

This morning we move closer to Christmas as we consider *The Reason for the Season*. The manger scene occupies center stage of all Christmas celebrations. And the occupants of every manger scene spotlight the reason for the season.

Mary = Trusting an Unknown Future to an All-Knowing God.

Mary, the virgin mother of Jesus, faced an unknown future, which led her to place that future in the hands of an All-knowing God. A close look at Mary life reveals a life of risks. Luke's account of the birth of Christ magnifies the role of Mary as the mother of Jesus Messiah. Luke chapter 2 spotlights the most recited portion of the Christmas story. However, Luke 2 only makes sense when introduced by Luke 1.

Luke 1:26) In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, 27) to a virgin engaged to a man named Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. 28) And the angel came to her and said, "*Greetings, favored woman! The Lord is with you.*" 29) But she was deeply troubled by this statement, wondering what kind of greeting this could be. 30) Then the angel told her: "*Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.*" 31) *Now listen: You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus.* 32) *He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David.* 33) *He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and his kingdom will have no end.*" 34) Mary asked the angel, "*How can this be, since I have not had sexual relations with a man?*" 35) The angel replied to her: "*The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore, the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.*" 36) *And consider your relative Elizabeth – even she has conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month for her who was called childless.* 37) *For nothing will be impossible with God.*" 38) "*I am the Lord's servant,*" said Mary. "*May it be done to me according to your word.*" Then the angel left her.

Clearly, Jesus' birth intervened a miracle, because the woman God chose to be the birth mother of His Son was a virgin. In Jewish culture, engagement and marriage equally united a man and a woman – both could be broken only by divorce. So when Mary embraced the assignment of being the virgin mother of the Messiah, she took enormous social and cultural risks.

- **Mary risked family rejection.** An unwed pregnant girl created incredible shame and disgrace in Jewish culture. What has become common place in 21st century culture was out of place in 1st century culture.

- **Mary risked public scorn.** Imagine the gossip in a small town and community.
- **Mary risked losing her fiancé.** In first century Israel, a women's only hope of a comfortable lifestyle hinged on marriage to a husband who could support her. Upon discovery of Mary's pregnancy, Joseph could have walked away from the engagement.
- **Mary risked her own life.** According to the Levitical code, if a woman severed an engagement by becoming pregnant with another man's child, she would be stoned to death. Mary put her life in jeopardy!

Mary embraced these risks because she was willing to trust her unknown future to her all-knowing God. Mary demonstrates for us the heart of Christmas. Trusting an unknown future to an all-knowing God means taking risks! But remember, Nothing is Impossible with God! What risks are you willing to take this Christmas?

****Song = *Mary Did You Know* will be sung here.**

Joseph = Standing Between What God Says and What Makes Sense

Joseph portrays the forgotten main character of Christmas. In our manger scenes, he's just sort of "there." While Luke focused on Mary, Matthew spotlights Joseph's key role as the earthly father of Jesus Messiah.

Matthew 1:18) The birth of Jesus Christ came about this way: After his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, it was discovered before they came together that she was pregnant from the Holy Spirit. 19) So her husband Joseph, being a righteous man, and not wanting to disgrace her publicly, decided to divorce her secretly. 20) But after he had considered these things, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "*Joseph, son of David, don't be afraid to take Mary as your wife, because what has been conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.*" 21) *She will give birth to a son, and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.*" 22) Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet: 23) *See, the virgin will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and they will name him Immanuel, which is translated "God is with us."* 24) When Joseph woke up, he did as the Lord's angel had commanded him. He married her 25) but did not have sexual relations with her until she gave birth to a son. And he named him Jesus.

Mary embraced risks. Joseph faced dilemmas. Three questions identify Joseph's Dilemmas.

▪ **Joseph's Dilemma = Why me?** Joseph emerged from a plain family, not a prominent lineage. A carpenter by craft, his dream involved marrying his sweetheart, fathering a family, and living “happily ever after” in his hometown of Nazareth. But this announcement by the angel shattered his plan.

▪ **Joseph's Dilemma = Why her?** Why choose Mary? She's just an ordinary girl. Scripture affirms clearly that Joseph cared deeply for Mary. He positioned her feelings above his own. His concern involved what people would think about her, not him. Why her?

