

Text: Luke 1:39-56

Title: A Word That Calms Our Fears & Ignites Our Passion

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Place: First Baptist Church, Olds, AB

“In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, “Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.” 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.” Luke 1:26-30¹

This week I was reading a series of articles in the *National Post* newspaper entitled, “Christmas Unwrapped.” One of the articles dealt with the very Christmassy topic of angels, and particularly with our changing view of angels. As many of you know, my favorite holiday movie is “It’s a Wonderful Life,” and it stars an endearingly fumbling little angel who goes by the name of “Clarence Odbody, angel second class.” Charles Lewis, who wrote the piece in the *National Post*, pointed out how at variance “Clarence Odbody” is from the angels of the Bible. He wrote...

When the archangel Gabriel landed in Nazareth 2,000 years ago to meet the woman who would become the Mother of [Jesus], as told in the New Testament, his greetings included necessary words of assurance: “Be not afraid.”

Despite myriad artistic depictions through the ages that show Gabriel looking like the most serene of creatures, Mary may have been shocked out of her wits by his presence. Being a Jew of her times, she would have known about the angels of the Old Testament, and so would have had good reason to fear. Angels were serious business in those days, even terrifying. They often carried flaming swords or their faces appeared to emit lightning. They were not the feathery sweet angels of today that hang from Christmas trees or appear in school plays.

...

Indeed, only months before, a relation of Mary’s was struck dumb for having the audacity to doubt Gabriel’s words. So after greeting Mary with, “Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee, blessed art thou among women,” the angel of the Lord needed to reassure her that all would be well.²

Although Mary accepted Gabriel’s “troubling” declaration that she would bear a child by the Holy Spirit would be the “the Son of God” (Luke 1:35), I’m sure she

¹Unless otherwise noted, all quotations are from *The Holy Bible : New International Version*, electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996, c1984)

² Read more: <http://life.nationalpost.com/2010/12/23/christmas-unwrapped-how-heavenly-angels-fell-from-their-pedestals/#ixzz198ZoEBgf>

was also aware of the trouble that awaited her. She asked the angel, “How will this be ... since I am a virgin?” (Luke 1:34) She was unmarried and her pregnancy was bound to cause a reaction in her community. No body was going to believe her story:

- ❖ Until God gave Joseph a dream that confirmed Mary’s story, he was fully prepared to break their engagement because of the shame it caused. (Matthew 1:19)
- ❖ There is evidence that Mary & Jesus had to deal with the innuendoes that he was illegitimate throughout his life. (See “Mary’s son” in Mark 6:3 and William Lane’s commentary on the passage in the NICNT)

Mary knew the social storm was coming, so when the angel told her that her cousin Elizabeth was also about to conceive a miraculous child (Luke 1:36), Mary realized that here was someone who would believe her story! If anyone could understand her situation, Elizabeth would! Mary quickly got ready and “**hurried**” to see Elizabeth.

The journey from Nazareth, Mary’s hometown, to Elizabeth’s house was a trip of some 60 or 70 miles. Even though she hurried, on foot the trip probably took her somewhere between 3 and 4 days – **she had lot’s of time to think!**

What did she think about?

Was it the **fears** of what might happen in her relationship with Joseph because of her pregnancy? Perhaps it came to mind.

Was it her **worries** about what people might say once her pregnancy became visible? Perhaps.

If you and I were in her situation, what would we think about for 3 or 4 days? No radio or MP3 player, no tunes, no news, just road!

It seems to me that we can tell what she must have been thinking about by what she says at the end of her journey. Were her words full of worry or fear? As she entered Elizabeth’s home Mary declared...

“My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me — holy is his name. His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation. He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, even as he said to our fathers.” (Luke 1:46-

Gabriel's announcement had "greatly troubled" her but by the time she reached the home of her cousin her heart was filled with praise to God that spilled out into what has come to be called her "Magnificat." Why? How?

Let me tell you what I think filled Mary's mind during those miles to Elizabeth's house. As she journeyed to visit Elizabeth, I think Mary was reminded of the Biblical story of another woman who experienced a pregnancy facilitated by God. Her name was Hannah.

We find her story in 1 Samuel chapter 1. Hannah was married but she had no children. In Hannah's day it was a social stigma for a married woman to be childless – some saw it as a sign of God's judgment. Hannah was deeply distressed and wept in prayer before God, pleading with him to give her a child.

