

# Ordinary Girl, Extraordinary Surrender

At the time of Jesus' arrival in the human race, Israel was under the tyranny of Roman rule. Herod the Great, who considered himself the king of the Jews, was threatened to the core by the birth of this illegitimately conceived refugee baby. As a result, history records the horrific Herod-ordered murder of thousands upon thousands of baby boys under the age of two. Jesus' birth set off a political wave of persecution that the Jewish people mistakenly thought the promised Messiah would combat by military might.

And whom did God choose to bring forth this real King of the Jews? He chose Mary. Mary, the place where heaven and earth collided. Mary, an ordinary teenage girl of humble means and upbringing from a nowhere place like Nazareth. Mary, who had likely not been chosen for anything more than simple household tasks up to this point.

This was where and how God chose to debut His one and only Son on the stage of human history. God spoke these words of hope through His prophet, Isaiah, declaring to His people His plan to redeem man from their sin through the coming birth of a Savior through a virgin:

"Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and she will name Him Immanuel" (Isa. 7:14, NASB).

But did you know we receive a hint in Genesis as to the coming Redeemer? In Genesis 3, God declared war on Satan and gave the first promise of the Redeemer. Satan would bruise Christ's heel, but Christ would bruise Satan's head and defeat him: "And I will make enemies of you and the woman, And of your offspring and her Descendant; He shall bruise you on the head,

And you shall bruise Him on the heel” (Gen. 3:15).

God, knowing all things for all time, had a plan at the birth of mankind to repair the breach man would create between himself and God. In cloaked terms, He told the first Adam of the last Adam—the one who would restore the connection to the Father that the first Adam destroyed through his choice to sin.

And why? Because of His great love for us.

### Ordinary Humanity

It’s so easy to read these accounts in Scripture and forget that these were real human beings, ordinary flesh-and-blood people, living in extraordinary times and remarkable circumstances. Take, for example, the following passage:

“Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city in Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the descendants of David; and the virgin’s name was Mary. And coming in, he said to her, ‘Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.’

And the angel said to her, ‘Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and give birth to a son, and you shall name Him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end.’

And Mary said, ‘Behold, the Lord’s bond-servant; may it be done to me according to your word.’ And the angel departed from her,” (Luke 1:26-28, 30-33, 38).

We must not fail to emphasize Mary’s ordinary humanity, the love-drenched backdrop for the greatest miracle this planet has ever seen. Mary was the coordinate on the map of human

history where heaven's love appeared. Every detail of her Son's arrival drips with humility and stands in stark contrast to man's religious expectations of how He would come. All of Israel, under the siege of Roman rule, was groaning with expectation of the coming Messiah who would rise up and fight for their liberation from the oppressive tyranny. Surely the longed-for Savior would arrive in an impressive military array, poised for the very war of the ages, ensuring that the children of Israel would be free once and for all.

And yet, Messiah's arrival was anything but impressive. Rather than entering on a white horse, He was born in a filthy, crude cave and laid in a manger made of cold stone. Rather than issuing forth on the wings of majestic angels, He was pressed through the birth canal of an unknown teenage girl whose only qualification for the job was that she said yes to her God. Rather than reveal His divinity through manifestations and miracles from an early age, He spent 30 years in humble preparation for three and a half years of holy ministry.

His mother's simple ordinariness only serves to gloriously highlight His extraordinary life. Every "Mary moment" in Scripture points to Jesus. Her life-altering encounter with Gabriel affords her the opportunity to partner with God in the most supernatural of creations, the very Son of God. Mary's moments with Elizabeth, when the Holy Spirit confirms through Elizabeth's unborn child that surely she is the mother of the Savior, reveal His glory even as a preborn infant. And what of the song of Mary after this familial encounter, in which she pours out her soul in song, praising God for the fulfillment of the long-expected answer to humanity's greatest need?

Mary's first gaze into the face of Jesus, at which time she must have once again felt the weight of her part to play in the redemption of humanity through her own Son, again demonstrates the supernatural power of the incarnation. And then there is the memorable moment at the temple in Jerusalem, when Mary and Joseph return after realizing Jesus was not

among them. Mary questions her Son and receives the gentle reminder that His existence revolves around God's purposes: "Did you not know that I had to be in My Father's house?" (Luke 2:49b).

The wedding at Cana (John 2:1-11) is yet another example of a Mary moment. Here, she points her finger at her Son, sensing that His time had come to reveal Himself through a miracle. And what about her painful presence at the foot of His cross? Once again, she looks upon His form and, in gut-wrenching agony, accepts who He really is. Finally, we see Mary in the upper room, waiting with His disciples for His promised arrival.

### **Humble Example**

Mary's life was marked by waiting. Her very existence revolved around His. She lived a life marked by her love for Him. As we look at the life of this remarkable human being, what can modern humanity learn from her humble example?

1) Mary's life purpose was to bring forth the life of Christ. And so is ours. "'I and the Father are one.' The Jews picked up stones again to stone Him" (John 10:30-31).

