



VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS

Moving From Worry to Worship This Christmas

Luke 1:26–55

Tim Badal | December 12, 2021

We're in a new series for the Christmas season, putting a pause on our sermon series on the Gospel of John. In these weeks leading up to Christmas, we'll be talking about our "Christmas Checklist." This morning we'll start at Luke 1:26 as we start on our journey to see what a Christmas checklist looks like.



In the Badal home, the custodian of the Christmas checklist is my wife Amanda. It's her task to make sure the four other Badal boys encounter and enjoy all the sights, smells, tastes, and sounds that come with the Christmas traditions. I sometimes see her write a physical list, but usually it's a mental list as she thinks of all the things that would make this a worthwhile celebration. For example, we love to watch Christmas movies as a family. We love having Christmas music playing. Of course, she and the boys do a wonderful job of decorating our home, both inside and out. Admittedly, she's had some angst recently, as God in His infinite grace has brought a lot of wind to wreak havoc on many of our outside decorations.

We have some other special traditions. We go into the city every Christmas to view the zoo lights and enjoy the other city festivities and decorations. We even go every Christmas to the Fox Valley mall. It's nostalgic for Mom and Dad. Some of you don't even know what a mall is anymore. We all have Christmas traditions, lists of things we want to accomplish, so on the 26th of December we can say we've celebrated a good Christmas.

In this series, we want you to embrace the traditions you'll find listed in your bulletin. We've come up with about 25 different things you should do to have a festive holiday season. In the midst of these, there are four things we especially want you to do, because these are things that put Christ back into the center of Christmas. Let's face it. All the things on Amanda's list are good things, but I'm thankful that she desires Christ to be central.

As a teaching team, each Sunday, along with Christmas Eve, we're going to be talking about some things we believe need to be added to our Christmas lists. These will hopefully make our experience of celebrating this incredible holiday even more full and robust, so that we might encounter the Christ of Christmas. We hope this will be a season of forgiving others for their trespasses and debts, even as we have been forgiven of ours through Christ. We want us to be telling others the real story of Christmas, even as the shepherds did. Like the wise men, we want to be giving gifts that are in keeping with the greatest gift ever given.

This morning I want to see how we can celebrate and worship Christ this Christmas. Let's face it, not everybody is in a celebratory mood. For a great many of us these days, the global pandemic has kept us from celebrating as we normally do. Others are dealing with various forms of brokenness and heartache. Today is the 12th of December, which is a reminder in our family of my parents' anniversary. This will be the first year that my dad will remember this date as a widower. We're not the only ones who have lost loved ones this past year; there have been many hurts, pains, and struggles.

It's no wonder that my new favorite Christmas song is "Behold Him," sung by a young lady whose name I can't even pronounce. I love this line: "In your silent night, when you're not alright, lift you eyes and behold Him." Can you say that this morning? In this

festive season when we should be singing, “Silent night, holy night, all is calm, all is bright,” can you say—because of the circumstances in your life—that your silent night is not alright?

We must move from worrying about our situation...

Is there worry and anxiety, concern and frustration, plus the exacerbation of all these feelings while still trying to celebrate Christmas? Are the circumstances of your life so overwhelming that you're unable to extricate yourself from them and truly encounter Jesus for all He is? I want you to look at Mary's encounter with Gabriel, hoping I can help you in your loss, sorrow or difficulty to move from worry and anxiety to worship and adoration. To do this, we see something in the middle that Mary did that we need to do as well.

We'll start in Luke 1:26, where we'll find what the church has termed the “Magnificat” —Mary's song to magnify her heavenly Father, praising Him for all He has done. The story opens with Mary as a young woman encountering the angel Gabriel.

²⁶In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, ²⁷to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸And he came to her and said, “Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!”

Right away Luke, who is big on details, gives us many details in this scene. First, we're told this happened in the sixth month. But the sixth month of what? What's going on here? As we'll learn later, this is the sixth month of the pregnancy of Mary's cousin Elizabeth. Why is that important? Elizabeth will soon give birth to Jesus' cousin, John the Baptist. What was especially unusual about this is that Elizabeth had been barren all her life and now in her advanced age should not be giving birth to a child. Yet she was now in her sixth month of pregnancy, which we will learn will become a great encouragement to Mary.

