

# “Our Glorious Future”

Luke 1:26-55 & 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24

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Biblical Scholar Alan Culpepper wrote, “The Mary story is so familiar that we let its familiarity mask its scandal. Acceptability, prosperity and comfort have never been the essence of God’s Blessings.” Mary was a poor teenager from a disreputable city. She was engaged but not married to Joseph. The angel Gabriel appears to Mary and announces that she will conceive and bear a son. In those days the best an unmarried, pregnant woman could hope for was to escape stoning to live a life of begging. The entire family would be shamed and then shunned.

How would you react to the Angels news? Perhaps if you were Mary you would want a few more details and a few more appearances by Gabriel. Perhaps you would have replied, “That’s great, but could you also appear and tell my family, the religious leaders, community leaders, and the Nazareth justice department.” Maybe you would ask for some clarity about the future and have a few demands. Gabriel please fly us over to Bethlehem and provide us with hot meals and nice lodging. We will need a nice house and some money.

Mary has great faith in God to provide us with a glorious future replying, “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.” Mary visits Elizabeth bursting into an exuberant song proclaiming our glorious future.

Mary calls God her Savior, admitting her desperate need for help. Mary realizes her deliverance depends on the mercy of God and not on her own strength, ability or status. To confess God as Savior means that we will look only to God and not to some other power for our salvation. The word Mary uses for Savior carries the meaning of an eternal savior. She is speaking of a loving saving action of God that is timeless, past, present, and future. She praises God for God is saving us to a perfect, joyful, love-filled eternal home of abundant living. John Calvin comments that this is the first and greatest reason that Mary is blessed, that she calls God Savior, thereby recognizing that she has been born again by the Holy Spirit to a renewed and eternal life. The remarkable honor of carrying God’s only begotten son is the second and lesser reason that Mary is blessed. Ponder that for a second. Your salvation through Christ is a greater blessing than if you would have been chosen to be Jesus’ parent.

Mary praises God for the loving actions of God with a Greek tense expressing what is timelessly true indicating past, present, and future action. Mary remembered the stories of God’s steadfast love in the past and experienced God’s love in the present. Full of faith, Mary is so sure, so confident, and so certain of God’s future promises that she proclaims them as an accomplished fact even though Jesus, the cumulation of God’s love and presence with us, is still in her womb.

Mary knew she was a lowly servant, but she had faith in God her Savior and knew with God anything is possible. God does not look at outward appearances. God looks at the heart. Mary's heart was full of faith, rejoicing in God her savior. Mary was a young, poor, female—all characteristics that to the people of her day, made her seem unusable by God for any task. Yet God chose Mary for one of the most important acts of obedience God has ever asked of anyone. God turned the world's view of what is of worth upside down. You may feel that your ability, experience, education, or situation makes you an unlikely candidate for God's service; yet, if you have faith, God will do amazing things through you.

God's favor and blessings does not bring success and fame by worldly standards and does not ensure an easy life. Mary had the honor of being the mother of the Messiah and it led to much pain and difficulty. Her peers ridiculed her, Joseph almost left her, she traveled 70 miles on a donkey while nine months pregnant, gave birth in a barn, was chased by a murderous king as she fled for her life to Egypt, she watched her son be rejected, beaten, and murdered. Yet through it all, Mary was faithful. She obediently dedicated herself to God's call and through Mary came the greatest blessing of all eternity, Jesus the Savior of the world.

The glory of Christmas came about by the faithfulness of ordinary people, Zechariah an old priest, a young girl, and outcast shepherds. They had faith in God and answered God's call. Ordinary people who were faithful, who believed that God's promised future glorious story would become reality. John Calvin comments that if we are wise we will be like Mary remembering the loving actions of God, which builds up our faith, inspiring thankful worship, and dedicated service.

Are you ready to welcome Jesus into our world? The challenge for us today is to consider whether we are open and receptive to the coming of Jesus into our lives. Mary said, "I am the Lord's servant," willing to risk her reputation in order to allow the Son of God to enter the world. Mary's faith overcame worry about her engagement, her social standing, her health, and her long-term financial security. Mary's faith overcame concerns about what others would think and do to her. Mary said yes to a baby who would grow up to be the Savior of the world providing a way for us to be cared for eternally.

Madeline L'Engle wrote, "This is the irrational season, when love blooms bright and wild. Had Mary been filled with reason, there had been no room for the child!" Are we willing to be open, receptive, and faithful to the promises of God? Are we willing to embrace the Christ Child and let this child make a difference in our lives? If we say yes we will find ourselves changed. We will become people who have Christ at the very center of who we are, just as Mary received Jesus into her life. We will turn into people who can say along with Mary, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word."

Have faith in God! Bold faith inspired by the story of Mary. She believed in God's future story with bold conviction which inspired her to sing of God's future deliverance in the present tense. Faithful believers have joyful hope in the midst of struggle, because they are confident in God's future story. May the anticipation and expectation of advent be with you. God is at work in you, in all of us. The best is yet to come.

In his work on Hope in Pastoral Care and Counseling, Andy Lester talks about the importance of our future stories. We are a narrative people, he says. We think of our lives as stories in process with a past, present, and future. Most counseling theories have led people to examine their past to see what got them into the mess they're in. But he says people's "future stories" are even more important. The way we imagine our future determines the direction we take, the momentum we enjoy, and the way we behave. People who experience sudden change, say the failure of a business or the loss of a loved one, lose a part of their future story and are disoriented until they can re-form a sense of what is to come and what is to become of them. People become dysfunctional when their future story turns negative, they lose hope, and then they get stuck.

In Jesus we all have a wonderful, awesome, glorious future with God for eternity. At times it is hard to glimpse our glorious future story. We can't fully explain it, see it, sense it, or even imagine it. Our faith opens our heart to Jesus filling us with the warmth of God's love, a whole new dimension of life where the Holy Spirit gives us a sense, of our glorious future. We can rejoice, pray, and give thanks regardless of our circumstances for we know Jesus is faithful. Jesus is our loving Savior who brings Christmas to our soul every day and one day will take us home to heaven. Amen