

JOKE - Just before Christmas two young boys were spending the night at their grandparents. At bedtime, the two boys knelt beside their beds to say their prayers when the youngest one began praying at the top of his lungs.

"I PRAY FOR A NEW BICYCLE...

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I PRAY FOR A NEW BICYCLE..."

His older brother leaned over and nudged the younger brother and said, "Why are you shouting your prayers? God isn't deaf." To which the little brother replied, "No, but Gramma is!"

Mary - THE DILEMMA OF SAYING YES

We are looking at some Dilemmas that characters that first Christmas may have experienced.

The word "dilemma" is defined as "a difficult situation or problem."

Different characters involved in the Christmas story find themselves in various dilemmas.

However, in the midst of these various Christmas Dilemmas, God is at work.

I love what Henry Blackaby says, “Find out where God is at work and join Him.”

Last week we looked at Joseph with his dilemma of doubt. And for those that weren't here we talked about that dilemma of doubt when the plans in his mind were shaded with the shattering news that his betrothed wife, Mary, was pregnant.

That news just wasn't in the blueprint he had created.

And today we are looking at Mary.

For a young teenage girl named Mary, she did not have to look to find where God was at work. God sent an angel named Gabriel to invite her into having a major role within the greatest story ever told.

After her encounter with the angel of the Lord, Mary would be faced with a situation containing problems.

She would be confronted with the dilemma, the dilemma of saying, "Yes."

The story of this Christmas Dilemma involving Mary is found in Luke 1:26-38.

Let's read it and find out not only how God was at work, but also how Mary responded to the dilemma.

Luke 1:26–38 (NIV): 26 In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, 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 conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call

him 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 Jacob's descendants 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 on 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 unable to conceive is in her sixth month. 37 For no word from God will ever fail." 38 "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled." Then the angel left her.

The work God was up to presented a seemingly difficult situation for Mary. How could a betrothed virgin become pregnant without ever having been with a man?

She was faced with a difficult dilemma if she yes, she would be mis-understood, talked about, not believed, just to name a few.

Mary quickly saw this dilemma for what it was and asked Gabriel the question in verse 34.

Luke 1:34 - "How will this be, since I am a virgin?"

It would not take long before Mary had her initial questions quelled in a way that led to her accepting the invitation of joining in the work of God that would begin in her womb.

Her "yes" was on the table as she responded with these words captured in verse 38.

Luke 1:38 - "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word."

While the twelve verses that capture this scene leading to the first Christmas a mere nine months away, we must not overlook the texture behind Mary's brave and confident, "Yes" to the dilemma she was in while God was at work in her.

Show video (Mary)

Saying, “Yes” to God does not equate to a carefree life with no worries or problems to overcome.

On the contrary, sometimes saying, “Yes” means being misunderstood, maligned, and having one’s character marred by those who may not understand the full extent to what God is up to at the moment.

Six months after God sent the angel Gabriel to give another birth message to a man named Zechariah who was serving as a priest at the Temple in Jerusalem of Judea, He now was doing the same for Mary.

Luke 1:26-27 - 26 In the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy, 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.

If God was going to send an angel anywhere, it makes more sense that He would do so to a priest serving in the Temple within the great and important city of Jerusalem in

the district of Judea.

Jerusalem had a rich history packed with prominence and influence. Jerusalem was a place where so many people from all over the world came and went. Jerusalem was the city that was sung about in songs of Israel story from the days of old. And the priesthood was of special significance to those who served the Lord.

God sending an angel to a priest serving in the Temple within Jerusalem makes sense.

But God sending an angel “to a city of Galilee named Nazareth,” ...not so much. Nazareth was out in the sticks. Nazareth was off the beaten path. Nazareth was situated in the region of Galilee which meant it was surrounded by Gentile lands.

Even the Jews in Galilee did not always keep that kosher of a kitchen. Lots of unfaithful lived in Galilee.

Nazareth had a reputation...and it wasn't all that great.

John 1:46 asks a question, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”

For God to do something great within Nazareth seems to pose...a dilemma. Jerusalem...yes. Nazareth...not so much...at least on the surface.

However, sometimes God chooses to do things in the big cities like Jerusalem and sometimes out in the country like Nazareth.

God gets a kick out of showing up at Wall Street and Wal-Mart. Both places are equally viable for Him to be at work.

While Gabriel was on his way to Nazareth, he was headed “to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary.”

