

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church
Paul Gunn, Pastor
Christmas Characters Advent Series

WHEN GOD TELLS YOU TO DO SOMETHING HARD (MARY)

Luke 1:26-38

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INTRODUCTION: Today is the first Sunday of the Advent season. This month, we are going to have sermons based around the Christmas Characters of the Advent. Most of us are very familiar with Mary, Joseph, the shepherds, and the Wise Men. However, this December we are going to think about these people in a different way. We are going to consider their part in the Christmas story and what they can teach us about how to live by faith.

Today we will read about Mary and consider her example of how to respond when God gives us a hard job. Today's sermon has three points:

- Talk to God about it.
- Listen to what God has to say.
- Submit to God's will.

SCRIPTURE: Luke 1:26-29

In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, ²⁷ to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸ The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you." ²⁹ Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be.

EXPLANATION: Mary was a young, virtuous woman who lived in Nazareth, a small and poor village in Galilee. She was probably between the age of 12 and 16, the typical age that Jewish girls became women and got married. Mary was engaged to Joseph. During this time in history, in this culture, an engagement was as binding as our marital commitments. The couple may have been waiting for Joseph to build

a home for them or for Mary to reach a certain age before the ceremony and consummation of the marriage, but legally and morally speaking, they were bound together.

As a Godly Israelite woman, Mary would have been very familiar with the Old Testament prophecies about the Savior. She would have also known the stories about the Old Testament saints and prophets, how angels often delivered messages to people God chose for divine missions. Still, I am sure that nothing could have prepared her for seeing an angel in person. While the appearance of an angel was a blessed event, Mary was smart enough to know that angelic messages often meant difficult assignments. Mary was favored, but she was also curious and scared.

1-TALK TO GOD ABOUT IT

SCRIPTURE: Luke 1:30-34

But the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. ³¹ You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. ³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, ³³ and he will reign over Jacob’s descendants forever; his kingdom will never end.” ³⁴ “How will this be,” Mary asked the angel, “since I am a virgin?”

EXPLANATION: The angel told Mary that she had found favor with God and would become pregnant with his son. Because we have the benefit of hindsight, we know that this was a blessed event, but for Mary, this news might not have sounded completely favorable. To have a child outside of wedlock was not common or accepted during this time in history. Imagine how scary this situation was for her. She had to have known that many people would not believe her. Many people would think the worst.

Having just been given this life-changing news, Mary asked a single question. “How can this be?” Questioning a divine message might seem like a mistake. However, Mary was not being disrespectful; she was genuinely curious. She had just been told that she was going to have a baby, and she knew that was not physically possible since she was a virgin.

At the beginning of this chapter, before Mary's story, there is the story of another miraculous conception. An angel appeared to the priest, Zechariah, and told him that he and his wife would conceive a son in their old age. Zechariah also asked a similar question. "*How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years.*" The angel was not pleased with Zechariah's question, and because of it, Zechariah lost the ability to speak until after his son's birth.

What was the difference? Why was Mary's question OK, but Zechariah's was not? The answer lies within the heart. Zechariah was a priest. He was well aware of what God could do. He knew of God's providence. He was also married. He knew how babies are made, and, therefore, knew what he and Elizabeth needed to do. His question, then, did not come out of a need for further explanation or a genuine desire to understand. His question was the result of a doubting heart. Basically, he was saying, "Really? I do not think you're telling me the truth. Prove it."

Mary was young. She was a virgin, and she genuinely did not know what she was supposed to do or how God was going to work this out. She was not afraid to ask an honest question because it was not out of arrogance or doubt. She was confident enough in her relationship with God to know that a question did not mean she would lose that relationship.

APPLICATION: It makes me think that in her life, Mary had asked God difficult questions. Perhaps questions like we have. Why do bad things happen to good people? Had she asked, why did my relative die young or why did that tragedy happen?

In our lives, God will sometimes ask us to do difficult things. God may ask you to share your testimony. God may ask you to take a stand against something that is wrong. God will ask you at some time or other in your Christian life to do something hard. It's part of that living by faith. Perhaps he will ask you to go through a hard season to demonstrate your faith in him and draw closer to him.