God heard her prayer and gave her a son whom she named "Samuel." He became one of the great prophets of the Old Testament. When he was a toddler, Hannah, in gratitude to God for his kindness to her, took her son and dedicated him to the service of the Lord in the temple in Jerusalem.

On the day Hannah brought Samuel to the temple she spoke these words, recorded for us in 1 Samuel 2:1-10. As I read Hannah's words of thanksgiving, I want you to listen for the echoes in Mary's praise. See if you don't agree that these are the words that shaped Mary's "Magnificat."

"Then Hannah prayed and said: "My heart rejoices in the LORD; in the LORD my horn is lifted high. My mouth boasts over my enemies, for I delight in your deliverance. There is no one holy like the LORD; there is no one besides you; there is no Rock like our God. Do not keep talking so proudly or let your mouth speak such arrogance, for the LORD is a God who knows, and by him deeds are weighed. The bows of the warriors are broken, but those who stumbled are armed with strength. Those who were full hire themselves out for food, but those who were hungry hunger no more. She who was barren has borne seven children, but she who has had many sons pines away. The LORD brings death and makes alive; he brings down to the grave and raises up. The LORD sends poverty and wealth; he humbles and he exalts. He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap; he seats them with princes and has them inherit a throne of honor. For the foundations of the earth are the LORD's; upon them he has set the world. He will guard the feet of his saints, but the wicked will be silenced in darkness. It is not by strength that one prevails; those who oppose the LORD will be shattered. He will thunder against them from heaven; the LORD will judge the ends of the earth. He will give strength to his king and exalt the horn of his anointed." 1 Samuel 2:1-10

That's what I believe filled Mary's mind on the miles from Nazareth to Judea. It **wasn't the fears and worries of what might be or could be** – it was the confident declaration of faith by one grateful mother of **the great things that God would do!**

Hannah's words of praise spoke of a God who is holy and a Rock for those who trust in Him. She spoke

- Of a God who gives food to the hungry
- Of a God who humbles some and exalts others
- Of a God who judges the words and actions of the proud
- Of a God who raises up the poor and seats them with princes
- Of a God whose rule extends to the ends of the earth and up to the heavens.
- And she spoke of **a God who made her heart rejoice!**

Meditating on that for three days is certainly going to lift the spirit of a young woman who had just been told the earth-shaking news by God's angel that she, a virgin, would bear God's Son. And Mary doesn't only meditate on Hannah's praise. Her words are full of references and allusions to the Psalms and other OT Scriptures. Mary's trip to Judea was saturated in God's Word and the praise that came from her mouth demonstrates it.

What came out of Mary's mouth wasn't a simple quotation of Hannah's praise – Mary's words were shaped by the Holy Spirit to give us a further revelation of God's plans for the world, plans that would come to pass through the work of Mary's Son, Jesus Christ.

Out of her meditation on God's Word came important perspectives on herself and her God. There is so much we could look at here, but this morning I just want to focus on two things. **First** of all,

Mary is amazed by the great things God HAS DONE for her (v. 46-49)

“My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour... The Mighty One has done great things for me” Luke 1:46-47, 49

In her words you catch the real sense of her wonder at God's kindness and mercy to her. She is amazed that God has taken notice of her, a simple teenager from Nazareth. Out of all the young women of her day or of previous generations, God has chosen her to be the mother of the Messiah.

The Lord has paid attention to her – he's noticed her – He's looked upon her. We're so used to using the title “Lord” that we lose the sense of the majesty and holiness that the title contains.

He is the Sovereign Lord of the universe,

The King of kings and Lord of lords,
 The One to whom every knee will bow,
 The Creator of the heavens and the earth,
 He who lives in unapproachable light,
 Who is a consuming fire,
 The LORD of hosts,
 The Mighty One,

The LORD Almighty is his name!

Mary is gripped not just by the greatness of what God has done but also by the greatness of God Himself!

And the Great God notices us.

At the heart of real worship,
 At the centre of a real appreciation of salvation,
 At the core of a deep understanding of God's grace is wonder!
 The wonder that God cares for me!

It's not just that she's a small creation within the mighty universe of the Creator that humbles her. It's that she's also a broken part of that creation. Just like any of us, she needs a savior.

