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**“Mary: Wonder”**  
*Luke 1:47-55*

I find it very interesting that the latest of in a long line (and getting longer all the time!) of Willis grandchildren... Cecelia Claire Willis... would be baptized on this day for which the message concerns Mary, the mother of Jesus. The reason I find it interesting is that our ‘daughter-in-grace’ Claire, and her family, are members of the Roman Catholic church. In fact, just last weekend I attended a funeral service at the church where Claire, Chandler, and the girls sometimes attend that is very near their home.

Anyway, as you all are probably well aware of, our R.C. brethren put a lot of emphasis on the Virgin Mary... much more so than we do in the Presbyterian Church. But regardless of how we may differ in our deference to Jesus’ mom, it is what we **share** in our Christian belief about this amazing young lady that is most important. What IS important is that whether Catholic or Protestant, we believe that Mary was told by a super-natural messenger from God that **“you will conceive and bear a son, and name him ‘Jesus.’”** (Lk 1:31) And further, that when she questioned how this could happen since she was a virgin, that angel replied that **“Holy Spirit power of the Most High will overshadow (“come upon”) you; therefore the child will be holy... (and) will be called ‘Son of God.’”** Our common faith leads us to believe that Mary’s humble response to this incredible news was very simple: **“I am the Lord’s servant; may it be to me as you have said.”**

Today we Presbyterians... with a few Catholics (and others?) sprinkled in... will consider what it was like to experience the coming of Christ into the world through the eyes of one who was most certainly ‘up close and personal’ to this history-changing event. The thought of having one’s body ‘filled’ with another human being is incredible enough... wondering just what that tiny life will be like. But when that child would be the Son of God? There is no doubt that Mary would look at her circumstances and be filled with awe... with joyful anticipation... be filled with **wonder**.

I don’t know if ANY of us could fathom the depth of amazement, of bewilderment, as to what was going through Mary’s mind when that angel appeared to her. The Scriptures say that

***“she was much perplexed*** (“troubled”) ***by his words.***” (1:28) Yeah, I’ll bet she was! Here was simple, teenage girl, engaged to a hard-working carpenter, looking forward to their life together. And then this ‘Gabriel fellow’ shows up. A stranger who declares that ***“the Lord is with you.”*** He goes on to tell her that she is ‘with child.’ (“pregnant”) Even though she is a virgin. And when she asks ***‘How?’*** he replies that the child she will be carrying is ***“holy”***, conceived not by human means, but by the power of the Holy Spirit. One might imagine the look of disbelief on her face when her mysterious visitor concludes with, ***“for nothing is impossible with God.”*** Her response though, doesn’t communicate doubt... her answer does NOT express the ‘IM-possible’ nature of her circumstances... for she answers simply, ***“I am the Lord’s servant; may it be to me as you have said.”***

What do YOU and I have to learn from Mary’s experience... not merely ‘once-in-a-lifetime,’ but ‘once-in-ALL-time’? As we look through the eyes of one who knew Him so intimately, who loved Him as only a mother could, what is it that you and I should SEE? FEEL? KNOW? What can WE learn from her?

**God chooses us for some difficult tasks. He doesn’t ask.** When Mary got engaged to Joseph, she had NO idea the path that her betrothal to him would take. Marriages, like life itself, is FULL of surprises, isn’t it? The issue is not whether challenges will come, but rather, how we deal with those inevitable, unexpected trials. Mary didn’t ASK to bear the Son of God, the very Savior of the world. While it may not have been articulated in Scripture, she had to wonder, ‘Why me, Lord?’ NO answer is given. God doesn’t have to. His decisions are not accountable to us. Like Mary, **We simply must TRUST in His reasons.** Because of the very reason Jesus came in the first place. To show God’s **LOVE**. We can spend so much time expressing our **questions** of God, we forget His **‘Answer’**... JESUS! Like He would say when He was ‘all grown up’... ***“Trust in God; trust also in me.”***

If we **trust** in God, then we must be **open to the task**. When Gabriel appeared to her, what was her reaction? ‘Oh no, you must have the wrong girl! Sure, I’m engaged to be married, and to having children, but I’d prefer a much more ‘natural’ means! There must be a lot of other women who are much more ‘qualified’ than me!’ NO! NO EXCUSES! ***“I am the Lord’s servant; let it be with me according to your word.”*** Or, ***“just as you have said.”*** I’m not

going to argue with you. God has a plan. I'm part of it. **I am willing to be available to God.** Oh how God longs for us to say the same!