▪ **Joseph's Dilemma = Why him?** Joseph must have wondered why God chose Jesus to be the Messiah. The Jews expected a military strongman. When he looked at his life – a simple carpenter, and when he looked at Mary's life – an ordinary girl, he must have pondered why God chose their son to be the only begotten son of God. With all of the options, with all of the royal families in Israel, with all of the potential rulers in the world, why him?

Joseph was caught like we are often caught – standing between what God says and what makes sense. All of us have followed God's will only to wonder if we did the right thing – if we made the right decision – if we took the right path. We look at what happens – we confront our circumstances – we consider our options – we contemplate our situations – and sometimes it doesn't make sense. Standing between what God says and what makes sense means dealing with dilemmas. This is at the very heart of Christmas. Some of you this very Christmas stand right where Joseph stood. You've got some tough decisions to make, and you had better make those decisions with God's will right in the center of your decision-making.

***Song = A Strange Way to Save the World will be sung here.*

Jesus = The Name Above All Names

The Gospels record the birth stories of Jesus Messiah. However, the Apostle Paul put in perspective the life of Jesus in Philippians 2 – an awesome text.

Philippians 2:7) And when he [Jesus] had come as a man, 8) he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death – even to death on a cross. 9) For this reason God highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, 10) so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow – in heaven and on earth and under the earth – 11) and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Mary embraced risks. Joseph faced dilemmas. Jesus endured struggles. To both Mary and Joseph, God sent an angel – a messenger – to deliver His divine

message. To Mary, the angel explained, *“You will give birth to a son and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High.”* To Joseph, the angel confirmed, *“You are to give him the name Jesus, because He will save His people from their sins”* The Christmas story centers Jesus as a baby in a manger. But this baby grew up and became a man. At the age of 30, he left his family behind, and launched a ministry that would only last three years. But those three years changed the world! There came the day when Jesus faced God’s will for His life. Consider Jesus’ struggles:

- **Jesus’ Struggle = Leaving the splendor of heaven knowing your destiny.** When Jesus was born in Bethlehem, he wasn’t like every other baby. Unlike every other child who only exists in the mind and heart of God before birth, Jesus existed as the Son of God before God even created the world. God the Father and God the Son co-existed in perfect union in heaven. But there came the day when God announced His ultimate will for eternity – for the Son to leave the splendor and majesty of heaven and descend to Earth as the sacrificial Lamb of God who would take away the sins of the world. Jesus is the only human being born for the purpose of dying. Every other human being is born for the purpose of living – only Jesus was born for the purpose of dying.

- **Jesus’ Struggle = obedient to death.** When the angel announced, *“Give Him the name Jesus, because He will save His people from their sins”* Jesus knew that meant death on the Cross – giving His life as a ransom for those who would believe. It meant that his life would pay the death penalty for sinners. It meant that His obedience would be an obedience to death – even death on a Cross!

- **Jesus’ Struggle = Yield to God’s Will.** The night before Jesus died on the Cross, He prayed intensely — *“My Father...not as I will but as You will.”* Jesus knew God’s will, but He struggled with it right up to the end.

The Christmas story is incomplete without understanding the struggles of Jesus. For Jesus to live up to His name meant struggling with God’s will. And yet, he did not violate His name, because Jesus’ name is the name above all names!

****Song = *Your Name* will be sung here.**

THE REASON FOR THE SEASON IS FOUND IN ONE WORD — OBEDIENCE.

Mary trusted an unknown future to an all-knowing God and became highly favored. Ladies, do you want to be highly favored? Then put your future into the hands of an all-knowing, all-sovereign God.

Joseph did what the angel of the Lord commanded him to do and became the earthly father of the King of Kings. Men, do you want your sons and daughters to

bless you and be everything that God created them to be? Then obey what God says even when it doesn't make sense.

Jesus followed God's will for His life and became the Savior of the world. I'm glad He did – aren't you? But Jesus is only a name, unless you've placed your faith and your trust in Him and Savior and Lord of your Life.