

Series: Fear Not!

“Overcoming Fear Through Surrender”

Luke 1:26-49

Today we are continuing in a series of sermons that focus on Christmas. Sometimes we need to be reminded that what happened 2,000 years ago still matters today. What God did in sending His Son to us as a gift radically changed our world and ultimately can even change our very lives. It is true that the details of this historical, life-changing event have never changed. Though we live in a culture that is constantly trying to redefine history, nobody can undo or change the truth of what has already happened. The birth of Jesus is one such event. We can study it and examine it, and we may discover new things, but we will never change it. As we study the unchanging truths of God becoming man and coming to this fallen world, I pray that we will get a fresh glimpse of what His coming meant then and what it means to us today.

As we continue to look at these passages that describe the birth of Jesus, I want us to look at these passages a little differently. Specifically, I want us to realize that we have much in common with the people that we will read about. They aren't just characters with names and facts about them. They were people who faced experiences and felt various emotions just like you and me. We are told by the so-called experts that there are four basic emotions that all humans experience – happiness, sadness, anger, and fear. While I could argue that there are more basic emotions, I am simply stating that, without question, the characters that we read about faced these various emotions. The emotion we will see clearly present in each of the accounts of Scripture is the feeling of fear. On each occasion we see that the sudden presence of an angel accompanied with the message that he shared brought fear. And on each occasion the angel gave a specific word of instruction and encouragement – “Fear Not!” In other words, don't be afraid.

Can you relate to this today? Are you dealing with fear today? Do you find yourself worrying and fretting over things that you can't fix, change, or prevent? What fears are affecting you? There are many things that cause us fear. When studying statistics, it is obvious that we have many fears. We are afraid of flying, afraid of public speaking, afraid of spiders, afraid of snakes, afraid of heights, afraid of the dark, afraid of failure, afraid of death, afraid of rejection, afraid of loneliness, afraid of commitment, afraid of the future etc. The list could go on and on.

The way fear affects us is crazy. It affects us biologically as our heart beats faster, our breathing speeds up, we begin to sweat, our muscles tense, our mouth gets dry, and our stomach is in knots. It affects us mentally as our mind races and seems to play games on us. The fear of a given situation can paralyze us mentally and place great barriers that hinder us from effective action. And ultimately, fear also affects us spiritually. It can prevent us from trusting God. It can prevent us from obeying Him. It causes us to be stuck on the “What ifs” of life. What if I give up total control? What if this doesn't work the way that I want it to? What if everything falls apart? What if? Our fears can rob us of the blessings that come through obedience. It can cause us to even doubt God. God doesn't want us to be a people governed by fear. In fact, over and over again in His Word we are told, “Do not be afraid.” We see this reminder in each of the passages that we read this month.

Last week we studied how God sent an angel to Zacharias to declare that he would have a son who would be the forerunner to the Savior. We saw how Zacharias responded to God and learned how we can overcome fear through faith. Today we fast-forward six months to the next message that God sent through the angel as we study the example of a teenage girl named Mary. From her experience we will learn a second powerful key to overcoming fear.

Read Text

The word “surrender” is not one that is used regularly in our vocabulary. The word usually has a negative connotation. When we think of “surrender” we think of a battle where someone has been defeated and they wave the white flag of surrender. Perhaps we think of a sports team that simply gives up and quits striving to win. Perhaps we think of someone who is admitting guilt and surrendering their rights. All of these images have a negative connotation. However, when it comes to the Christian life we find great comfort and great freedom in this word “surrender”. In fact, we see through the example of Mary that surrendering to the right things and the right Person will enable us to have victory over our fears. It will enable us to have peace, even in the midst of great difficulties. The word surrender means “to yield to the power of another; to give oneself up.” The key to overcoming our fears isn’t simply in the action of surrendering. There are many things and many people that we could surrender to. ****ILL:** A teenager may surrender to the pressure that a friend places upon them to do some action. A child may surrender to the influence of a tantrum-throwing sibling. An employee may surrender to the unethical leading of his employer. These surrenders don’t satisfy and certainly don’t equip us to walk in victory. The key to victorious surrender is found in Who and what we are surrendering to. In Mary’s case, we find that she surrendered to God and His plan for her life and this enabled her to have victory over fear and gave great peace. When we surrender to the Almighty God we have nothing to fear. **Psalm 118:5-6** says it well, “From my distress I called upon the Lord; The answered me and set me in a large place. The Lord is for me; I will not fear; What can man do to me?”