As I thought about Mary's willingness to trust in God and 'be available' to Him, I thought about that classic hymn entitled "Trust and Obey." One of the verses says that *"We never can prove the delights of his love until all on the altar we lay. For the favor he shows and the joy he bestows are for them who will trust and obey."* Only can we appreciate the fullness of God's love for us when we lay the sacrifice of OUR love on the altar. The altar... a place of sacrifice... much like this Table where we remember the ultimate sacrifice Jesus made for us. As we seek to faithfully follow Jesus, then we will experience the favor and joy only He can give. For those who 'trust and obey.'

Mary's **trust** and **obedience** to serving God came out of character traits such as her **humility**... in her words, *"the lowliness of his servant."* This *"Mighty One... the Son of the Most High God"* was not being born to some royal family. Not to the proud and powerful, but to one of those in the *"servant Israel."* You and I are also called to be as 'servants' to one another... in the pattern of Jesus, who declared that He came *"not to be served, but to serve."* Jesus would remind His disciples that *"whoever is least among you will be the greatest, and the greatest will be the least."* Or in further words of Scripture, *"Humble yourself in the sight of the Lord, and he will lift you up."*

And in addition to her humility, Mary had an **attitude of gratitude**. Not simply grateful to some 'extraterrestrial' who came to her in a vision. But to the One she KNEW was behind her every blessing. The one of whom that angel spoke. *"My spirit rejoices in God my Savior."* When she spoke of how generations would call her "blessed," Mary knew "from whom all blessings flow." And SHOWED it. Her words in Luke 1:47-55 are known as "The Magnificat", from the first word in the Latin translation of this passage. *"My soul MAGNIFIES the Lord."*

What she is saying here is that her life should be like a magnifying glass. That the goodness of God should be 'magnified', be made greater, larger, for everyone to see more clearly. Her every breath, her actions, her thoughts, her words, should bear witness to the One who had brought such blessing in her life. Even a blessing that came with it a great responsibility. That life should show others CLEARLY that she **trusted** in God, a God who would

reward her **humble** spirit with an incredible gift. That the same God who thought so much of her to choose her in this way would be faithful to carry her through whatever trials came with her amazing 'assignment.' Her life wasn't about HER... but the One who literally **lived through her**. Like the purpose of that magnifying glass, to bring sharper focus onto the object seen through it. To borrow from her words, we must ask the question, '**does your soul magnify the Lord**'?

My friends, just like Mary, you and I have been given a great gift. A precious, incredible, priceless gift. Also a gift that we are meant to carry inside of us. The gift of **Life**. The Life of **Jesus Christ**. And why has he chosen us to receive this gift? How could God love someone who is as imperfect and self-centered as we are... so undeserving of the sacrifice Jesus has made for us? **Don't know... I can't answer that one**. Mary couldn't either. But she **trusted**. **Open** to God's leading. **Humble** reliance on that same Spirit that brought Jesus' life into her. May that Holy Spirit breathe new life into each one of us this Christmas season. May each of us feel that same 'breath of heaven' that will enable us to **magnify** the Lord. The same God who chose Mary chooses YOU. So let us join in those words she declared so powerfully: **"My spirit rejoices in God my Savior... for I am the Lord's servant."** Rejoice and serve. Trust and obey. *"For there's no other way, to be happy in Jesus...than to trust and obey."* AMEN?

### **CHARGE AND BENEDICTION**

*"I am frightened by the load I bear... waiting in a silent prayer. In a world as cold as stone, must I walk this path alone?"* In this song, Mary in effect asks, WILL YOU BE WITH ME, LORD? The same question that you and I often ask. As we approach that miraculous day when the 'breath of heaven' blew onto the earth in the form of Jesus, may we know the answer in one of those names for our Lord: Emmanuel. God with us. So, as you prepare to leave this place, know that you do not go alone... that the Spirit of the Living God is above you to watch over you, behind you to support you, beside you to be your friend, before you to show you the way, and deep within you, to give you peace. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, all God's children said... AMEN! Go with God...