

“The Gift of Mary’

**Luke 1:26-38**

By Rev. Art Scanson

A nervous-looking man was pushing his son in a super market grocery cart. The youngster was howling at the top of his lungs and throwing vegetables and fruit out of the cart. The father just kept on pushing the cart; repeating in a quiet voice, “Take it easy Billy. Don’t cry Billy. *Cool* it Billy. Everything will be okay Billy.” A woman shopper turned and said, “Sir, I admire you for the gentle way you’re soothing little Billy. To which he replied, “But lady, *I’m Billy.*”

Oh so powerful, yet so gentle.

Our story today begins in the little town on a small hill in northern Israel. To be from Nazareth would be like calling Grace City, or Moffitt, or Regan, or Almont home. Not much to talk about. But for Nazareth it was Jewish by birthright, while Rome claimed power, and Greek by influence of language. People there went about their business as usual. A daily routine with little or no excitement.

This is probably the setting that Mary grew up in and she is probably about 12 or 13 years old. She has finished “Synagogue School” where she learned to read and write and more than likely, learned the Old Testament in some detail as that was the textbook for “Synagogue School.” She has now become old enough for her parent to have made arrangements for her marriage. Mary, this peasant girl, and Joseph were betrothed to each other. It was a the most binding time of engagement. Legally it meant that she and Joseph were already husband and wife, but they could not be together yet. Usually lasting a year before the actual wedding.

So Mary was no doubt filled with excitement and plans for her upcoming wedding. The joy of the wedding ceremony, that opportunity to wear special jewelry and really nice clothes and the time when she would leave her home and go to live with Joseph and his family, as was the custom. These were the happy days of excitement and joy for a young maiden as she waited for her wedding day.

And then it happened! And then. . .Read the scripture lesson - Luke 1:26-38.

Yes, in the midst of all the excitement for the days to come, the Angel Gabriel breaks into the picture. Can you imagine that moment that shattered everything of normal living - to have an angel break into your existence? And the angel says, “Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.” (At a time like this the Lord better be with you!) And seeing her terror the angel tried to help her see there was no reason for fear, for the news was good news. Because God was to bless her. Well, so far so good. But then, the angels tells this virgin that she is going to have a son. Now if this isn’t enough, there is even a name for this boy - “Jesus.” Obviously, Mary wanted to know how this could be.

How could she a virgin become pregnant? The angel explained that the Holy Spirit would bring forth this child from her and this child would be the Son of God.

By now she was probably like Billy in our opening story. *“Take it easy Mary. Don’t cry Mary. Cool it Mary. Everything will be okay Mary.”*

Can you imagine the turmoil in her mind and soul? How was she going to tell Joseph and her parents. What would people say about her? After all, there could be severe consequences over this. And how she must have worried - because she knew she was not guilty of anything wrong! The agony of her life must have consumed her thinking. Why me? Then comes the question “Why am I a “favored woman”? The angel, in saying that Mary was blessed by God, was not saying that God would make her way easy. What God was more likely saying was that Mary would be used by God, and in the long run of life, this is what being blessed means.

Here is where we need to remember, she had no doubt learned in the “synagogue school” the prophecies from the Old Testament scriptures. She was aware of how the Israelite people had waited for a messiah as the Israelites felt that their God had fallen silent in the land. And no doubt there were those words from the angel still in her head - “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.” So this ordinary small-town maiden becomes obedient and demonstrates trust in the call of God for her life. Our scripture shows us how she was a woman of faith and knew the scriptures - and when she had time to think about all of these things and ponder them in her heart - she is able to praise God with her song that we find in the scriptures and know as “The Magnificat.” As it is full of Old Testament references to the Messiah.

**One of the gifts** Mary brings to us is that she was favored by God for a task that would finally allow each of us to be favored. She was obedient to God’s call which shows us that we too can be obedient and trust in God’s guidance.

**Another of the gifts** is when the angel Gabriel said, “The Lord is with you,” In her day, Mary was chosen to be the person to help accomplish God’s will in salvation history. She was willing to take-on the risks of a broken engagement, loss of family life, demoted social status, and even the possible consequences of the law. Mary accepted

on the part of all of us, that the Lord would be with her and is with all of us too, when we are obedient to God’s call in our life. As Mary was submissive to God’s purpose and her role in assisting that purpose, she becomes a example for all of us. This then is **another gift**.

So Mary like many of us would do, she turns to someone who has been or is in a similar circumstance. Mary goes to see Elisabeth who is also in a unique situation. Elisabeth by now is six-months pregnant after waiting to bare a child for many years. She too had been visited by the angel. Together these prospective mothers were women of such

triumphant faith that they were willing to accept God's plan in their lives and their sons' lives.

After the visit and Mary's return to Nazareth where she was faced with all of the serious problems of her coming marriage and the social implications of her pregnancy, nowhere is there a reference to her unwillingness to place her whole womanhood at the disposal of her Creator God. Added to this is Joseph's love for Mary that makes us certain of the devotion she attracted to herself. **Notice the gift here - A willingness to be used by God for who she was and what she could become.**

Then comes the time for them to leave for Bethlehem. A trip of 90 to 100 miles depending upon the route. It was a tough trip, up and down hill. Mary no doubt prepared for this trip by preparing food that had to be dried, water in goatskins containers. And we can't forget the swaddling clothes that she would no-doubt need before the return. **Another gift - she did everything she knew to cooperate with God's leading.** That we too might give ourselves to being prepared for the coming of the Christ-child into our life.

When the shepherds, who had heard the angels' words and seen the "glory of the Lord" as they tended their flocks, came and told Mary of the angels' message, Mary accepted quietly the positive affirmation of the heavenly message: "For unto you is born this day in the city of David a savior, which is Christ the Lord." She may have wanted to go out among the people and exclaim, "Look, I am the mother of the Savior" as if she wanted to be vindicated. "But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart." Because inside of her heart and mind she knew and felt confirmed in her faith and faithfulness. **Yet another gift - when we cooperate with God, our faith and faithfulness will be found worthy and confirmed.**

Yes, we are gifted by the gifts of Mary:

- 1) She was obedient to God's call which shows us that we too can be obedient and trust in God's guidance.
- 2) Mary accepted on the part of all of us, that the Lord would be with her and is with all of us too, when we are obedient to God's call in our life.
- 3) Mary becomes an example for all of us, as she becomes submissive to God's purpose and her role in assisting that purpose.
- 4) Her willingness to be used by God for who she was and what she could become.
- 5) She did everything she knew to cooperate with God's leading.
- 6) Mary shows us that when we cooperate with God, our faith and faithfulness will be found worthy and confirmed.

May Mary continue to be used by God as she becomes an example to all of us in preparation for this Advent season. And all God's children said - "AMEN."