



# VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH

## Christmas Is Serving

Luke 1:26–38

Josh Caterer | December 31, 2023

Not only is this the final message of the year, it's also the fourth and final message in our series called "Christmas Is..." It's been a great series throughout December. Each of the four messages has been a different theme, with a different example of someone in the Bible who embodies this theme.



We started the first week with the theme of giving and our example was the wise men with the gifts they brought for the Lord. The second week our theme was trusting. We talked about Joseph and his amazing example of trusting the Lord. Then last week, of course—Christmas Eve—Pastor Tim preached a great message, using the shepherds as an example of what sharing looks like.

This week our theme is serving. If you're looking for someone who shows us what it looks like to have the heart of a servant, you'd be hard pressed to find a better example than Mary, the mother of Jesus, and her response to God's calling on her life. We'll be looking mostly at Luke 1:26-38, although we'll jump around a little bit in the chapter.

Before we even get into it, I want to take a moment to point out where it mentions the angel Gabriel in this passage. He shows up a couple times just in this chapter. He appears to Zechariah to talk about the birth of John the Baptist. In verse 19 Luke says, *"The angel answered him, 'I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I was sent to speak to you and bring you this good news.'"* This seems to be the role Gabriel has in the Bible. He is sent by God with specific and important messages that have to do with the unfolding of God's plan for mankind. He actually appears in the Old Testament book of Daniel. It was Gabriel who appeared to Daniel in chapters 8 and 9, where he explained to Daniel the meaning of certain prophetic visions Daniel had had concerning end times prophecies.

The point is that Gabriel is kind of a big deal. He's a heavy hitter. He's not like your run-of-the-mill angel, an everyday angel like the one in *"It's a Wonderful Life."* Did you watch that over the holidays? Three of you. Great. I watch it every year. It's one of my favorite movies. So do you happen to know that angel's name? Clarence. That's good. Somebody over here knows his last name. Clarence Oddbody. That's his name. But Clarence is a piece of work. He's sloppy. His hair is messed up. He's a second-class angel and doesn't have his wings yet. He's kind of a knucklehead.

On the other hand, Gabriel is way higher up on the angel org chart. He's much closer to the top. I'm just pointing that out, like, *"Note to self: if the angel Gabriel ever appears to you, write down whatever he says because it's really important. So keep this in mind as we jump into the text here. Let's read, starting in verse 26:"*

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

<sup>29</sup> But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. <sup>30</sup> And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God."

Let me put a pin in it here for a second. Have you ever noticed this happening when angels appear to people in Scripture? They get really freaked out, then the angel has to talk them off the ledge. "It's okay. It's okay. Don't be afraid. This is good." It must be really overwhelming and kind of terrifying to be visited by an angel—a glorious, other-worldly creature. And that's the reaction Mary has. She is greatly troubled. So the angel says, *"Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God."*

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

<sup>34</sup> And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?"

<sup>35</sup> 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. <sup>36</sup> 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. <sup>37</sup> For nothing will be impossible with God." <sup>38</sup> 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.

This is the Word of the Lord.

Here we have the archangel Gabriel appearing to this young woman Mary, telling her this incredible thing that's about to happen to her. She will conceive and bear a Child Who will be the Son of the Most High. That's an incredible piece of information. Mary's response to it also is incredible. Under the circumstances, she takes it pretty well. It's a troublesome piece of information. The thing Gabriel is telling her, first of all, is humanly impossible, which is why she asks in verse 34, "*How will this be, since I am a virgin?*" The angel says, "You're about to become pregnant and bear a Child in your womb." She's like, "But I haven't been with a man. I'm in the middle of this betrothal period." That's like an engagement, but it's months long. It's not like she was going to get married in the next week. So she was saying, "If this pregnancy is going to happen anytime soon, we have a slight logistical problem here. This is humanly impossible." Even more than that, it was highly inconvenient. If Mary gets pregnant before she is married, this creates all sorts of problems for her.

First of all, how is she going to explain it to the man she's betrothed to? Joseph might not take it so well when he finds out she's pregnant. This could derail their entire betrothal and marriage. For a woman to be having a child out of wedlock in that culture, there was lots of shame and scandal attached to it. It was not a good way for a young woman to get started in life. So you'd think her response would be to see this as bad news, that she would have a bad attitude about it, that she would have to be dragged kicking and screaming into a calling like this. But Mary's response is actually incredible. She says, "*Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.*" So somehow, despite all these challenges and difficulties attached to what she's being told here, Mary's response reveals the heart of a willing and joyful servant.

She doesn't say, "Can't you find somebody else?" Or, "Can't we wait until after I'm married? That would solve a lot of problems for me, Gabriel." She doesn't do any of that. She's like, "*Let it be to me according to your word.* Exactly what you're saying—I'm in. Bring it on."

In fact, if you read down a little farther, there's this thing we call Mary's song of praise, or the Magnificat. That's a cool word. It would be a good band name. But I digress.

