

Here I Am, Call Me Blessed 2021
Micah 5:2-5a Luke 1:38, 45-55

Micah 5:2-5a (New Revised Standard Version)

But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah, who are one of the little clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to rule in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days. Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in labor has brought forth; then the rest of his kindred shall return to the people of Israel. And he shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God. And they shall live secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth; and he shall be the one of peace.

Luke 1:38, 45-55 (New Revised Standard Version)

Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord." And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. 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 powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever."

When I was younger and we wanted to play a little football,
the two team captains would choose up sides,
each trying to pick the best players for their team.

When I ran a small business and was hiring,
from the job applications, resumes, references and interviews,
I would try to choose and hire
the best and most qualified that I could afford.

That is how our world works, to succeed and win
get the best and most qualified to play on your team ...
... but God doesn't always seem to operate that way.
Again and again God seems to choose the unlikely and unexpected,
as we read earlier from Luke's Gospel, vs. 52
He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly.

In the book of Judges the Midianites had defeated Israel
and were making life difficult and miserable for them.

The people cried out to the Lord for help and rescue.
So God called and equipped Gideon to lead an army against them,
but the problem was, vs. 7:2

The Lord said to Gideon, "The troops with you are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hand. Israel would only **take the credit** away from me, saying, 'My own hand has delivered me.'
Sometimes God prefers to work through the weak and unlikely.

In 1st Samuel 16, the prophet is sent to Jesse to anoint a new king.

And so Jesse presents each of his sons, each one very impressive,
but each time the Lord says to Samuel, no that's not the one, vs. 7

But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart."

In the end, God chose David, who became Israel's greatest king,
though the youngest & smallest, and **seemingly the most unlikely**.

In John 18, we read about the night of Jesus' betrayal and arrest,
and Simon Peter cursing & denying that he even knew Jesus 3 times.

And yet after his resurrection, **though Peter had failed**, in John 21
we read about Jesus restoring and calling Peter to serve, vs. 17

He (Jesus) said to him the third time, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" And he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "**Feed my sheep.**"

In Acts 9 we read about Saul, sent and authorized by the high priest
to arrest any Christians he can find & bring back from Damascus,
but along the way the Lord changes his plans, and name to Paul.

God chose, called and equipped Paul to be Apostle to the gentiles,
someone we'd probably not choose nor go about it that way,
but as he explains in 1 Corinthians 1:27-29,

But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; **God chose what is low** and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, so that no one might boast in the presence of God.

God chose for the long-awaited Messiah to come from Bethlehem,
a tiny and otherwise insignificant village. Micah 5:2

But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah, who are one of the little clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to rule in Israel.
Bethlehem is a symbol of God using **the seeming insignificant**.

Mary epitomizes God's loving grace and mercy **toward the unlikely**.
She was probably just a teenage girl,
a young peasant women from an insignificant town in Galilee
yet chosen to fulfill God's word and promises. vs. 48a
for he (God) has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.

The world would see Mary as a non-descript-unimportant-nobody,
an insignificant, hardly worth noticing with little to offer,
yet through whom God acted – to redeem all of Creation.

Unexpected, unmerited, and unlikely --- entirely by God's choice.

We honor Mary not because she was so special and superior,
but because she was so ordinary - yet uniquely chosen by God.
She is the model of receiving God's unmerited favor,
unlikely, yet filled by God's love, grace and mercy.

She trusted entirely because she believed what God had promised,
and when ordinary people trust, by taking God at his word,
that which is placed in God's hands becomes extraordinary.

Mary, by our expectations would seem to be most unlikely,
but God sees the heart, her trust and willingness to obey.

I suppose Mary could have said "no", but instead, vs. 38

Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word."

"Yes, let it happen to me, just as God wills – just as God said,
all of it according to God's will, God's purpose & plan **not mine.**"

This is simple and absolute surrender to the will & purpose of God.

Mary obediently responds to God's call and his agenda for her--

- risking the loss of reputation in her home community,
- the rejection and shame of an unmarried pregnancy,
even putting at risk her pending marriage to Joseph.

**She trusted, and willingly accepted discomfort and inconvenience,
"If that is what God wants of me, than let it come to pass"**

Mary is willfully fully embracing God's word and promise,
choosing to participate in it fully **by adding her own life to it.**

That is humble, glorious and obedient Christian discipleship,
an example and pattern of faith worthy **for us to follow...**

... in doing whatever God commands as revealed in Scripture,
doing whatever is right & faithful in obedience with integrity,
however difficult, inconvenient, humbling, bothersome,
embarrassing, messy, uncomfortable or even unpleasant.