The second thing Luke tells us is that Mary lived in Nazareth in the region of Galilee. Nazareth was a backwoods area and we're told elsewhere nothing good comes from there (John 1:46). Then the third thing we learn is that the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary, who was a virgin at that point. She was, however, engaged to a man named Joseph. So in one sense they were already married, but they had not yet consummated their marriage, so pregnancy was not something that would have come from their engagement. Finally, we are told that Mary is favored and graced by God for a particular role and purpose. Notice that this encounter isn't altogether celebratory. Look at verse 29: “*But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be.*” If that wasn't scary enough, what the angel was about to declare to Mary would cause her even greater angst and concern.

You and I will struggle with celebrating and worshiping God if we find ourselves worrying about our own situations. At times, because of the issues in our lives, that worry fills our hearts. Verse 29 says Mary was “greatly troubled.” It's the only time this phrase occurs in the entire New Testament. Luke used a unique word for a unique situation. It means to be highly agitated, to be anxious through and through, to be acutely distressed. This was a unique circumstance that caused Mary's emotional strain. Her mind was racing, trying to understand what the angel was saying.

Maybe this Christmas, you also have some of these same feelings. You may be greatly troubled, agitated or anxious, vacillating between how you or others expect you to feel and how you truly feel. Or maybe you're vacillating concerning a particular action to take or having trouble understanding your circumstances.

What causes Mary to be so concerned? Does Luke tell us Mary was just an anxious person by nature? No, we have no clue that this was the case. It was this encounter with the angel that caused her to be greatly troubled. I think that might be true for a lot of us as well. Our anxieties are the result of things that come to us. Sometime our anxiousness comes from God throwing us a curve ball.

That was the case for Mary, as we see in verse 30: “*And the angel said to her, ‘Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.’*” That doesn't seem too bad. It wasn't a reason to be anxious. In verse 31 we see what she was troubled by.

³¹And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. ³²He 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, ³³and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.”

³⁴And Mary said to the angel, “How will this be, since I am a virgin?”

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

What the angel just declared to her destroyed Mary's life. Nowhere in this text is there any mention of Joseph. Marriage to him was her expectation. At a time of Joseph's choosing, according to the custom, he would come to the woman he was engaged to, bringing her home to live with him for the rest of their lives. They would have marriage relations, resulting in children, and live happily ever after. That was her plan and purpose, but the angel just told her, "That's off the table for now, Mary. Instead, your life will be different from your mother, your grandmother, your older sister or your friends. Oh, and you will have great shame, because no one will believe you. You've been pure and done everything a righteous woman who is faithful to God should have done."

Then what does God do? Her gives her a new calling that's filled with all kinds of expectations on His part and all kinds of scorn from her mom and dad, her family and community—and her husband. All of this has landed on this young peasant girl as the result of one conversation. Can you imagine how greatly troubled you would have been, if you had been in her place? You would be agitated, vacillating and frightened. Mary realized she would then be labeled as an adulteress, plus her fiancé might leave her. She could even be stoned. At best she would be seen as crazy.

Somehow Mary presses through all of these thoughts and focuses on what is being asked of her. "You are going to give birth, raise, teach and look after the Son of God." If there was ever a job where a person was more unqualified, it would be Mary doing what she was called to do. Many of us feel unqualified for the various roles and responsibilities we've been given, but there is no one who could logically be qualified to do what Mary was being asked to do: raise up the infinite Son of God. How can a human woman with limited wisdom and knowledge teach the omnipotent Holy One? How can a creature raise up the Creator? It doesn't make any sense. Mary was wholly unqualified to do what God was calling her to do. It's understandable that her anxiety would be extreme, probably thinking, "I'm going to fail at this." Even if she would be able to survive the shame and scorn, at the end of the day, she was to be given a job that was vastly overwhelming.

Many of us can, in some sense, find ourselves with assignments we can't accomplish. Maybe we have a situation of suffering or difficulty, so we end up vacillating. God has called us to go through it, to serve others in it, to be faithful to Him in the middle of something we're convinced we can't do. Some of you might even find yourself paralyzed in your anguish and anxiety, because of your inability to move forward.

If there was ever someone who should have felt paralyzed with what had been thrown her way, it would have been Mary. Notice that she doesn't stay paralyzed. She doesn't stay in a pattern of worry. asking, "What if...? What about...? How come...? What am I going to do...?" None of that. What Mary did instead is something we need to see as a model for our own lives. She took her question marks and gave them to God.

