

Mary: A Call to Provide - Luke 1:26-38

Pastor Jon Haakana

December 3/4, 2016

William Cooke and Charles Wheatstone were British inventors in the 1830's. They are credited with the breakthrough technology in communications that enabled the first telegram to be sent via an electric telegraph system. On January 11, 1838, Samuel Morse sent the first telegram in the United States across two miles of wire at Speedwell Ironworks near Morristown, New Jersey. While the telegram continued to gain momentum as a means for delivering messages, people became anxious at their arrival because they often contained bad news.

A death has occurred.

An accident has happened.

A sickness has spread.

A war has begun.

Tragic news in short phrases is hard to receive.

However, in 1933 Western Union, the American telegraph company began offering singing telegrams as a way to make receiving messages more enjoyable and even fun. George P. Oslin was the public relations director of Western Union at the time that is credited with this new twist for receiving messages. Suddenly, receiving messages turned into something more exciting and popular. Mr. Oslin asked Western Union operator, Lucille Lipps (I am not making this up), to sing the message over the telephone; this became the first singing telegram. From that day forward an entire industry was born that enabled messages to be sent and received creatively with flare, fanfare, and even embarrassment at times.

While God did not see fit to send a singing telegram to deliver the message of the coming Messiah, Mary certainly would have described the angel's arrival as anything but ordinary or mundane. Luke's gospel records the unexpected message that was delivered by Gabriel, the angel, and received by Mary, the young maiden, from Nazareth. It was the opposite of bad news. In fact, it would become the start of good news, the gospel that would lead to salvation for all who would receive it into their lives as a personal message.

This message from the angel was anything but tragic or sad. On the contrary, this unbelievable news from the lips of Gabriel to the ears of Mary was a call to provide. Every Jewish girl prayed and dreamed of the privilege of her womb one day being the one to carry and provide the long awaited Messiah of God's people. The thought of being chosen to be a part of the plan that would provide the rescuer, redeemer, and savior for Israel was a hope and a future any young Jewish lady would be honored to experience. And it's just like God to extend the Call of Christmas to come forth from the place, person, and circumstances that we see in the story.

Luke 1:26 sets the stage for us. "In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth..." The city of Nazareth is quite a contrast to the city of Jerusalem. If a city was to provide a carrier for the Messiah, it seems like Jerusalem would be much more of a natural option. Jerusalem was the center of the Jewish world. Nazareth was off the beaten path. It was accessible to trade routes, but one had to want to go to Nazareth to get there. Jerusalem was seen as significant; Nazareth seemed insignificant. John 1:46 records the contemporary Judean opinion of Nazareth. "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?"

And the region of Galilee was such a contrast to the region of Judea. The former was out in the country; the latter had a wilderness but was known for the big city. Galilee was rough around the edges and anything but Kosher in their kitchens. Judea was much more polished, prim and proper and followed all the religious rules. But at the end of the day, God sends an angel both to

Jerusalem to give a message to a priest in the temple just as quickly as He seeks out a quaint town on the outskirts of the country hills in Nazareth for a visitation. All real estate on the earth is an equal opportunity for God to do something great and place a call to provide for the next part of His plan. No matter if you live in the big city or out in the country, on the right side of the tracks or the wrong side, in the high tax bracket neighborhoods or below the poverty line, God knows where you are and how to send a message your way. He is calling you this Christmas!

Wherever you are this Christmas, God can use you to be a part of His plan and to do His will. You never are off the grid when it comes to God and his location services. He is aware of your whereabouts and has plans for you regardless of where you come from or where you live.

Verse 27 goes on to tell us about the one with the womb who would be called upon to provide the savior would be a most unlikely candidate in the eyes of the world. God sent Gabriel "to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary."

The fact that it states Mary was "betrothed" to Joseph meant they were not merely engaged. A Jewish engagement resulted in a marital status which, though unconsummated, was as sacred as marriage itself. The consummation would come later, but the commitment and covenant were just as strong beforehand in the eyes of that culture and time. The fact that she is signified as a virgin harkens back to the prophecy of the Messiah from Isaiah that all Jews would be aware of in that day. "Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel." Isaiah 7:14

And the name stated in Isaiah's prophecy we just noted from 7:14 for the coming Messiah was Immanuel. The meaning: God with us. The Lord is with you. The Call of Christmas is a reminder that the Lord is with you. The call of Mary is a call to provide. Only a favored one in the eyes of God would be given the privilege and the call to provide the Christ-child who soon would be with us in the form of a baby from her womb. The fact that she was a virgin would mean God would have to be the one to create inside of her this one she was being called to provide for the salvation of the world. Such a call to motherhood in this fashion would be frightening to consider. But the appearance and speaking from an angelic visitor would cause one to be full of fear as well. Verse 29 and following confirms such an emotion.