Mary doesn't refer to Him as "God the Saviour" or "God our Saviour" – she calls Him, "God **my** saviour."

Can you make the same declaration? The carols & songs of Christmas speak of Jesus as "the Saviour of the world" but **is He YOUR Saviour?** Have you made that same personal declaration that Mary made?

Saviour from what you might ask:

- From the agony of guilt & shame for things you've done that you can't change
- From the fear of dying not knowing what's beyond the grave
- From the loneliness of living without the friendship of the One who made you
- From the emptiness of looking at a perfect sunset and having no one to thank for it
- From the eternal punishment that awaits us because of our failure to live up to God's perfect standard for living.

You can rejoice in the freedom of sins forgiven and the promise of eternal life & peace.

You can celebrate personally knowing the God who made you and have His presence with you every day.

You can face death knowing that God walks with you through it and

waits for you on the other side.

All this is contained in Jesus, who is “God my Saviour.”

Mary is amazed at the great things God has done for her. But **second...**

Mary is amazed at the great things God IS GOING TO DO through her. (v.51-53)

“He has performed mighty deeds with his arm ... He has filled the hungry with good things” (Luke 1:51, 53)

Mary uses a technique that many of the prophets used when they spoke of what God was about to do. Prophets would often speak of God’s acts in the future as if they were already accomplished. In their minds, God’s promises were so certain that they spoke of them in the past tense: He “has performed,” “has scattered,” “has brought down,” “has lifted up.” Do you see?

Hannah’s praise had spoken of God raising the poor to sit with princes but the Holy Spirit amplifies that insight in Mary’s mind as she travels. God won’t just exalt the poor, he will also one day bring down the mighty from their thrones.

Through the life and message of Jesus, Mary’s son, God was going to shake the earth!

In some parts of the world, this is actually a dangerous portion of God’s Word to read in public. At various times throughout history, authoritarian regimes have seen the seed of revolution in these words of Mary. As Bible scholar William Barclay put it, **“There is loveliness in the Magnificat but in that loveliness there is dynamite.”**

Mary describes **a moral revolution**. “He has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.” (v.51)

In Jesus, all mankind has the opportunity to see what we should be and aren’t. The example of Christ is the deathblow to pride. The moral revolution has begun!

Mary describes **a social revolution**. “He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble.” (v.52)

In Christ there are no social classes, no races, no economic distinctions, no factions or cliques – we are “all are one in Christ.” (Galatians 3:28) And wherever Christ is preached society is made just.

Finally, Mary describes **an economic revolution**. “He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty.” (v.53)

In God’s economy, the rich are to be “rich in good deeds and willing to share” with those in need. (1 Tim 6:18) One of the great traditions of the Christmas season is that of care for the poor because Jesus was born among the poor. Charles Dicken’s story, [A Christmas Carol](#), is built on that tradition. In our community that spirit of care is given embodiment in so many ways: in the Christmas Angels Society, in the Calgary Mustard Seed’s “Warm Feet for the Street” program, in our own church’s tradition of gifts to our own people who might be feeling a bit stretched at Christmas and in so many other ways. Cindy Palin tells me that the “Break of Day Ministry” is in touch with twenty-one families in our community, most of them single parent families, who come for the excellent meal and for the support they receive from the Break of Day team. And I want you to know that during this past Christmas season your Deacons and pastors distributed over \$3000 in food assistance to people in our church and community because we worship a God who fills “the hungry with good things!”

The world God has planned is a different world than the one we live in. The revolution began with the birth of Jesus, and when Jesus comes again the revolution will be brought to completion.

But for now, the revolution is carried on one heart at a time, one ministry at a time. As God works in us and through us, the world is being changed. You and I won’t be asked to bear the Son of God in our bodies as Mary was; but we are asked to bear the Son of God in our hearts.

I want to challenge us to follow Mary’s example in this: **allow God to do His work in us and through to bring about revolutionary change in the world.**

We often get discouraged, thinking that Christianity no longer has power to affect the world in which we live. We’ve developed a “victim mentality” that says that God’s revolutionary program will just have to be put on hold until Jesus comes again. That’s not true!

Let’s just think about a few revolutionary changes that the message of Jesus has caused in recent years:

- ❖ Laszlo Tokes, pastor of the Reformed Church in Timisoara, Romania, is credited for igniting the fire that brought down the Ceausescu Communist regime during the Christmas season of 1989.
- ❖ Pastors in East Germany led prayer meetings that lit the fires of change that brought down the Berlin Wall and the Communist regime in that country.