In verse 46, Mary just starts to praise the Lord, saying:

<sup>46</sup> "My soul magnifies the Lord,  
<sup>47</sup> and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,  
<sup>48</sup> for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant.  
For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed;  
<sup>49</sup> for he who is mighty has done great things for me,  
and holy is his name.  
<sup>50</sup> And his mercy is for those who fear him  
from generation to generation."

This does not sound like a person who has just received bad news, does it? She seems actually pretty fired up about this. She's into it. She's happy. This is amazing because, if we're honest, most of us would have a hard time being so excited and having the heart of a joyful servant in a situation like this.

When it comes to serving the Lord, especially if there's any inconvenience involved, many of us back away from it and just say, "I don't have the time. I don't have the resources. I don't have the bandwidth for this. This just doesn't work for me right now." So we end up saying no to opportunities to serve the Lord if it's inconvenient. Or maybe we say yes, but when we start to feel the pinch of inconveniences, we don't have a particularly great attitude about it. We're sort of sighing and groaning and complaining, so we miss out on this joy that is so evident in Mary.

So the question is: how does she do it? Where does Mary's joyful attitude come from? How could she have the heart of a willing and joyful servant when faced with such an inconvenient calling? What we're going to see in the text is that she was able to have the heart of a joyful servant because she knew a couple things.

First, she knew that her service would be a blessing to other people. When the angel told Mary her Child would be called the Son of the Most High and that of His Kingdom there would be no end, she knew that could only mean one thing. The Child she was going to be giving birth to was going to be the Messiah, the promised One, the One Who had been prophesied about in the Scriptures and Whom God's people had been looking forward to for centuries. He was the One through Whom God was going to bring salvation to untold numbers of people.

So Mary, apart from being inconvenienced, was being given this amazing opportunity to be part of something bigger than herself, something that would have ripple effects of blessings for other people, not only then, but for generations to come. That's why she says, *"From now on, all generations will call me blessed."* She was looking at the bigger picture here. She knew this was not just about her; it was about God wanting to bless other people and wanting to use her as the instrument to make that happen. She found joy in that. Mary may have been a very young woman at this point, but she did have the maturity to know that joy is not found in getting what you want, or having things go your own way in life. She was with it enough to know true joy is found in being used by God to bless other people, that there's greater satisfaction, meaningfulness and joy that outweighs any inconvenience this kind of service might cause.

The inconvenience to her was actually incredible. Think about how this derailed her life. The first thing that happened was her dreams of marriage were disrupted. She had hopes, dreams and expectations for the future, just like anyone else. She was betrothed to be married, so certainly had a picture of how that was going to go. She saw herself settling down with her husband, starting a family, raising kids, being a wife and mother, finding satisfaction in the things that come with that kind of domestic life together.

That's the plan, but then this angel comes along with this 'good news' and the first thing that happens is her husband decides to call off the marriage. Matthew 1:19 tells us that when Mary was found to be pregnant, *"Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly."* He's like, "I'm out of here."

But then an angel appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, *"Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit."* So then he changed his mind and did take Mary to be his wife. But for a while there, he knew she was pregnant and was planning to divorce her, because he apparently did not believe the child was conceived by the Holy Spirit. We assume Mary would have told him that. It would have been a pertinent thing to mention, but the Bible doesn't record that conversation between Mary and Joseph. Oh, to have been a fly on the wall for that one. What would she say? "Oh, ah, honey, I have news. I'm pregnant. Don't worry, I didn't cheat on you. I'm still a virgin." How's he supposed to respond?

"Ah, so you're pregnant, but you're still a virgin? Okay. Look, honey, I'm no doctor, but I'm pretty sure there's only one way that happens and I wasn't part of it."

What does she say? "Don't worry. It was conceived by the Holy Spirit. An angel appeared to me and told me the whole thing. It's totally legit. It's above board." You can't blame the guy for being skeptical. It's a completely fantastic piece of information. So he's like, "All right, we can do this on the DL to avoid scandal, but we're calling this whole thing off." But then the angel appears to him and says, "Joseph, she wasn't kidding. This is from the Holy Spirit." He's like, "Okay," and they got married. So it seems like they got that problem straightened out, but that was not the end of their problems by a long shot.

As soon as this Baby is born, King Herod finds out about this Christ child and wants to kill Him. So then they're on the run. Joseph has a vision in which he's told they have to go to Egypt, so they become fugitives. Herod made a decree where he killed all the boys younger than two, which was terrible.

Then eventually when Jesus grows up, He leaves home. He's sleeping on the ground. People are following Him around, some of whom love Him, but some of whom hate Him and want Him dead. They eventually do take hold of Him and kill Him by nailing Him to a cross at a relatively young age.

So this Child Mary gives birth to here is going to have a short and tumultuous life that will completely disrupt their whole family. Any dreams of domestic stability and normalcy she might have had as a young woman went out the window when that angel told her what was going to happen. This thing she was being called to do was highly inconvenient. But Mary embraced it with

the joyful heart of a servant, because she knew it wasn't just about her. This was bigger than her. She knew God would use her service to bless other people and she found joy in that.