During our time together, I want us to observe four actions that Mary took in her process of surrender. I believe that we will experience the same kind of victory and peace if we follow her example.

I. Mary Received God’s Plan (vs. 26-33)

This point is very simple, but it can’t be missed. Mary was faithful to receive God’s will and we should do the same. She wasn’t too busy to hear from God. She wasn’t too distracted to take notice. She wasn’t callous in what was taking place. She wasn’t passive about its application. She warmly welcomed the will of God for her life even though there are many things that could have hindered her from truly receiving it.

First, her insecurities and feelings of inadequacy could have hindered her from receiving God’s plan. In the text we learn that Mary was from the region of Galilee from the city of Nazareth. The region of Galilee was a place that was despised by the Jews because the whole region was largely populated by Gentiles. Then to make matters worse, King Herod at the time had recently raised up pagan temples in the region. Suffice it to say, this was no place that the Jews would be rushing to. Then we learn of the city of Nazareth, which was a very insignificant city in the ancient

world. The population of the city was about 15,000 and nothing noteworthy had ever occurred there. It was so minute that the people felt that there would never be anything of any good to come from Nazareth. Even the residents themselves had little thought of anything extraordinary. They weren't a self-confident people. Not only this, but she was young, likely a teenager when she received this message from God. It would've been easy for her to think, "This can't be true. I'm too young to be used by God. And I'm from Nazareth. What could God possibly want from me?"

Second, her own plans could've hindered her from receiving God's plan. We learn quickly here that Mary was engaged to a man named Joseph. Mary and Joseph were in what was called the "betrothal" period of their relationship. In that particular culture, most marriages were pre-arranged much earlier. Once a young lady was of age to marry, then the couple would officially enter the official "betrothal" period which lasted a year. This was not as it is today. In that culture the engagement was legally binding. The soon-to-be bride and groom, at that time, were considered husband and wife in all matters except that they didn't live together and the marriage hadn't been consummated. As a result, the betrothal could only be broken by the formal proceedings of divorce. During this time, the bride was preparing and learning, while the groom was literally building onto his father's house so that he and his bride would have a place to live. So here is Mary in this amazing time in her life. She is in a season where she is likely daydreaming and planning things out. She is likely thinking about marriage, Joseph, babies, etc. This was an exciting time of life for her. She was not in any way expecting what was about to occur. She had no idea that God was about to interrupt her plans. There is nothing that would've tipped her off that something was coming. God's call happened suddenly and unexpectedly. Yet, this didn't hinder her from receiving God's message. Please understand that **God's interruptions are for His glory and for our good**. These divine interruptions often feel like an inopportune time, however, what we see is that **God's interruptions are actually His invitation for us to join Him and be a part of His work**. ****ILL: Being called to lead worship at Liberty**. In Mary's case it seemed like an interruption, but God meant it for good. From man's perspective it was an inconvenient time. From man's perspective this would almost seem cruel. From man's perspective it is hard to make sense of it all. But from God's perspective He was doing something so extraordinary that it would change the whole world.