If you struggle with worry or anxiety, remember this. Whereas men and women deal with question marks, God deals with exclamation points. At no point is God thinking, "Oh My, what are We going to do? What's going to happen?" He's not concerned, because He knows exactly what's going to happen.

...to welcoming God into our stress...

What we see Mary doing was welcome God into her stress. If you want to move from worry to worship, the second step is vitally important. Welcome God into the mix. Invite God into your struggle. Invite God into your circumstance. When you do, God will turn those question marks into exclamation points. Let's see how He did this with Mary.

First, through the angel, we see that there is certainty in the promises of God. Mary had lots of questions, but who wouldn't? She actually asked one of the most powerful questions that could ever be asked: "*How will this be, since I am a virgin?*" She isn't being faithless here. She wasn't demanding a sign, like Zechariah did back when he was told about his pending birth miracle Luke 1:17). She simply was asking, "Can I get in on the details of this? How do you operate, God? I have confidence that You have a plan, but I just want to know how it's going to be." She wanted to learn more.

Notice how God took Mary's question mark and turned it into an exclamation point. Between verses 30 and 39, we find ten places where God says, "I will..." Not, "I might, or I could, if the circumstances warrant it." He says, "I will do this. I will do that. I will make

this happen. I will make that happen.” Those are exclamation points. When Mary welcomed God into her worry, her question marks turned into those exclamation points. She began to rely on the God Who says, “My promises are secure. This is going to happen.” As Job says in Job 42:2, “...no purpose of yours can be thwarted.” Nothing can stop God’s plans—not our doubts, not other people, nothing.

We read in James how the tongue is very good at boasting about a great many things. Could it be that God’s tongue is getting the best of Him and that He’s boasting about something He is not in fact going to accomplish? Some of us believe that can happen. Some of us read Scriptures and think, “All God does is boast.” Others say, “Well, He did it then, but He’s not doing it now with me.” Or we say, “I’ve never seen this kind of thing take place.” Let’s face it. Mary’s problem was so big that she couldn’t go to the Scriptures to find help with her situation. She couldn’t get a concordance to find information on her situation. “Let’s see. I’m a virgin. An angel has come to me and says I’m going to give birth through the Holy Spirit. There’s nothing on this page about that. The Son of the Most High God—where can I find something on that? It’s not in here. It’s never happened before.”

She was thinking, “You’re telling me I’m the first woman to ever give birth as a virgin and that what is inside me is the Holy One of God. This has never happened.” So she couldn’t go to the Bible for encouragement because of a previous example of this happening to another woman.

She couldn’t go to her mother, grandmother or her friends’ small group. Can you imagine her getting together with the girls, as the women in our church do, and ask for prayer? “Hey, could you guys pray about something?” “What’s going on, Mary?” “Funny thing. I was cleaning the blankets, like we do on Tuesdays, and an angel appeared to me.” “Hmm, it’s going to be one of those prayer requests. Oh, okay, let’s see where this goes.” Mary continued, “The angel told me I’m pregnant, but listen, it’s not Joseph’s child; it’s the Holy Spirit’s child. I just want to know, how did any of you deal with this when it happened to you? Please share and I’ll write this down.” Nothing. None of them had ever dealt with anything like that.

What does God do for us in times when we don’t have any answers? Notice how gracious God was in Mary’s situation. In verse 35 she finds out that this crazy thing is going to happen to her. Then in verse 36 we see that He gave her a “down payment” to prove that His plan could be trusted. “Your cousin Elizabeth is with child. You know, the older woman who’s been barren for so long, the one who sits alone at family gatherings because people think she’s cursed.”

Why is this important? I think when we welcome God into our struggles, He is faithful to bring us a counterpart to endure the struggle with us. Did He bring someone who was dealing exactly with what Mary was facing? No. She was entirely alone in this. But God did give her the encouragement of someone else who was experiencing a miracle. I love that Mary is just learning about her pregnancy, but Elizabeth is six months along.

This is why we’re so big on small groups. Here’s your plug for small groups. When you endure difficult times, it’s amazing to realize that God has partnered you with people who maybe aren’t going through exactly the same thing, but perhaps they’re dealing with something similar.

I’ll never forget when Amanda was diagnosed with cancer and our minds were flooded with all the “what if’s,” all the big question marks. We were sitting at a community event, talking with a woman who said, “Listen, I’ve had that same kind of cancer. It’s hard. It will be a battle, but I’m evidence that I made it through—you can get through it as well.” I’ll tell you what, when we went home, our questions weren’t answered, but it was so good to know there was someone who had been in our shoes in some way.

