

# *Mary's Life-Altering Moment*

**Luke 1:26-38**

**Advent Sunday 4-B, Dec 24, 2017**

Many pregnant women in the United States today are collectively lodging one, gigantic complaint against the American public! This complaint--is the growing tendency that more and more people have--to walk right up to them--during the second or third trimester of their pregnancy--and without even asking the expectant mother's permission, first--they reach out their hands and touch that part of her body where the baby is growing inside.

Some of these people are family members and friends, while others are complete strangers, but many pregnant women these days are identifying such behavior as a rather intrusive and awkward gesture!

Besides, haven't most Americans learned that great personal lesson we were all taught, while we were still children in elementary school? The number one rule with respect to other people is "DO NOT TOUCH THEM," or to put this directive in a more positive way: "KEEP YOUR HANDS UNTO YOURSELF!"

Nevertheless, more and more pregnant women are asking themselves the question: "Why"?

Perhaps, people who reach out touch the bodies of women expecting a child, do this because of the mystery and the promise that pregnancy reveals.

Other people may want to reach out and draw near the sign of new life and new growth in our midst! While there is little scientific evidence to back this up--some have conjectured that more and more people are walking right up to pregnant women and touching their stomachs, for the same reason that the first appearance of daffodils in the Spring makes them want to kneel down, close to the earth, not only to get a closer look at these tiny little signs of new life popping out of MOTHER EARTH--but also to touch them!

We all know that so much of what happens inside of a woman concerning those 9 months of the gestation period, remains a mystery.

Though we can certain agree with King David when he says in Psalm 139, "*We are fearfully and wonderfully made,*" none of us seems to have any recollection, at all, of what it was actually like for us--as King David also says in Psalm 139--to be knit together, by our Creator, in our mother's womb!

We have all heard the story of the Angel Gabriel's appearing to the young Nazarene maiden--to make his annunciation to her, many times! She, whose name was Mary, was now being designated by God to be: "The Highly Favored One."

Yes, God had chosen her, out of all the other women who have ever lived on the face of the earth--to become the personal Carrier of his only-begotten Son into our world!

Questions? Of course, she must have had questions--how could she not have had questions!?!

But the thing the Church has tended to appreciate the most about Mary--was this young girl's willing-spirit--in response--to Gabriel's annunciation. She doesn't protest the way that many people do throughout the Bible when God calls upon them to fulfill a very specific role for him. She didn't say as Moses did: "I am not very good at public speaking;" or as Jeremiah did: "Lord God, I am only a child and don't know how to speak!"

Instead, Mary's answer mimics that of the Prophet Isaiah, whom God called upon one day to become a prophet! He didn't say: "Not me, no way!" When God asked the question of Isaiah: "Whom shall I send?" Isaiah responded by saying: "Here am I! Send me, send me!"

There is one new aspect of Mary's pregnancy, however, that I came across this year that I have never really considered before. With all the information that the angel did reveal to Mary about her pregnancy--much more information than most pregnant women have ever had revealed or available to them--until these much more recent times--her pregnancy was much more like a 21<sup>st</sup> Century pregnancy than one that would have taken place in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century.

1. Back in the old days, there was no way for expectant parents to know ahead of time, if they were going to have a baby boy or a baby girl! They didn't know that until the day when the baby was actually born!
2. And there was no way to know if there was going to be one child born that day, or twins, or maybe even triplets for that matter! Who of us can ever forget that Rebecca, the wife of Isaac, gave birth to her twin boys--Esau and Jacob who would be rivals against one another for the larger portion of their lives!
3. There were no high-tech ultrasounds, back then, to capture a somewhat mushy image of the child you were carrying. It was all a surprise, only to be revealed at birth. And even with our technological advances, the details and formation of life in pregnancy are still very much a mystery.
4. So, this passage in Luke is in many ways thoroughly modern, because Mary is given a lot of information at the outset. In what can surely be called a life-altering moment, Mary learns that she is soon to be pregnant; she will have a son; she should name him Jesus; and that her Child will pretty much rock the world, making his debut as the Son of God.

Mary has only one question at the end of the angel's spiel, and that is about the mechanics of it all, since she is a virgin; which is a fair enough question, but unlikely to be where our questioning would have ended!

Instead, like the prophet Isaiah already stated, Mary gave this dutiful response: "Here am I, let it be with me according to your Word."

This is a statement of profound trust—profound trust in the face of what looks to be some very daunting and challenging instructions—even more daunting than Mary knows!

