

**MARY, A WOMAN OF FAITH**  
**Luke 1.26-38**

**I have a very heavy theological question for you today?  
 What are some things you're afraid of?**

**I confess I'm afraid of heights and I'm afraid of roller coasters.  
 Put those two together and I really start to shake.**

**When Bret was about 5 or 6 we took him and his friend Butch to Valley Fair.**

**It started innocently enough.  
 It was a nice day and of course there was plenty of excitement.  
 Char and I basically chased the boys from ride to ride  
 and we ended up on a few of them ourselves.**

**When we got to the roller coaster things started to go downhill for me.  
 The boys of course got in line right away.**

**Char said well aren't you going?  
 I said, no way, you know I hate those things.**

**She said, honey, you know they need someone to go with them.  
 I said, no way, they'll do fine.**

**She said, Thomas, you know one of us is going to go with them.  
 I said, nope, no way, I'm definitely, absolutely, positively not going to go.  
 It would take an act of God.**

**The other ride ended and they opened the gate,  
 Butch and Bret jumped into the front seat.  
 I got in the seat behind them and then this lady got in beside me.**

**She said hi and smiled and said something like, won't this will be great.  
 I tried to smile, but was thinkin', it won't be as great as you think lady.**

**I fastened my seat belt tight, held tight to the handle, and closed my eyes tight.**

**We started to move, click, click, click, up, up, up...down, down, down, whoosh.  
 Up, up, up, click, click, click...whoosh, down, down, down.  
 Up, up, up, click, click, click...whoosh, down, down, down we went, again and again.**

**Well that wasn't so bad until we got to one that came down, down, down  
 and my stomach came up, up, up, and got stuck in my throat.**

**I couldn't breathe so I thought it might help to opened my eyes-it didn't help.  
 All I saw was Bret, Butch,  
 and a bunch of people waving their arms up and down and screaming.  
 I thought that might help...at least the screaming, so I screamed-it didn't help.**

I know my mouth was open but I couldn't even hear the scream.  
I was still holding on tight, my knuckles had turned white,  
I was pretty sure I had turned white.

When I finally took a quick peek at the lady in the seat next to me.  
She was still smiling that sweet smile and seemed to be enjoying the ride.

So, I thought, maybe the lady might be able to help.  
I was desperate so when we started down the next slope I grabbed her hand.

She must have thought this slope was steeper and scarier than the others  
because she lost her smile, looked terrified, and started screaming too.

The rest of the slopes must have been very scary for her too  
because she didn't stop screaming even when we were going up.

We finally slowed down, got to the gate, and stopped.  
Believe it or not, she jumped out before Bret and Butch.

Fears come in all sizes and shapes-don't they?

Some of the things we're asked to do in life, in this roller coaster ride of life  
aren't always fun, some are downright miserable, and some we're afraid to try.

So, what are some things you're afraid of?  
Are you afraid of Heights? Mice? Snakes? The dark? Deep Water? Change?  
Are you afraid of not having control? Losing control? Being Loved? Not Being Loved?  
Are you afraid of speaking in front of a group of people? Praying? Being closed in?  
Are you afraid of Dying? Maybe not dying but how you die?  
Are you afraid of the future?  
Are you afraid for your children and grandchildren?

You children, grandchildren, teenagers and young adults, what are you afraid of?  
I'll bet your fears have more to do with how you perform on tests, in ball games, and concerts.  
Maybe you're afraid that mom and dad won't get along.  
Maybe you're afraid your friends won't like your new shirt, slacks, or shoes?  
Maybe you're afraid your friends won't think your new ring, tattoo, cell phone, or new "do" are cool?

Maybe you wonder if mom and dad, family and friends,  
or even God will still care about you if you say or do something stupid.

There are all kinds of fears aren't there?  
Whatever your fear, this morning I want to encourage you,  
that whenever fear knocks at your door, answer it with faith.

And especially if God is asking or wanting you to do something and you're afraid to do it,  
as fear knocks at your door, be certain to answer it with faith.

**Gabby, our friend from the skit said** Hebrews 11.1 defined faith this way,  
*"Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see."*

The Message says, *“The fundamental fact of existence is that this trust in God, this faith, is the firm foundation under everything that makes life worth living. It’s our handle on what we can’t see.”*

This morning let’s look at the story of a teenage girl, Mary, who is a great example of a child of faith, even a woman of faith. Let’s look at her story and see if we can get a handle on this faith business.

First know that **GOD CALLS YOU TO A LIFE OF FAITH...click, click, click, up, up, up**  
*26In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee*  
*27to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David.*

*The virgin's name was Mary.*  
*28The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you."*

Verse 28 in the Message is wonderful, it starts Gabriel’s conversation with Mary this way.  
*“Upon entering Gabriel greeted her, “Good morning!  
 You’re beautiful with God’s beauty,  
 Beautiful inside and out! God be with you.”*

If an angel came to us with a greeting like that why would we have to care so much about wealth, health, good looks or great talent, power or prestige.