It's important to note that Mary not only was a virgin, but also that she was betrothed to a man named Joseph.

Betrothal in biblical days meant that this woman legally was married to this man.

Although they had not yet consummated the marriage with a wedding, a feast, and the marriage bed, once a betrothal was in place a marriage was recognized in the eyes of the law, the land, and the Lord.

Betrothal often happened for a girl after she started puberty.

Thus, Mary likely was a young teenage girl when she was visited by Gabriel, as she was betrothed to Joseph, while still a virgin.

After the man got his house in order and was ready to lead his wife into a life of provision, they would complete the marriage with a ceremony, a feast and sexual relations for the first time.

Mary's Christmas Dilemma was about to become clear as she encountered Gabriel and the message he had for her

from God. Gabriel greeted Mary and identified her according to verse 28 as “O favored one.”

The word used in the original language is kecharitomene.

Mary is a “favored one” because she is the recipient of God’s grace.

Biblical scholars note how the only other place in the New Testament where this language is used is in Ephesians 1:6 where the Apostle Paul speaks of the “glorious grace” that is freely given to those found in Jesus Christ.

The reason this is important to note is that the only reason Mary is favored and full of grace is because God chose to give it to her.

The same is true for us, for those of us who are found to be followers of Jesus who have been adopted as sons and daughters of God through His salvation.

Favor and grace only come freely as a gift from God.

Neither Mary nor any follower of Jesus is full of grace on her or his own. Rather, it is only because of the freely received gift of God.

The grace of God helped to sustain Mary when she received the news from Gabriel that God wanted to do His great work of sending His one and only Son into the world as Savior through her womb. While such an honor was the hope and dream of most every Jewish girl, the dilemma it brought was a betrothed virgin who would be pregnant.

That detail would be very difficult to explain to any who would notice a baby bump before a wedding day.

Even before she received the news of how God wanted to be at work in her, verse 29 describes Mary's initial emotions to the encounter with the angel.

Luke 1:29 - Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be.

It is normal for one to be “greatly troubled” after being greeted by an angel. Even more so with the news that she had received.

Anything less would seem to be less than human. Mary was very much human. She was young. She had her whole life ahead of her. And the Lord God had chosen her for a special assignment in the story He was authoring.

God had been waiting for hundreds and hundreds of years for this moment that would begin the countdown to the advent of the Messiah. Although Gabriel told Mary what was behind the greeting that greatly troubled her, she likely did not have the full picture of what she was about to say, “Yes” to a few moments later.

What Mary did do was “tried to discern” what was happening that she soon would say, “Yes” to with her whole life.

This is an important phrase for us to consider as we make our way not only toward the meaning and true celebration

of Christmas, but also to the invitations God puts before us to join Him in the work He is doing.

Mary engaged in the encounter with God's messenger. Her "yes" was not passively or flippantly "on the table." Rather, she was active in her pursuit to understand what this invitation into the work of God was all about.

How was she to do this? What did this mean? She wasn't a zombie who mindlessly was caught up in a trance that would lead her forward as the voice called her.

No, she "tried to understand." As she continued to question and listen, she eventually concluded that this dilemma was worth her "Yes."

Luke 1:38 (NIV): 38 "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled." Then the angel left her.

Mary was not paralyzed by her emotions of trouble. She moved past them with a desire to try to discern what was

happening and what was being said.

As we try to discern how God is at work around us or in us and how best to join Him, may we not be paralyzed by fear or a troubled heart.

There are still reports of visions, dreams and even angelic visitations reported today. God may not always use those modes of messaging for our lives. But when He does we might be asking, trying to understand, what does all this mean.

And if God decides not to communicate with us by visions, dreams or angels, how might we “try to understand” how God may desire for us to join Him in the work He is doing?

Find out what God already has said. God has said some things about who we are and what we are to do in and with our lives that has been recorded in the Bible.

God never will tell a person to do something that is contrary to what already He has said in the Scriptures.

While the Bible may not have specific words about a specific dilemma that we face in life, there are principles and broad truths that encompass many of our decision-making processes.

It has been said that the people who hear God's voice the most are the ones who know His Word the best.

Psalms 119:105 states, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path."

Find out what God already has said about the path you are on and where He may want you to go next as you read the Bible with a prayerful and humble attitude.

Pray and ask God to speak to you.

Someone has said that God's phone number is J-E-R-3-3-3.