Third, her fear could have hindered her from receiving God's plan. Mary was likely in her home when suddenly the angel Gabriel appeared before her. He said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." How would you respond to a sudden angelic being in your presence? How would you respond if an angel appeared and was suddenly talking to you? This was a frightening sight. **Verse 29** says that "she was very perplexed at this statement." The better translation is the KJV which says, "She was troubled at his saying." I believe that she was terrified and confused all at the same time. She has never had a heavenly messenger like this before. I imagine that she was likely overwhelmed in the moment. She didn't know what to think. So, the messenger from God calms her down saying, "Do not be afraid, Mary; for you have found favor with God." He is saying, "Mary, the Lord is with you. You have been greatly graced. So, I have come with a message." Can you imagine Mary's surprise? She would soon come to realize that God had been watching and examining her life and character. She would also soon realize that God had a greater plan for her life than she could ever imagine. Gabriel continued in **verses 31-33**. Can you imagine what she

was thinking? The angel is telling her, “Mary, God has a plan. You have been chosen by God to give birth to His Son. This baby is the Son of the Most High and God will give Him the throne of His father David.” In other words, “Mary, you remember the Messiah that God has promised, that the prophets have prophesied of, that the people are waiting for? Yes, Mary, the Savior of the world, the long-awaited Messiah, the King of all kings will be born to you.” It is interesting to note that these verses describe what was to happen soon and prophetically what would happen in the future. How would you respond? This would’ve likely caused all sorts of fears, especially for a teenage girl. However, Mary didn’t object. She didn’t refuse, argue, make excuses, run away, complain, etc. Mary simply received the message from God. I challenge you to examine yourself this morning. Perhaps God hasn’t sent you an angel, but in your life are you seeking the will of God? Have you received His message and His plan for what He’d have you to do?

II. **Mary Trusted God’s Plan (vs. 34-37)**

Now at this point in the conversation Mary didn’t know the details. She knew the big picture of what the angel was saying, but she didn’t know how this would actually be fulfilled. So she asked a question, “How can this be since I am a virgin?” There are some who would say that her question shows her doubt. But, I don’t think that is the case at all. If this demonstrated her doubt, she would have been rebuked as was Zacharias earlier in the chapter. And, in fact we see in **verse 45** that she did indeed believe. So, her question was actually one of faith. Mary knew the Old Testament Scriptures. She knew that there would one day be a Messiah who would come to save the people. She didn’t question that. Nor, did she question the angel’s message. Her question was simply an honest question. “I believe you that I am going to have the Christ child, but I am a virgin, how exactly is this going to happen?” Her question was a statement of faith. She believed the promise, but she wondered how it would be performed.

I believe herein is another major thing that hinders us from overcoming fears. We think we have to have everything figured out. We want to know every step and every detail. We simply want to be in control. We seem to live life knowing that our plans aren’t as good as God’s, but we are content with imperfect plans because we’re at least in control, or so we think. As a result, **many of us end up settling for less because we are simply not willing to trust God’s plan.** As we see with Mary, I believe that God wants us to seek Him and ask of Him, but in doing so we must trust His plan. Please understand that God always does things in His time and in His way. There are times that we may not see how it all fits together and we rarely see the whole picture, but we can be confident that He is working and that He can be trusted. **Isaiah 55:8-9**, “ ‘For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,’ declares the Lord. ‘For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts.’ ” Though there are times we fail to see how He is working or what His strategy is, we can be certain that He will show us step by step what we need to know. Maybe that’s you this morning. You just need to trust God one step at a time. No doubt, this revelation completely disrupted her plans, but she still trusted God’s plan. As she asked the angel for direction, he revealed three things that were helpful to trusting God’s plan:

A. **God’s Promise**

I say this as God's promise because of the emphasis of the text. Eleven times in this passage we see the angel use the word "will". He is saying, "God will do this." The emphasis wasn't on Mary - her purity, abilities, skills, experiences or lack thereof, or anything else. The emphasis is on the fact that God had a plan and He promised to accomplish it. God always keeps His promises. **Numbers 23:19** explains, "God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should repent; Has He said, and will He not do it? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?" Then in **Jeremiah 1:12b** God explains to Jeremiah, "I am watching over My word to perform it." Friends, God always fulfills His promises. If you are struggling in your faith, if you are discouraged or defeated, get into God's Word and study the promises that He has given. Mary could trust God's plan because He promised to accomplish it. When she asked about it, He even gave her a brief glimpse into how He would fulfill His promise. See, God is not a God of chaos. He is strategic and orderly. So, the angel of the Lord begins answering Mary's question by telling her the plan. He begins by telling her how the child would be conceived. She didn't have to take matters into her own hands like we often try to do. Luke 1:35 says that the conception of the Christ child would not take place as conception normally does among women. In fact, this would be a miracle of God and would show His power over nature. Some struggle with this, but if He made these bodies and knows every hair on our head, He can do with our bodies what He desires. So, the angel told Mary that the Holy Ghost would come upon her and the power of God would overshadow her. The text says nothing of intimacy with man. Instead, it says that the power God would overshadow her and the child would be conceived. And as a result, the child that would be born of her shall be called the Son of God. In other words, God was going to accomplish this supernaturally. We don't know all of the details, but we do know that the conception was a miracle. Apparently, this information was more than enough for Mary to accept and understand. She didn't ask another question about the process. She simply understood that God promised He was going to do it and He had the power to accomplish it. She trusted that this was no problem for God, Who created our bodies and knows how they work and exactly what was needed to fulfill His plan. It was good enough for her and that's good enough for me.

B. God's Proof

Not that it was needed, but to prove that God is capable of all things Gabriel gave Mary a word of assurance. I am thankful for these moments when you get a Word from God and you know that He is reassuring you of something. In this case, the angel told Mary that her cousin Elizabeth was six months pregnant. This was an amazing thing. Given Elizabeth's age and that she had been barren up to this point, this was truly a miracle. The family had long lost hope that Elizabeth would have a baby, but according to this heavenly messenger this was already happening. Gabriel's point was that if God could take a barren womb and make it spring to life, then He could certainly do the same in a virgin's womb. It made no difference to God. After all He is the One who created the whole wonderful process of conception and birth! The point, though, is that God was giving her a practical word of proof and encouragement to help her as she walked forward. Praise God for the proofs that He often brings to remind us of His working in our lives. How has God proven Himself to

you? What things has He done in your life to remind you that He is capable of anything? Hold those moments close to your heart and praise God for them. They strengthen you along the journey of life so that you continually trust God's plan.

C. God's Power

The next thing that we see is a final word on the matter. Gabriel said emphatically, "For nothing will be impossible with God." He was reminding her that God has all power and authority to do according to His will. The point is that God accomplishes His purposes through the power of His Word. Gabriel understood this all too well. He had stood in the presence of God. He had seen first-hand the wisdom, love, and power of God exerted in many different ways. May we never forget that God has ALL POWER. There is nothing He can't do. Don't let yourself get discouraged when you know the One Who has all power and has promised to work all things for His glory and your good. His plans and purposes are often far different than our own. However, when He reveals His plans it is always for His glory and our good, even when we don't understand it. We can trust His plans and believe His promises. As a result of that, we don't have to worry and fear when difficulty comes. In fact, I believe that there will be a time for every follower of Jesus when He will call us to do something that we can't possibly do on our own. In this, we come to the clear realization that we must trust Him and depend on Him, knowing that nothing is impossible with Him. ****ILL:** God calling to forgive, be generous, reconcile, serve, etc.

III. Mary Surrendered to God's Plan (vs. 38-40)

What do we do when God's plans are different than our own? What do we do when He has interrupted us with a new direction and path? We do what Mary did. I love how she responded. She surrendered completely to God. Notice how she did this:

A. She Communicated Her Surrender Through Her Words

There was a specific moment when she addressed the issue at hand. This is her moment of commitment. I believe there must be that moment of decision – whether it be public or private. There must that moment when you talk to God and surrender once and for all. Mary verbally communicated, "Behold, the bondslave of the Lord; may it be done to me according to your word." In other words, she recognized clearly Whose she was and who she was. She knew that she belonged to the Lord and she also was willing to serve Him. In fact, she called herself a "bondslave" or "handmaid", which was the lowest kind of female servant in that day. The point was that she humbled herself before the Lord and surrendered to His plan. What a powerful example for each of us to follow! I'm sure if it had been us in that situation we might have hesitated or at least reconsidered. She could've had some real issues with what Gabriel was saying to her. She would have to soon face the disappointment of her parents, the criticism and mockery of her neighbors, the outrage of her family, and even doubt from the man who desired to marry her. Her body would go through all sorts of changes. She was facing the real world very quickly. What would she do about the local rabbi and the other authorities? To have a child out of wedlock was a very serious matter, not to mention the personal scrutiny she would face. But none of this

mattered to Mary in the moment. She said, basically, “May everything that you have said about me come true. I have no fear because I know my God and I know that His plans are for my good and His glory. I surrender completely to Him.” She was living out the instruction of **Romans 12:1-2**, “Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.” She simply heard the message, believed, and surrendered herself completely to the Lord’s will. It is important to remember that God calls us to do the same!

B. She Confirmed Her Surrender Through Her Actions

Immediately upon her confessing her surrender to God the angel departed from her, but the story didn’t end there. This wasn’t just a powerful moment. Yes, we need those powerful moments where we say “Yes!” to God. We need those moments in prayer, at the altar, when we humble ourselves and yield completely to Him. However, if those moments of surrender are real it will prove itself in actions that follow. In Mary’s case the angel had not simply just told her about Elizabeth’s pregnancy, but had specifically said, “Behold, even your relative Elizabeth has also conceived a son in her old age; and she is now in her sixth month.” The word “behold” means “to observe, take note of, fully consider.” Mary wasn’t given any further instruction, so I believe that she took this as a hint. She didn’t know where to go or what to do next, but the angel had certainly implied that she should take note of her cousin who was aging and was also six months pregnant. So, what did Mary do? She took the hint and went to visit Elizabeth. She believed the message was true, so she went to minister to Elizabeth. This was all an evidence of her faith and her willingness to do whatever the Lord desired of her.

IV. Mary Rejoiced in God’s Plan (vs. 41-49)

Let me ask you, how would you have responded if you were in Mary’s shoes? How would you feel if you had your own plans and directions? How would you feel if you had your whole life ahead of you and then suddenly God interrupts everything? I imagine we would be afraid. Maybe we would be upset, disappointed, or confused. Notice what God’s plan led Mary to do. When she entered Zacharias’ home the baby in Elizabeth’s womb leaped for joy. Suddenly Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and began to praise the Lord and bless Mary. Right there God the Father confirmed that the child within Mary’s womb was indeed the Christ child, the Son of the living God. Then when she was silent, Mary began to praise the Lord. In fact, she sang these words aloud. Her song is known by many as the *Magnificat*, which is the first word of the song in Latin, which literally means “My heart glorifies.” Mary was overjoyed. When we consider her situation, it seems odd that she’d have joy. She was most likely a teenager. She was engaged to be married to Joseph who was likely still working on their home. Add to that the Mosaic Law’s decree that one caught in adultery should be stoned to death. One can only imagine the rumors that would swirl, the whispers that would be spoken, or the stares that would cut like a knife. But Mary’s attention wasn’t on herself. She didn’t worry about her or her situation. Instead she focused her attention on

the Lord, trusted His plan, and praised Him. Her great desire was to magnify the Lord and not herself. That's why eight times in this text Mary says, "He has," referring to all that God has done.

Remember that the text started with Mary experiencing fear and trouble, but it ends with celebration and praise. What made the difference? How does one go from being troubled to now being joyful? How does one go from experiencing fear to experiencing overflowing joy? What brought the change was that Mary believed God and surrendered completely to Him. When we trust God and surrender to Him, we have nothing to fear. God is calling us today to surrender, both in word and in action, completely to Him. Please notice specifically what Mary rejoiced in. She rejoiced in the reality that God has shown His grace by providing a Savior for all mankind. Friend, if Mary was a sinner in need of God's grace, then we should be reminded that we are as well. In the same way, we must also believe in Him and surrender our all to Him.