These are major changes brought about by people who embodied the message of Jesus in their lives and actions. They carried Christ in their hearts as they worked with their hands.

But God's revolutions don't just change governments; they change hearts! And God's revolutions don't always change thousands of hearts at once; most often, it's one or two at a time.

Charles Colson is head of Prison Fellowship, a ministry that works with prison inmates and their families around the world. Prison Fellowship sponsors a program called the "Angel Tree" which provides Christmas presents for the children of inmates. Let me read you one of the stories from that ministry:

"Early one Sunday morning, just before Christmas, the pastor of a small church in Oregon was putting the final touches on his sermon when he heard a muffled knock on his study door.

Puzzled, he walked over and opened the door to find three small, disheveled children looking up at him: a five-year-old boy with his three-year-old brother and a two-year-old sister.

"Mister, can we see the church that brought us those Christmas presents?" the 5-year-old asked shyly.

Instantly the pastor realized who his guests were. A few weeks earlier the congregation had participated in Angel Tree, a Prison Fellowship ministry that distributes Christmas gifts to children whose parents are in prison. The three children were from one of the families visited by church members. Their father was behind bars; their mother was involved in drugs and prostitution.

"Of course you can see the church. Come on in." And the pastor led his guests around the small sanctuary. The children thanked him and waved good-bye, and the pastor returned to his sermon.

About 15 minutes later, he heard another knock. It was the three children again. "What time does church start?" asked the five-year-old boy.

"In an hour."

"We'll be back." Once again the children waved good-bye and trudged off. Fifteen minutes later, behold, again the three children stood at the door and knocked. "Is it okay for a person to come to church if his socks don't match?" asked the oldest boy.

"Of course!" said the pastor.

The child looked up again. "Is it okay to come if you don't have any socks at all?"

"Sure," said the pastor. "Why do you ask?"

"Well," said the little boy, "my socks don't match, and my brother here doesn't have any socks at all."

"You can come just as you are," smiled the pastor, and sweeping the two-year-old up in his arms he ushered the children into the sanctuary. A couple sitting nearby kindly shepherded them through the unfamiliar service. But they were puzzled by a small paper bag the oldest boy was clutching. "We didn't know how long the service would last," he explained, "so we brought our lunch."

Inside the bag was a single hot dog, which the children planned to share among the three of them.

I don't need to tell you that these youngsters were quickly taken up by several loving arms and became a permanent part of that small congregation. And all because of Angel Tree, which literally opened the door to a church they never would have dreamed of approaching on their own.

Their father may be in prison and their mother may be on drugs-but for these children, ever since last Christmas, there is now another world...a world bright with God's love." (© 2004 Prison Fellowship)

That ministry, the Angel Tree, was begun by a woman named Mary Kay Beard who was moved by the stories of women she met in prison. And she didn't meet them when she was a volunteer – she had been in prison with them, convicted of bank robbery. She became a Christian in prison and when she left, she took the names of the children of her fellows inmates with her and found Christmas gifts for those kids. That was 1982 and 556 kids received gifts. Today, Prison Fellowship delivers close to 1 million gifts each Christmas to the children of inmates in the US and around the world.

God has done great things through Mary's son, Jesus. God is still doing great things through people like Mary Kay Beard and the people of that small church in Oregon.

And He'll do them through you and me if we'll let Him.

Mary arrived at Elizabeth's home with her mind filled with thoughts of God inspired by meditation on God's Word:

- She was amazed by the great things he had done for her – Her Saviour took notice of her!
- She was amazed by His greatness – He was almighty, most holy and full of mercy.

- She was amazed by the great things he would do through her His great plans – He was going to bring justice to her broken the world.

Despite the problems she faced ahead – she still had to face Joseph with her news, her pregnancy would never be accepted by most of her neighbors – Mary’s mind and heart was filled with praise.

What struggles do you face in your life? Do they overwhelm you?

Fill your mind with His Word and become overwhelmed by the great things He has done for you.

Despite your problems, become overwhelmed by His ability to use you to accomplish great things today!

- **Invitation to Prayer Ministry**
- **Final Song:** O Come & Join the Dance
- **Benediction**