

Session 4: Betrothed Mary

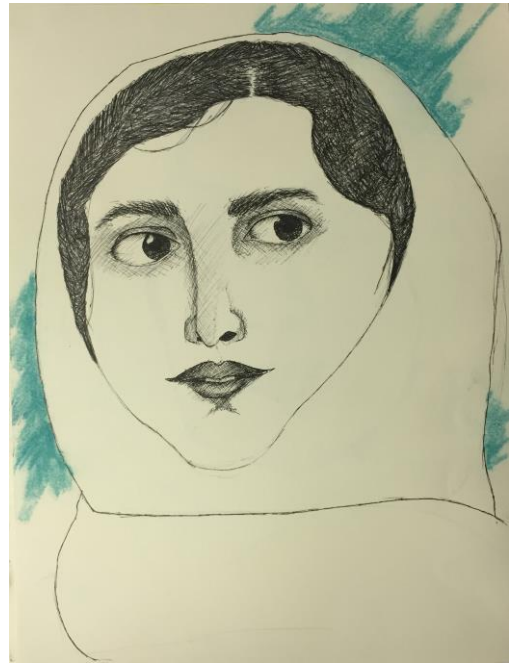
“God’s Calling for Us”

Living Hope Ladies’ Retreat

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By Emily Tiberi

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you." But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?" And the angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy -- the Son of God. And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. For nothing will be impossible with God. And Mary said, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word," And the angel departed from her." (Luke 1:26-38)



"Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word..."

How often can we honestly echo these words in our own lives?

Here stands Mary, a young woman whose whole life radically changed in an instant. She didn't ask for the role of the mother of Jesus. In fact she wasn't even offered it as a choice. Instead, she was *told* by the angel Gabriel, "you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus." She was called upon by the

Lord to be a conduit for his salvific plan for the world. Her response? "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word."

There are many things Mary could have said. Numerous thoughts that could have crossed her mind: This is ridiculous! Me pregnant? With God's son? This never could happen! But.... what if what the angel said is true and I do become pregnant? Nobody will ever believe me. Who will take care of me? What will my parents say? What will Joseph say? Will I be rejected? Will I be stoned? I don't want to be pregnant. There's too much at stake! My reputation is on the line. Let God choose someone else to bear his son. I am perfectly comfortable in my own town, doing my own little thing...

But no, *this* is what she says:

*My soul (my whole being) magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for he has looked on the **humble** estate of his *servant*.
For behold, from now on **all generations** will call me *blessed*,
for he who is **mighty** has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.
And *his mercy is for those who fear him*
from generation to generation.
He has **shown strength** with his arm;
he has scattered the proud *in the thoughts of their hearts*,
he has **brought down** the *mighty* from their thrones
and **exalted** those of humble estate;
he has **filled** the hungry with good things,
and the rich he has sent away empty.
He has **helped** his servant Israel,
in *remembrance* of his mercy,
as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever.*

Mary saw God for who He was. Her song is one of utter amazement. She recognized the magnitude of God's promise for her life and is awestruck that the Almighty Creator would bless her. As a Jew, Mary would have been very familiar with the words of the prophets. She would have lived in high expectation for the coming Messiah never imagining that she, a poor girl, from a town few people had heard of was to be the mother of the Savior of the world. She acknowledged that she was a mere servant of the Lord and rejoiced because the Creator God, the Lord of Israel who is on high took notice of a lowly servant. Recognizing the stark contrast between the all-powerful, all-merciful God and herself, Mary was moved to worship. God – who generations before had promised the childless Abraham a son. Who had blessed his seed throughout the lineage of Israel. Who had promised a Messiah to the Jews. Who had just promised the Messiah to her.... Joy in Mary's life was not just a fleeting emotion because she had just met an angel. It permeated her entire soul. God was both the object and the giver of her joy. She was humbled that she was to be a beneficiary of his goodness. Knowing what He had done for generations before, she praised God with true faith.

But even though Mary faithfully and graciously accepted God's plan for her life, it didn't mean that her life would be smooth. She would still face hardships and inconveniences. She would travel about 80 miles by donkey while great with child. She would give birth to the babe in a barn. She would become a refugee in Egypt when her son's life was threatened. Ultimately, she would witness the crucifixion of her son - her Savior. As she watched him being nailed to the cross, she did not know the sheer magnitude of his salvific plan. But with great faith, she graciously accepted God's design for her life recognizing that she was a mere instrument to be used by him to bring redemption for all generations.

Is this our response? When we face our daily callings, do we rejoice? In the Lord? Always? I confess that for me, it frequently is not. My dear husband recently gave me a bright pink coffee mug. Emblazoned on the front is the statement "Money can't buy happiness but it can buy ice cream which is pretty much the same thing!" While I can chuckle over this witty gift, I am also convicted of its truth. Why is it that a hot fudge sundae covered lots of whipped cream and bright rainbow sprinkles will always make me smile but giving of myself for the sake of others does not? It's because I equate my joy, my happiness, with personal comfort. I don't like the inconvenient, the challenging, the painful. I want the world to revolve around me and my timetable. In all honesty, I am prideful. I frequently fail to recognize that I am but dust who was created by the all-powerful, almighty God.

But that is just it, so often we fail to recognize who God is. He is the Creator of the world. The one who knows all things and controls all things. We were made in his image for his purpose – to bring salvation into the world. When we look past our own personal bubble and see the greater story we can learn to have joy even in the midst of the inconvenient.

Following Mary's example, I realized that there are four things that we too can learn. First, we must see God for who He is. When we have a right view of God, it will lead us to the second point – a right view of ourselves. We are mere instruments for his eternal plan. Thus, it can help us to change our perspective regarding our calling. When we recognize that our role is to serve God no matter the circumstances it will help us to change our perspective. Instead of seeing dirty dishes as a frustration, a waste of time, and a reason to grumble about the messy counter, we can see them as vessels whereby we were able to bless someone else with a nice meal and chance to share the good gifts that God has blessed us with. Which is the third point – we will be moved to worship God because we can recognize that he has taken notice of us. Instead of mulling in our personal woes as selfish as the dishes are dirty, we should rejoice that God has blessed us with so much. Even if we have little, we **deserve** absolutely nothing. We are to be filled with joy because of God's goodness in our lives.

After meeting with her relative Elisabeth, Mary was blessed two-fold. First, she was blessed because of the "fruit of her womb" and secondly because "she believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord." We too can claim this blessing. God has also called us to be women of faith and we too can claim this blessing. We can be joyous because He is perfecting us. *Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. James 1:2* Steadfastness – a life of faithful endurance. God never promised that life would be easy or convenient. In fact throughout the Scriptures he promises the exact opposite. But he also promised that the trials and tribulations of this life would ultimately lead to perfection. Perfection we do not deserve, but will be richly bestowed upon us by the all-mighty Creator of the World who came to the Earth as a mere babe to redeem all mankind. This should fill us with Joy, unspeakable joy. For in His presence there is *fullness of joy; at His right hand there are pleasures forevermore. (Psalm 16:11).*