The angel said I was favoured by God.

You said I shouldn't be afraid. I have to admit, hearing from an angel is not nearly as frightening as telling my Mom and Dad I'm going to have a baby.

Joseph and I vowed to each other that we would be virgins until we were married. Now what is he going to think? What will he say? Lord, I felt honoured at first, but now I'm not sure. I need your strength and your boldness to even tell the people I love most, but then there's the kids at school, the teachers, and the people at church. What will they say behind my back? What kind of wonderful adjectives will they use to describe the latest case of teen pregnancy? Lord, I need you now more than I've ever needed you before.

BIBLE READING: Matthew 1:18-25 Joseph's story
We're not going to visit with Joseph tonight. I'll leave it your imagination to wonder what he must have been wondering through all of this.

BIBLE READING: Luke 2:1-7 Jesus is born

BIBLE READING: Luke 2:8-20 the shepherds' story

CLOSING PRAYER

Let's listen in as Kim prays once again...

Mary said, "I am the Lord's servant. May it be to me as you have said."

So often my prayers are like, "Lord, do this, and please do that." In other words, "My will be done." Mary's prayer was, "God, your will be done."

She shows a depth of faith which I don't even come close to. And she was a fourteen year old girl, facing a situation beyond anything I've ever faced.

Lord, may I have that kind of faith. I suppose you can't trust someone you don't know. That just confirms all the more my desire to know you, Lord.

I have no idea what's going to happen tomorrow or next week or next year. But if you're with me – and you've promised that, and I'm learning to trust you – then I'm not worried. Alright, let's go. Amen.