"But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. And the angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.'" Luke 1:29-33

Names are indicative of parental hopes, and this name certainly would stir the hopes of God's people. The name, 'Jesus,' means "the Lord is salvation." She was being called to provide the womb and nurturing motherhood for the salvation that would be put in her provided place from the Lord. She was not the one who was the source of such grace as some have supposed. It was God who chose to put His favor on her and create the salvation source in her that would be provided through her because of the goodness and favor from God.

The theological truth being: Mary by herself could not produce a son, but God could give her one whose name, Jesus, means "God saves." This, in essence, is the gospel: humans cannot produce their own salvation, but God can and has chosen to accomplish it for all of humanity. He just desired for the Call of Christmas to come through the womb of a virgin from a remote country village. Mary's call was a call to provide what God had decided. She provided herself, and God would do the rest. As Mary is processing the message from the angel that certainly

was no singing telegram, she did so by asking a logical question. She knew that she had not been with Joseph yet, or any man in that regard, that possibly could have led to such a conception in her womb.

In verse 34 Mary responds: "How will this be, since I am a virgin?"

This was not a statement of unbelief. Rather, it was a question of trying to understand. God never gets tired or frustrated with our honest questions. He invites us to stay curious as we seek to understand who He is and what He wants us to do and become in our lives.

Mary was going to have to trust God with the details. A promise was being made to Mary that only could come true to fulfillment if God provided the details. Mary was being called into the promise; her part was to provide the womb that would lead to a legacy of salvation from sin, death, Satan and hell. God provided the details. Mary provided her life as real estate to be claimed, developed and turned into a home base for the fulfillment of the promise to take place. It was a call to provide. And only God had the power to do it and make the promise come true. Mary had the opportunity to join God in the call of Christmas.

Gabriel explained God's plan to Mary's question of 'how?' in verse 35: "And the angel answered her, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God.'"

As Luke writes of this conversation, he mentions the Holy Spirit. The reason this is so important is that Luke does not want his readers to forget that the Call of Christmas is wrapped in the activity and working of the Holy Spirit. Verse 35 references that not only will the Holy Spirit come upon Mary with this incredible detail of how this promise is going to come to fruition, Luke also notes that God's power is going to "overshadow" Mary in the process.

The word for 'overshadow' in the original language is episkiazo and carries the sense of the holy, powerful presence of God. God's presence through his Holy Spirit is going to be overpowering and at work in such a way that it is clear something holy is happening in our midst.

There are places on the earth where the moment you walk into it there is a sense that you are standing on holy ground. The great Cathedrals of Europe that cause a person to look up and feel small as the massive arches ascend towards the heavens can have this effect. When a choir fills the cavernous space with angelic voices that reverberate throughout, a person can have a feeling of being overshadowed, episkiazo, by the presence of God's Holy Spirit.

The overshadowing Spirit, therefore, not only protects but also creates. It brings about conception in Mary's womb that she provides. The Call of Christmas for Mary is a Call to Provide. N.T. Wright goes on to suggest, "The Holy Spirit will come upon Mary, enabling her (as the Spirit always does) to do and be more than she could by herself. But at the same time, the 'power of the Most High' will overshadow her. This is something different: God Himself, the Creator, will surround her completely with his sovereign power."

God's power from outside, and the indwelling Spirit within, together result in things being done which would have been unthinkable any other way. At the same time, God supernaturally is providing the details of how the Messiah will be born inside the womb provided by Mary. Notice the kindness of God in how He provides someone to walk alongside Mary during this unique time of her calling.

"And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. For nothing will be impossible with God." Luke

1:36-37

Mary responded with trust and submission to God's will in verse 38 because she believed what the angel reminded her of in verse 37. "For nothing will be impossible with God." And Mary said, 'Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.' And the angel departed from her." The fact that nothing is impossible with God is one of the most hopeful statements of reality found in the entire Bible.

What is your "impossible" this Christmas that the Lord wants to remind you is not impossible with Him? Is your "impossible" a situation at work, at school, with your finances, your marriage, a strained relationship with your kids that seems all but lost? Is your "impossible" a slate of responsibilities that feels crippling and consuming? Is your "impossible" a never ending debt payment that soaks up all you make and leaves you with little to live on without taking on more debt?

What if your Call of Christmas is a reminder that nothing is impossible when the Savior is on the scene? What if your call is like Mary's: a call to provide God space to take up residence within your life and begin to work? What if God wants you to provide real estate in your life that can be overshadowed by Him as His Holy Spirit goes to work on you, in you and through your life circumstances?

The process may be painful but necessary for something new to be created. It may require counseling. It may include a total budget rework. It may be cause for confession and a request for forgiveness. But whatever God may lead you to do in your "impossible", know that you will not be asked to walk alone. He is with you. He is Immanuel. He is Jesus. The Lord is salvation. All you need to do is provide the Spirit of God space in your life to take up residence and begin a new work in you. Mary did. And her call of Christmas was a call to provide her whole self to grow the Son of God inside her womb.

What might you ask God to produce in you as you answer His call this Christmas? Will you provide all of who you are to all of who God is? Listen for His Call this Christmas. In Jesus. Amen.