Now, obviously none of us are in the exact same situation as Mary, but we can all relate to her in this one way: serving the Lord can be very inconvenient. A lot of times it will cost you something. It could mean you have to find time to carve a few hours out of a schedule that already feels overloaded in order to serve the Lord in some way. Or it could mean giving financially to support gospel ministries that are great, that you believe in, but finances are a little tight right now and you don't know where that money is going to come from. So this is really an inconvenient time to be giving.

But like Mary, we are given the opportunity to participate in something that's bigger than ourselves. We have the opportunity to be used by God to bless other people in ways that have ripple effects that will actually outlive us and have an impact on future generations. I think even the church we're sitting in right now is an example of that. There are people who served decades ago, when this church was just getting off the ground, people who gave of their time, talents and treasures to bring this church into existence. A lot of those people are not here anymore. Some of them have passed away. But God used what they gave as a foundation to build this church, where the gospel is being preached, where our children are being taught, week in and week out. Lives are being impacted.

So when we spend our time, talent and treasure in a way that God can use to bless other people, there is real joy in that. That's where true joy is found—and Mary knew that. She could see that about to unfold in her own life which is why she was able to have the response of a willing and joyful servant's heart. She knew her service would bless other people. But she knew something else, something even more beautiful. She knew that her Lord would be with her. That's the first thing the angel said to her: *"Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!"* Notice the angel did not say, "The Lord will be with you." He wasn't talking about how she would give birth to the Lord and He would live in her house. That's the way He would be there with her. That's a future tense idea: the Holy Spirit *will* come upon you in the near future. No, the angel said, "Mary, O favored one, the Lord is with you right now" —present tense. But what did he mean by *with you*? What does it mean to say, "The Lord is *with* you"?

I think it's important for us to define it, especially a word like 'with' —a very common word we use every day. You always assume you know what this word means. But actually the word 'with' has a lot of different nuances, depending on how you use it. You could say, "I ate a hot dog *with* mustard." Not catsup, never. I eat a hotdog *with* mustard, indicating the presence of mustard on the hotdog. Or you could say, "I was swimming *with* the current," indicating that we're going in the same direction. Or as a musician, I think of songs with the word 'with.' "Hit me with your best shot," meaning whatever it means. It means you like Pat Benatar, which is cool. But it could mean a lot of different things depending on the circumstances.

In this case, when the angel says, "The Lord is with you," our first thought might be, "Okay, the Lord is there; He's going to be present in her life." Or "He already is present in her life." The Lord is here in this room, like, "I will go to church with you. I will be present with you." So we assume that's what it means. Yet it means more than that here. You can tell because of what the angel says right before that: *"Greetings, O favored one..."* He uses that word *favor* again a couple verses later when he says in verse 30, *"Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God."* Mary was favored by God.

I looked up synonyms for 'favored,' and the words that popped up 'beloved,' 'precious,' 'cherished' —things that indicate strong, positive feelings. So when the angel says, "The Lord is with you," and "You are favored," it doesn't just mean that the Lord is there; it indicates something about God's attitude toward Mary. It's not just that He's there; it means that's He's actively on her side. He's in her corner. He's got her back. It means He is for her. Whatever trials she's going to face, whatever valleys she has to go through, whatever inconveniences might arise as a result of this calling on her life, she will not have to face these things alone. God Himself will be with her. He is for her. She is favored. He will be the source of her strength and comfort. He will be working all things together for her good. He will meet all of her needs.

That's why she was so filled with joy. That's how she could have the heart of a servant and say, *"Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word."* She knew her service was going to be used by God to bless others and that the Lord was with her.

Now, this is true for us as well. Mary wasn't the only favored one. I mean, yes, she had a very unique and important role to play in the gospel story; I don't want to downplay that in any way. But it is also very true that God's favor is not reserved only for Mary, the mother of Jesus. If you are a follower of Jesus Christ, if you've placed your faith in Him and received Him as Lord and Savior, God has already showered favor upon you. We can say truly that we are favored by God. Our sins have been forgiven. We've

been brought from death to life, from darkness to light. The Holy Spirit of God has taken up residence within us from the moment we believed. He is with us. He continues to shower His favor upon us, working within us to sanctify us, to lead us and guide us, to provide for us, to give us strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow.

For those of us who are saved—if we are in Christ, if we have found our hope, life and redemption in Him—then these words the angel Gabriel said to Mary are not just for Mary. These words are for us as well: “Greetings, O favored one; the Lord is with you.” Isn’t that glorious? Isn’t that the basis of having a willing and joyful servant’s heart that would respond to whatever His plan is for our lives?

The Lord may be calling each and every one of us to serve Him with our time, talent or treasure today. Maybe there’s some opportunity that has presented itself to you to give, to serve, to support, to be involved in the ministry of the gospel, but you’ve been a little hesitant because it’s just not a convenient time right now. I want to encourage you by pointing out that whatever inconvenience there may be, it’s more than made up for by the fact that any way we serve the Lord, anything we give to the Lord is used by Him to bless others and that He is truly with us. So with confidence and joy, we can take the example of Mary and say, “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to Your word.” Amen?

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All Scriptures quoted directly English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

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