Mary accepts this disruption of her life-plans,
and as Elizabeth notes, Mary embraces God's call, vs. 45

And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord."

In Mary we see an ideal example & model of Christian discipleship:

- **humility;** in responding to God's will,
without doubt or dispute,
but grateful that God would choose her,
amazed at her place within God's plan.
- **faithfulness;** in accepting and desiring God's will,
though it was difficult and inconvenient,
and quite different than 'her wedding plans'.
- **usefulness;** in obedience and fulfillment of God's will,
so that God was able to use Mary in a wonderful way,
because submitting her all to her God was her priority.
- **courage;** in accepting God's will, plan and purpose.
She trusts entirely the promises of God,
however difficult, demanding that may be.

Mary is an extraordinary model of faithful discipleship,
in that she freely and willingly submits her all,
body, mind and spirit to the will and purpose of God,
and so she serves God's will, purpose and plan.

And that, I believe is the clue and guide to our pathway
toward having a most meaningful and wonderful Christmas...

... that is, **unrestrained submission** to the Lord as our 1st priority.

Mary's place in the Christmas story exemplifies our call,
to embrace God's agenda, and place it ahead of our own,
**and like Mary, to bring and bear Christ into our world
by living lives that boldly proclaim the Good News...**

... as by walking in faithful and attentive obedience with the Lord,
**we can and will make a difference
as we become a blessing in the world around us.**

In just a few days it will be Christmas day,
so how are your preparations coming, will it be a good Christmas?

When I was a student, I certainly wanted to know
the basis being used for determining my grade,
and as an employee, it was even more important to know
how my employer decided who got a raise or promotion...
... we need to know the criteria for making such judgments.

When my mother was still alive, she used to labor endlessly
and found great delight in bringing our whole family together
to share our stories & laughter over an amazing Christmas meal...

... and even as wonderful as that meal together always was,
**we know that something more and deeper is necessary
to have the truly meaningful and wonderful Christmas
that our loving God intends and desires for us...**

... and that the blessing of an extraordinary Christmas
is not about getting all the arrangements and details just right.

**So, by what measure do we decide whether or not
our Christmas has been a good and meaningful one?**

How do we tell a good or a great Christmas, from one which is not?

As I've thought about that this week,
and tried to remember and figure out what it was that made
some of my Christmas memories more remarkable than others...

... and I realized that
some of my most meaningful Christmas experiences occurred
during some of the worst and most difficult times of my life.

**So what can you and I do toward a measurably
more meaningful and wonderful Christmas?**

Mary answers that question back in verse 38:

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

We all have opportunities every day if we are willing to look,
to do things though small, yet also significant & extraordinary,
when they serve to embrace God's will, purpose and plan,
as perhaps something, **that only a Christian would do...**

... as a hopeful blessing and encouragement
as a reflection of God's own loving compassion,
or share our smile with someone who can't find theirs.

It may be that someone we encounter,
will do or say something terribly wrong, hurtful or offensive,
which then, for Christ's sake, we choose to let it go,

and so forgo our rightful resentment and revenge...
...choosing instead to practice forgiveness, mercy and forbearance,
simply because we love Jesus, who lives and dwells in our heart.

If we will look and listen for where and how God's Spirit leads us,
then even in the mundane, the ordinary and every day of our lives,
there will opportunities to make a real difference to someone ...
**... which will make for a measurably better and deeper,
and a much more meaningful and wonderful Christmas.**

What Mary did physically in the flesh – by offering her own body
through the indwelling and growing of God's presence within,
is exactly what we as Christians are called to allow
God's Holy Spirit to accomplish in and through us.

With her physical body, Mary literally gave birth to Jesus,
giving birth to God's gracious mercy and love for this world,
exactly as we are called and equipped to do spiritually...

... for as Mary gave birth according to God's will and loving purpose,
so too each of us has also been specifically chosen and called
to bear, to bring and reveal Jesus Christ out into our world.

The measure of Christmas is not to be found in the superficial,
not in the materialistic or worldly nor even religious ritual,
but **within our relationship with God through Jesus Christ.**

Mary is honored, and blessed by God, not because
she was somehow a spiritual giant, more righteous or even sinless,
but **because she took God at his word, she accepted and
followed what she was told despite her fear and doubt.**

**May what Scripture has to say about Mary, also be said about us,
that we obeyed, trusted and embraced the promises of God,** as in vs. 38 & 45

Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word."
And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by
the Lord."