We all have to be prepared to do the hard things that God tells us to do. Mary was not afraid to talk to God, and we do not have to be either. God already knows our confusion, our frustration, our fears, even our anger. 1 Peter 5:7 says that we should "*cast our fears on Him.*" Philippians 4:6 tells us to "*pray about everything.*" God

wants to hear from us. We may not always get the five-year-plan. He may not always give us the answer we want, but when we ask with believing hearts, God welcomes the conversation. When he gives you a hard job,

- Talk to God about it.

2- LISTEN TO WHAT GOD HAS TO SAY

SCRIPTURE: Luke 1:34-37

The angel answered, “The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. ³⁶ Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. ³⁷ For no word from God will ever fail.”

EXPLANATION: Notice that the angel did not really explain a lot. I am sure Mary was still confused. He did not spell things out for her. He did, however, give her some exciting news. He told her something that no one else around her knew. He told her that her relative, Elizabeth, was going to have a child. We can be certain that no one else knew this because earlier in the chapter Luke said that Elizabeth hid her pregnancy for the first five months. Since they did not live in the same village, it’s unlikely that Mary or her family knew about the pregnancy until the angel told them.

God often works this way. He does not give us a lot of details, but he reminds us of His faithfulness in our lives and in the lives of the people we know. Still, God is a God of details and he cares about the small things. He didn’t choose to not reveal details to Mary because they weren’t important, but because she didn’t need to know them.

What if Mary had known some of the details?

- What if she had known that Joseph would privately wonder if he should break off the betrothal?
- What if the angel told Mary that she would give birth far away from her family, in a barn, after having traveled on a donkey?
- What if she had been informed that she would watch her son crucified on a cross?

The angel used Elizabeth as an example of God's faithfulness. Imagine if Mary had missed that part of the message? What if she had shut down after verse 35? John 8:47 reminds us that *"anyone who belongs to God listens gladly to the words of God."* Romans 10:17 tells us that *"faith comes from hearing."*

Hearing about the Lord's work in Elizabeth's life helped strengthen Mary's faith. Like Mary, when we receive surprising news, an unplanned announcement, or a difficult assignment, we can:

- Talk to God about it.
- Listen to what God has to say. Most importantly, we should:

3-SUBMIT TO GOD'S WILL

SCRIPTURE: Luke 1:38

"I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled." Then the angel left her.

EXPLANATION: Make no mistake. Mary was human, and, as such, she had to be scared. She was going to face questions and doubts from the people around her. She was going to experience changes in her body. Being the Savior's mother had to be daunting. But Mary did not argue with God. She did not try to reason her way out of what was happening. She did not request an alternate plan. Mary submitted. She accepted God's authority and yielded to His will. She said, "OK, Lord. Whatever you want." It's the same response God expects from us.

ILLUSTRATION: What's the craziest thing God ever asked you to do? One famous Bible teacher tells the story of how God asked her to comb an elderly gentleman's hair in the airport. Turned out, the man had been hospitalized and away from his wife for months. He was worried about how ragged he looked. The teacher ministered to him by combing his hair and sharing God's love. Another time, God asked a family to give away their vehicle. They did, and God provided a replacement for them. A missionary family was experiencing success after several years of hardship, but God asked them to leave their growing ministry and go to another area where the need was dire.

APPLICATION: God called Mary to a difficult task. Sometimes he will call us to do hard things too. Mary’s difficult job turned out to be the beginning of the Gospel story—the greatest news the world has ever heard. It’s only when we submit that we experience the blessing. When he asks you to do something,

- Talk to God about it.
- Listen to what God has to say.
- Submit to God’s will.

INVITATION: Mary is one of the most popular characters in the Christmas story. She is the mother of Jesus, but before that, she was already a follower of God. Her life provides us with an example of how to respond to God’s call.

What is God asking you to do today? Proverbs 3:5-6 says, *“Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; ⁶ in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.”* The first call upon any person’s life is the call of salvation. Do you know Christ as your Savior? He will forgive you and lead you into a life of obedience. If you already have a personal relationship with Jesus, then consider what he wants you to do for him. Maybe God has asked you to do something. Is it something hard? Is he leading you through a difficult season? How will you answer his call?

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Thanks to Jennifer Anderson for her editing assistance.

Sincerely, Paul Gunn
Tusculum Hills Baptist Church
Nashville, Tennessee
USA