

²⁶ In the sixth month, 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. ³⁰ But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. ³¹ You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name 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 the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end."

³⁴ "How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"

³⁵ The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon 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 barren is in her sixth month. ³⁷ For nothing is impossible with God."

³⁸ "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May it be to me as you have said." Then the angel left her.

Your life changes. Permanently. Irreversibly. Suddenly. What do you do? There are a thousand ways it could happen to any one of us or all of us at the same time. A natural disaster could devastate our way of life. A death in the family. Loss of a job. Son or daughter getting engaged to someone we don't like. Illness. Chronic health problems. A situation totally out of your control develops and changes your life, doesn't have to be tragic necessarily, just something different. How do you respond?

Do you act or do you freeze? We've probably all had at least one of those life-defining moments, so what was it for you? Did you do something to try to change the situation? Try to force life back to where it was? Sometimes that sort of works. Or were you consumed with either anger or grief or self-pity and just couldn't do anything? Try to find someone responsible and make them pay? Did you stumble about to make sense out of the change? Struggle to sleep, wondering how things will ever be okay again?

However you approached it, I think it's safe to say that most of the time our reaction is not to just wholeheartedly accept that which disrupts our life so much. Whether we wallow in grief or denial or we struggle to put things back how they were, we don't usually just let it in with open arms.

And yet, did you notice that this is exactly what Mary does with the angel's announcement? Here she is, a young girl, pledged to be married to a man named Joseph and now a message from the Lord comes, "Mary, you're going to have a baby. No, not after you're married, not with your husband, you're going to have a baby now, conceived by the power of God."

Imagine the thoughts that could have raced through Mary's head at that moment. Why me? I just wanted a quiet life with my husband. I never wanted anything special. I am nobody special. Why do I have to have this special baby now? What's Joseph going to think? Will he believe this is from God or will he think I've made a fool of him with another man? He'll probably divorce me before we're really married. Can't God choose someone else?

Doesn't seem like Mary had any of those though. Even her one question she asks doesn't seem to be the unbelief that Zechariah exhibited last week, because Gabriel answers this one without chastising her. And her final response? "I am the Lord's servant. May it be to me as you have said."

Absolutely astonishing. How many of us would claim to have that level of faith to respond this way? And even if any of us did, to cut right to the chase in so few words that capture everything true about the situation. Mary's amazing attitude is a product of her first statement. "I am the Lord's servant." Mary knew who she was before God. She knew exactly what her place was. And not in some kind of demeaning way, she just knew the truth of the matter. God is God. Not her buddy, not her pal. He is Lord Almighty, and she is but a limited creation of his. She may be favored by him, he may love her, but that does not change the overall relationship. He is God. She is mortal.

And that means when God speaks, she doesn't get to question it. She doesn't have a leg to stand on before the infinite creator of the universe. Her human wisdom can't hold for a second before the wisdom of God. His ways are not

our ways. And remembering our place before God, keeping those paths to our heart level, reminds us of several truths when we are faced with accepting his will in our lives.

For one, when you remember that God is God and you are only his servant, that means that you're going to stop trying to throw your wisdom on him like it's worth anything. You may have a thousand good reasons why things shouldn't be the way they are right now, or why this or that shouldn't happen to you. Why you think that what you're going through does no one any good. But put any of that before the wisdom of God and it is dust in a hurricane. You can't even begin to compare on any level! You are merely his servant, and we have no ground to question his wisdom or put yours on his level.

What's more, understanding your place as his servant also means you shouldn't even expect to *understand* his decisions. To continue the analogy of the servant, the servant should not expect to understand all the master's decisions or commands. After all, the servant is tasked with a particular part of the house, a particular role and that is all the perspective the servant has. But the master sees everything, he knows how it all fits together and what needs to be done in each part to make it all work together. God is even more than that. His intelligence and wisdom are so far beyond us that alone should tell us we can't always follow his logic. Even the very nature of God is beyond our limited capacity, so why should we think we can find reason that we could comprehend in his actions? But the role of the servant is not to understand, the role of the servant is to trust and obey.

And the trust comes for a very good reason. Our master has promised that only good will come from serving him. Only good will come out of his decisions. We may not know what the good is on this side of eternity. We may not understand how it comes or where from. But our master has promised that good comes from it and that is enough for us. Mary's life was disrupted by what happened. And in the end she had to watch her son die in torment. But the greatest good ever came from that. And God made sure she was taken care of both earthly and spiritually. There is no reason to doubt the goodness of our Master. He has only ever taken care of us, he has only ever proven himself faithful. And for that we can trust him completely. As the angel assured Mary, the same is true for us now: nothing is impossible with God. No matter how bleak or painful or difficult, God can work good from it. He can and he will and we don't need to see or know how in order to trust it.

With all this in mind, knowing our place before God as his servants, remembering that we are not equal with God, that we have no authority to question his decisions nor should we want to, we can respond as Mary did to any changing circumstances in our lives. When God makes it clear that this or that way is how our life is going to go, instead of throwing a fit we can say with Mary, "May it be to me as you have said." Recognize that you are but his servant, and take comfort in his love of you despite that.

No matter what it is that happens, as a messenger of the Lord I promise you that the end result will be the same. It will work for your good both now and for eternity, because of the child that Mary was to bear. In him, we receive the greatest blessing; elevation from slaves to heirs. This does not change our standing before God when it comes to his decisions for our lives but it does change the end reward. Whatever God asks of you now, it is to accomplish this good in your life, to bring you to your eternal inheritance.

Whenever changing circumstances hit our lives; good or bad, in Christ may we always have this attitude of Mary. I am the Lord's servant. May it be to me as you have said. Amen.