This saying refers to a verse found in Jeremiah 33:3 that is an invitation from God to call on Him in prayer.

Jeremiah 33:3 (NIV): Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know.'

While this passage in context is intended as an invitation to Jeremiah the Old Testament prophet from the Lord God Almighty, the nature and character of God as One who has created people for an intimate relationship is consistent.

Hebrews 13:8 (NIV): 8 Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

James 1:17–18 (NIV): 17 Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. 18 He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created.

James 1:17–18 (TPT): 17 Every gift God freely gives us is good and perfect, streaming down from the Father of lights, who shines from the heavens with no hidden shadow or darkness and is never subject to change. 18 God was delighted to give us birth by the truth of his infallible Word

so that we would fulfill his chosen destiny for us and become the favorite ones out of all his creation!

God repeatedly describes Himself as our Father in Heaven who longs for a relationship with His children whom He created in His image. He wants to speak to us and show the plans He has for us and our future. He wants us to come to Him as a child comes to his or her father. He wants us to seek Him and to know Him and to be known by Him. God never gets offended when we desire to call on Him and desire to hear from Him.

Proverbs 15:22 (NIV): 22 Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed.

It's easy to find people to tell you what you want to hear or affirm what you already want to do.

But there are times we need to seek wise counsel, trusted advisors, Godly friends that will tell how they think God would like us to handle some of our dilemmas. So that we can succeed in what God is calling us to.

What are the circumstances of the current situation?

Oftentimes God speaks to us and guides us in our lives towards the work He wants us to join Him in by nature of the circumstances that surround us. Look for the doors that are opening rather than trying to kick down the ones that are closed.

Jesus said in Matthew 7:7-8, Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened.”

This counsel from Jesus does not necessarily mean just follow the path of least resistance.

Rather, it means to be proactive in trying to discern what the circumstances around your life may be leading you towards.

Is there a path that seems to be opening? Follow it. Are there hurdles and difficulties that continue to close

options?

Perhaps the circumstances are what God is using to direct your path. As long as your circumstances lead you not into temptation or contradict what the Word of God already has said about a situation, move forward with humble confidence.

What do you want to do?

David gave some great instruction when it comes to discerning what God may be leading a person to do when he wrote these words of wisdom in Psalm 37:4

Psalm 37:4 - "Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart."

God created us to worship Him, to be in relationship with Him, to love Him, to pray to Him, to enjoy Him, to live for Him in complete surrender. A person who does this is someone who is delighting himself or herself in the Lord.

As we live in this manner, recognize that God created us with different desires and passions and dreams. As long as they do not contradict what God has said in His word, as long as trusted advisors affirm what you desire to do, as long as circumstances allow for them, and as long as God is not telling you something to the contrary through prayer...GO FOR IT!

These five ways are how a person may “try to discern” what God is inviting that person to join Him in if an angel of the Lord is not directly giving the message like Gabriel did to Mary. As God invites us to join Him in what He is doing, respond as Mary did in Luke 1:38.

Luke 1:38 - “I am the Lord’s servant,” Mary answered, “May your word be fulfilled.” Then the angel left her.

This was a way to convey that all of who she was at the disposal of God in total and absolute devotion. Mary was giving all of her life to what God wanted her to join Him in doing and being. Although she did not know everything that was to come her way, she knew she could trust the Lord to

be with her and overshadow her with His presence each step of the way. Her Christmas Dilemma was met with a YES!

She knew she would face criticism, ridicule, character assassination, and perhaps even worse.

The law of her day stated that Joseph could divorce her and even submit her to death by stoning for becoming pregnant. But what God calls us to, God sees us through.

Mary could of easily decided to abort the promise of God. And church there are times when the Lord will ask us to things we don't understand, the our family don't understand and we will have a choice to say yes to what a God is calling us to or abort what He has called us to. Let me to prophecy over you today. All of you are pregnant with potential, chose to say yes so God can birth in you what a He has called you to.

Mary had been told that whatever dilemma she faced, she would not face it alone. Gabriel made that clear from the

start of his greeting to her.

Luke 1:28 - "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!"

The beautiful truth of Christmas is that the Lord not only was with Mary all the way but also is with us when we call on His name and walk through life empowered and accompanied by His Holy Spirit. As we move forward toward Christmas, may we respond to any dilemma in our life with "YES" as we seek to join God in what He is doing and give him honor, glory, and worship each step of the way.