Jesus lived and modeled oneness with His Father. This level of love often proves offensive to spiritual leaders who emphasize religion more than relationship.

And then Paul addresses the Colossian church, expressing that Jesus is the exact representation of the Father: "I was made a minister of this church according to the commission from God granted to me for your benefit, so that I might fully carry out the preaching of the word of God, that is, the mystery which had been hidden from the past ages and generations, but now has been revealed to His saints, to whom God willed to make known what the wealth of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles is, the mystery that is Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col. 1:25-27).

Christ in you, the hope of glory. Christ *in you*!

Mary carried the physical incarnation of Christ in her body. We carry the crucified and risen Christ in us through the power and presence of the Holy Spirit: "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me" (Gal. 2:20).

Connection, oneness—all that was lost through the actions of the first Adam was restored through the actions of the second Adam. God made us for oneness with Him, and Mary exemplified this through a life lived in surrender to her God. She withheld nothing from Him, even her own body and reputation, that she might bring forth the very life of the Christ child.

2) Mary lived with the consequences of His favor. God's favor doesn't always feel good, and it often appears to be anything but favor. "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you" (Luke 1:28b). This is how Gabriel began his encounter with Mary.

But what did favor look like for Mary, an unmarried, pregnant teenager? In the culture of that time, this meant that she would face the shame of Joseph's expected rejection as well as the shame of public spurning and scorn, not to mention the shame she would bring on her family. There was even the possibility of her being stoned to death for her sin of becoming pregnant under these presumed circumstances. At best, Mary had to face life going forward as a massively misunderstood and misrepresented girl. Yes, the virgin birth was foretold by the prophet Isaiah, but to come via a peasant girl from Nazareth? No way.

And what about the favor of a lengthy journey to Bethlehem while in her final trimester of pregnancy?

Here are a few more notable examples of the ways Mary

experienced God's favor:

- Giving birth in a filthy cave.
- Hearing the painful prophecy of Simeon in regard to Jesus' destiny, that "a sword will pierce your own soul" (Luke 2:35a).
- Fleeing to Egypt (another fun road trip) to protect her baby from death.
- Losing her son for three days at the Passover Feast in Jerusalem.
- Witnessing the respected religious leaders of the day hate and ridicule her son.
- Standing at the foot of her son's cross on the day of His execution.

Yes, there were beautiful soul-soaring moments as well. Mary looked straight into the eyes of God, seeing His first smile and feeling Him breathe. She held Him, kissed His face, nourished the Savior of all mankind at her own breast. She witnessed His first miracle in Cana. The tiny hands that once grasped her fingers turned water into wine, thus bringing attention for the first time to who He really was. The little feet that kicked inside her walked on water and trampled all over religious traditions.

But His favor isn't always easy and may not seem like favor. When the life of Christ shows up in our everyday moments, it can be beautiful and peaceful and elating, but it can also be lonely, empty and painful. It can even look as if God is opposing you.

That's why we don't focus on what life looks like, but rather on what He looks like. And He looks like love. Unfailing, unclenching, never-ending love. We don't train our eyes on facts. We hone in on truth.

Birth is messy, but the life of Christ is worth the mess. It was worth it for Mary. And it is worth it for you and for me.

His love for us made the pain of our redemption worth His pain. And His love for us makes walking in surrender to Him worth it. We must always return to love.

3) Love is a choice. Mary could have said no, and so can we. So often we forget: The conception of Jesus didn't "happen" to her. It was offered to her. And she could have said no.

Many of us read this passage of Scripture and assume that the King of kings took Mary for His own purposes, much as an earthly king would take yet another woman into his harem for his own pleasure. Not so!

Not once in human history has God ever forced Himself on humanity. Instead, He graciously offers Himself. And at the one moment in history where He shows up dressed in flesh and bone, He offers Himself once again. All of heaven wrapped in skin made a choice to surrender His life in exchange for ours.

And once again, there is a choice. Will we surrender to Him with all that we are, or will we settle for a distant view with little to no buy-in? Will we stop praying, "Jesus, help me" prayers and instead say, "Jesus, *have me*"?

If we return to Genesis, we see God reaching out to mankind: "Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man, 'Where are you?'" (Gen. 3:8-9).

God had no need to find His beloved creation. He knew right where they were. He asked this question to punctuate the distance they had created between themselves and Him. That signified the start of His journey to close the distance we had created and repair the breach. It began in that first garden, and it culminated in the Garden of Gethsemane where Jesus breathed out, "not my will, but Yours be done" (Luke 22:42b).

This is the same prayer His earthly mother had prayed: “May it be to me according to your word” (Luke 1:38b). These words of surrender were the hallmark of her life.

Mary was an ordinary human being whom God allowed into this most sacred space in time because of her extraordinary surrender. Hers was a life spent gazing upon Him, a timeless invitation to the rest of humanity to do the same.

When offered the responsibility to bring forth the Messiah in the earth, will we gaze on Him and respond as Mary did? Just as it was for Mary, the choice is ours.

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