And we really do not know if Mary's response was said in joy and laughter, or in perplexity or fear, or even in knowing resignation.

We have her words, but we don't know her tone. We don't know how soon after this encounter she spoke the words of the Magnificat, and if her heart had to catch up with her words. Fortunately, for Mary, she would have at least some time to grow into the call God had for her—a full nine-months in fact!

Today, our Gospel reading tells us of two pregnant women meeting in the hill country of Judea. They are blood-relatives in that they are cousins!

One of these two women, Elizabeth, is well past child-bearing age—and yet she is pregnant. The other, Mary, is only a teenager, probably about 14 years old, which many Bible scholars have conjectured through their study of history. She is also expecting a baby.

Elizabeth is six months pregnant, carrying John the Baptizer in her womb, the prophet and forerunner of Christ. Mary, although a virgin, is newly pregnant by the Holy Spirit. Yes, both are pregnant by the power of God's Word. And they are living proof that *“with God nothing is impossible” (Luke 1:37)*.

So, Mary went to visit Elizabeth.

As soon as the sound of Mary's greeting reached Elizabeth's ears, the baby in her womb jumped for joy, and she was filled with the Holy Spirit.

What a moment! The word from Mary caused Baby John to leap for joy. There he was, an unborn Child, barely six months old in his mother's womb; not yet born and already he was preaching Christ!

So, there they were. Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, blesses Mary and her holy Child. *“Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!”*

Notice what Elizabeth doesn't say. She doesn't say that Mary is simply one whom God has blessed. No, Mary IS THE MOST-BLESSED WOMAN among ALL other women until the end of time!

Although Elizabeth is her older relative, she considers it an honor, an act of grace and kindness that Mary should visit her. She even calls Mary “the mother of my Lord.” And so, the Church has called Mary, the Mother of God (theotokos in Greek) which most literally means the one who bears God in her womb.

Mary is the bearer of the eternal Word, the mother of the Messiah, the Son of God.

Mary becomes the doorway through which the Son of God would soon, thereafter, enter our world. She is the chosen and honored instrument of Christ's incarnation, through whom the Son of God received His body--His body that He might offer it for the life of the world. This is why, Mary is the most blessed woman among all other women who have ever lived in any other time or place!

That's why, to this day, we are to honor Mary because of what God has brought about through her.

Furthermore, Mary shows us what happens when God's Word has its way with someone. She was filled with the Spirit and the Word of God. She believed God. She trusted His Word. And from such trust in God's Word, she said “yes” to God's plan. She agreed to the impossible task of being the virgin mother of the world's Savior.

Mary is a picture of God's grace--that God loves us to such a high degree and in such a special way that He would send His Son to be born of such a mother. God humbled Himself even to need a teenaged mother for nourishment and care, to be diapered and bathed by her, even though He is her God and Savior.

Yes, even to this day, we are to honor Mary as one whom God has blessed above all other women. She is our Lord's instrument of His incarnation. That's why she is to be blessed by all who believe in her Son for their salvation.

But here's the best thing about Mary. Her soul magnifies the Lord, and her spirit rejoices in God her Savior. She directs our attention to the same place--to her Child, to her God, to our God! She teaches us to worship God in humility and fear. For as she sang, "*His mercy extends to those who fear Him.*"

Mary teaches us not to take our place with the proud and the powerful, the ruling and the rich of this world. For the Lord is the one who topples the mighty from their thrones. He puts the powerful in their place.

And yet God is a God of mercy. His arm is mighty to save. His arm lifts those who are humbled and bowed down. God helps those who cannot help themselves. His arm reaches out to fill the hungry with good things. His arm extended from the heights of heaven to a frightened girl named Mary. He reached down to embrace the world, to join Himself with us. He extended His arms on a cross to save us. He extends His arm to us now, as we hear His Word and receive His gifts.

Mary teaches us to receive God's gifts in the way of faith. She reminds us that God keeps His Word. He remembers "to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, just as He spoke to our fathers."

Indeed, God keeps His promises. He kept the promise He made to Adam and Eve after they were expelled from Eden. He kept the promise He made to the patriarchs and prophets of Israel. He kept the promise He made to you when you were baptized. And He renews His promise whenever you hear His Word and receive His forgiveness.

God is faithful. He sent His Son, born of Mary, born under the Law, to suffer and die under the Law. And even more, He rose again and rules, so that through His dying and rising, the world would be blessed with forgiveness, with peace, with eternal life. AMEN