It’s not surprising that right after the angel gave her this news, “*Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah, and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth.*” There is something about enduring a struggle by sharing it with someone who is already ahead of you in that. When you welcome God into your stress, He starts putting people in your life who have gone through something similar. This gives you a glimpse into what He is able to do.

Mary wasn’t alone; God was at work in the lives of people around her. God told Mary what He was going to do, giving her evidence that He was able to do miracles like this in that her cousin Elizabeth was with child. Then finally, He told Mary this in verse 37: “*For nothing is impossible with God.*” He ended the instruction by declaring something about Himself: “What you see as impossible, I see as wholly possible.”

Maybe you're vacillating, worrying and anxious, but when you have question marks, I want you to replace them with exclamation points because nothing is impossible with God! Instead think, "I'm going to put all my chips in. I'm going to lay myself in the hands of God. Even though I think my situation is altogether impossible, I believe in a God Who can make everything He desires come to pass."

Some of you may need to hear this this morning. Turn your question marks into God's exclamation points. Then, as you welcome God into your life, He will begin to affirm His plan for your situation. He has a plan to deal with your pain and anxiety. If you haven't seen this, look around. There are others around you who are struggling and God is using them to do great things. Watch John and Laurie Barrett. They have a lot of struggles, yet through these struggles, God has allowed them to serve and honor Him. If we're looking for it, we will see things that are impossible for us are still possible with God.

...to worshipping God through Scripture and song.

When you and I welcome God into our worry, it allows us to worship Him. In Luke 1:46-55, we hear Mary breaking out in song. She was able to worship God through Scripture and song. What can we learn from her worship? First, **her worship was God-centered**. In these verses, Mary included 17 attributes of God:

⁴⁶ And Mary said,

 "My soul magnifies the Lord,
 ⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
 ⁴⁸ for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant.
 For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed;
 ⁴⁹ for he who is mighty has done great things for me,
 and holy is his name.
 ⁵⁰ And his mercy is for those who fear him
 from generation to generation.
 ⁵¹ He has shown strength with his arm;
 he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts;
 ⁵² he has brought down the mighty from their thrones
 and exalted those of humble estate;
 ⁵³ he has filled the hungry with good things,
 and the rich he has sent away empty.
 ⁵⁴ He has helped his servant Israel,
 in remembrance of his mercy,
 ⁵⁵ as he spoke to our fathers,
 to Abraham and to his offspring forever."

There are 17 different attributes or affirmations about God and His goodness, grace and mercy. This should remind us that in our worship, in our prayer, we need to stop making it all about us. Rather, it needs to be about Him. Mary had much to complain about and question. Instead, she turned her attention to her God. Knowing He was a God of the impossible, she chose to worship and adore Him.

Second, **her song was Bible-centered**. All of her words came from the Psalms, from Hannah's prayer in 1 Samuel or from other points of Old Testament theology. Scholars are blown away, wondering how this unlearned peasant girl was able to express this kind of Bible knowledge. Remember, she wasn't carrying around a Bible. There wasn't an app on her iPhone 1. Rather, she had hidden God's Word in her heart over time. How much more should we be able to hide God's Word in our hearts when we have it available wherever we go?

Why should your song, your worship, be Bible-centered? Because the more you know about God's attributes, the greater your faith becomes. When you have seen God address the troubles, fears and concerns of people over and over again, you're going to realize, "My problems aren't as big as I thought they were. God has found a way to address them before, He will address them for me today."

Finally, **Mary's song was gospel-centered**. That is, her song is all about how God saved her, how God met her, how God has shown mercy to her. We have many, many reasons to celebrate God this Christmas season, because of all He has done. The gospel of Jesus Christ is that He came to seek and save that which was lost (Luke 19:10). You and I have hope, joy and peace. You and I have salvation and every spiritual blessing under heaven because Christ came and made His dwelling among us.

If you don't think you have reason to celebrate, then you don't realize what you've been saved from. When you begin to rehearse all God has saved you from, then out of the overflow of your heart, you will begin to proclaim and sing the praises of the One Who called you out of darkness and brought you into His marvelous light.

That's what Mary did. She magnified the Lord, Who moved her from worry into worship. God wants to gift you with that this Christmas as well. Amen?

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All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

Note: This transcription has been provided by Sermon Transcribers (www.sermontranscribers.com).