If you as a child, teenager, a confirmation student, or young adult, single or married, with or without children, working, retired or just tired and you are sitting here today and wondering about your worth, then take heart, listen closely, you’ll find your worth in God’s call and claim on your life.

But you need to know that call doesn’t mean easy street. Because when God calls you, he is going to challenge you.

That is our second point,  
**GOD CHALLENGES US TO GROW IN OUR FAITH.**  
 Down, down, down, whoosh...click, click, click-up, up, up  
 Down, down, down, whoosh...click, click, click-up, up, up

Verses 29-30, *“Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God.”*

Did you hear the word favor again. Don’t just pass by it, it’s a great word.

Now make a note that in these four Advent stories the angel says each time, “Don’t be afraid.”

We heard Gabriel say it to Zechariah last week, Mary this week, next week you’ll hear it when Pastor Eldon talks about the conversation with Joseph, and the fourth week the shepherd’s are to be comforted by those words.

Grace reminded us at staff this week that “Do not fear” is in the Bible 365 times, God wants to remind you and I each day that when fear knocks, let faith answers.

Ok, now just remember God calls and after God calls you,  
then God is going to give you something to do.  
He is going to challenge you, he is going to give you some responsibility.

Here the invitation he gave Mary,  
*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."*

**WOW!!!** In short, Mary was only to partner with God  
and only give birth to Jesus, the Son of God.

You and I, too, are to partner with the Holy Spirit to give birth,  
the spiritual birth to Jesus in our lives.  
And then we're to be Christ Bearers that he may be birthed in the lives of others.

We can't take that responsibility lightly.  
Read yourself into the stories and expectations of these Biblical characters.  
Jeremiah tells us that God has a plan in your life, one for good.

Paul wants you to know that you are God's workmanship created to do good works,  
to join him in the good work he's gotten ready for us to do.

And he tells the Corinthians that you are gifted, gifted for the common good,  
you are given something to do to show who God is.

Many trails and testings are opportunities to grow in faith, stepping stones of faith.  
Today we're talking about being challenged to serve as a stepping stone of faith.

So what say you to this call and challenge?  
Mary said yes.

Like her, **GOD WANTS US TO KEEP THE FAITH** and grow in faith.  
Listen in, verse 34, "*How will this be,*" Mary asked the angel, "*since I am a virgin.*"  
Sound familiar? Well, at least part of it should.

When Zechariah was told he would have a son, his response to Gabriel was, Luke 1.18  
*"How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years."*

A contemporary translation would be,  
"Ya, right! Do you expect me to believe that?  
I am an old man and my wife is an old woman."

Mary's responds in faith, it's more like, "Alright, just tell me what to do."

The difference is that Mary had faith, she trusted God with her fear.  
Zechariah was skeptical and sought clarity.

John Kavanaugh was working with Mother Theresa at the “house of dying” in Calcutta.  
 He asked her to pray for him.  
 She asked him what he wanted her to pray about.  
 He said to pray for clarity about what he was to do for the rest of his life.  
 She said no. He asked why.  
 She said to him that he didn’t need clarity.  
 He said that she always seemed to have it.  
 She said no. She didn’t have clarity. She had trust.  
 Clarity is an attempt to eliminate risk.

Remember our earlier definition of faith, *“sure of what we hope for,  
 certain of what we do not see...a handle on what can’t be seen.”*

Mary had faith. She trusted God.  
 And when you think about it, being younger might have had helped.  
 Young people think they’re invincible anyway.

Perhaps Mary was more open to life’s adventures.  
 Unlike Zechariah, she didn’t have to overcome countless experiences  
 of fear and failure that made him weary and wary.

Perhaps she was more innocent, more naïve about life.  
 Unlike Zechariah, she doesn’t have to peel away the layers  
 of doubt and discouragement, sorrow and sin that had made him skeptical.

Perhaps Mary had more childlike faith,  
 unlike Zechariah, she didn’t have to laser,  
 to seer through the cynical scar tissue of bruises and brokenness  
 that had blocked his vision.

She voices her wonder and the angel gives her more information  
 and like Zechariah, she receives a sign,  
*v35, “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.  
 V36, Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age,  
 (you better believe she is going to check it out-it’s fun to talk about babies)  
 And she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month.  
 V37 For nothing is impossible with God.”*

And her ultimate response,  
 Verse 38, *“I am the Lord’s servant,” Mary answered.  
 “May it be to me as you have said.”  
 Then the angel left her.*  
**MARY KEPT THE FAITH,**

Mary found a handle for her fears, for this roller coaster ride called life.  
 It’s called faith.  
 So how about you?

Who will answer when God knocks on your door and fear tries to sneak in?

