

Wesley United Methodist Church

December 24, 2017

“Lessons from a Girl in Trouble.”

Luke 1:26-38

As a little girl climbed up into Santa’s lap, Santa asked the usual, “And what would you like for Christmas?” The little girl just stared at Santa with her mouth open and horrified look on her face for a minute, and then she gasped: “Didn’t you get my e-mail?”

That had to have been the same sort of horrified look that Mary must have had on her face when the angel of the Lord appeared to her and spoke to her about God’s purpose for her life. Read Luke 1:26-38.

No wonder the angels always begin their greeting to us with the words, “Do not be afraid.” I don’t think the angel was so much calming Mary’s fears over the angel’s appearance, but rather because the message the angel was bringing.

I’ve always wondered how Mary truly reacted. If she was anything like me, it wasn’t an instant decision. When God called me to become a pastor, my first reaction was, “Not now, Lord” And when God said that he was serious, I pulled a Jonah and ran in the other direction. When I got here, God was waiting for me. The last thing I wanted to do, at that time, was a preacher. I thought about this for a couple years and had legitimate excuses. Finally, I grew tired fighting God and said, “Yes!”

I’ve admired Mary and her response for a long time. She doesn’t appear to have argued like I did. The only question she asked was, “How.” “How can this be?” Maybe Mary had a deeper sense of purpose in her life at the time of her calling than I did.

Mary was “in trouble.” A married woman gets pregnant and we say that she is “in a family way,” or “expecting.” But when an unmarried girl gets pregnant, we say she is “in trouble.” She was going to have a baby and she wasn’t married.

One day, out of the clear blue sky, with no warning, an angel from God came to Mary and told her she was going to have a baby. The news was understandably frightening. Mary wondered what in the world was going on. But the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus.” It was the kind of news that can wake one up very fast.

For Mary this news was confusing. “How can this be,” she asked, “since I have no husband.” “How can I have a baby without that?” she wondered. The angel explained, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you...”

Mary was not the only one affected by the angel’s news and its development. Her parents, about whom we are told nothing, surely must have suspected their daughter, wondering what in the world she had been up to. She was engaged to a man named Joseph, and scripture tells us he not only suspected the worst, but was ready to act on his suspicions. One can hardly blame the poor man. Mary had gone away to the hill country of Judea to visit her relative Elizabeth, who was also pregnant. She was gone three months. Shortly after she got back the tell-tale signs of her pregnancy began to show. Joseph jumped to logical conclusions: Mary had been unfaithful.

It took an angel from the Lord to change his mind. After Joseph prepared himself quietly, and with as much kindness as possible, to break off his relationship with Mary, an angel came to him and told him to go ahead with his plans to marry the girl, because that which had been conceived in her “was of the Holy Spirit.” It was all part of God’s promise, the angel told Joseph, the promise through Isaiah: “Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son and his name shall be Emmanuel, which means, God with us.”

The birth of Jesus was a miracle, a true miracle! Unlike so many things which are labeled miracles in our day, things which are nothing more than God’s grace at work, the birth of our Lord was a miracle.

In the miraculous birth of Christ there are some good lessons to learn, lessons that will help us live each day of our lives to God’s glory and our benefit. There are two lessons especially for us to note. The first is obedience; the second is trust.

God wants us to obey him. Mary and Joseph obeyed God. I am sure that it wasn’t easy for them to do that. There must have been a lot of hassles in their life. What God asked each of them was extremely demanding. But they obeyed God. Joseph did what he was given to do, and Mary did what God gave her to do.

Ever since Eve’s decision to disobey God, we have been faced with a constant battle to obey him. The temptation is always there to do what we want to do instead what God wants. We like to decide for ourselves what is right and wrong, what is good and bad. In every aspect of life, we struggle with obedience.

Beyond faith, what God wants from us more than anything else is obedience. No matter how difficult or unpleasant a task he lays before us, God wants us to obey him. “Be doers of the word and not hearers only” we read in James 1:22.

Jesus said, "If anyone loves me, he will keep my words...and my Father will love him and we will come unto him and make our home with him" John 14:23. Jesus nowhere promises obedience will be easy; but he does promise that the Father will love us for it.

The second lesson is trust. We are to trust God the way Mary and Joseph did. Mary's trust was so complete that she told the angel after hearing all he had to tell her, "I am the Lord's servant. May it be to me as you have said."

Trust him because he is the God who does the impossible. Trust him because he is the God who brings good out of bad things. Mary got in trouble; how awful. Through that God brought the Savior Jesus into the world; how wonderful. Trust God because he works for good in all things with those who love him. Mary trusted God and was rewarded with the gift of the Savior, a gift the virgin shares with us, with all who trust in God.

"Don't be afraid," the angel told Mary. God says the same to us. Do not be afraid to obey and to trust me. I will never let you down for I am with you always. I gave my Son as a living guarantee. Amen.