

Isaiah 61:1-2, 8-10 (New Revised Standard Version)

The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; For I the Lord love justice, I hate robbery and wrongdoing; I will faithfully give them their recompense, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them. Their descendants shall be known among the nations, and their offspring among the peoples; all who see them shall acknowledge that they are a people whom the Lord has blessed. I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my whole being shall exult in my God; for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

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."

Back when I ran a small business, we posted a help wanted ad one time,  
and a young woman, seemingly obviously very unqualified applied.  
She had dropped out of high school to have a baby and was  
working part-time at a local beauty salon washing hair.  
She didn't have nor was she likely to develop the skills we wanted.

The manager and I agreed that we would keep looking and interviewing.  
But then early the next morning she called asking about the job.  
She was told, still interviewing, and nothing has been decided.  
And she called every day for the next week and was told the same thing.

As it happened I answered when she called again the next week.  
She insisted, almost begged how very much she really wanted the job,  
so I took a chance and hired her despite the manager's objections.  
She grew into the job & became the best worker I've ever hired.

**Sometimes the most unlikely accomplish the most extraordinary.**

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.

**Mary epitomizes God's loving grace and mercy toward the unlikely.**

Earlier in the 1<sup>st</sup> chapter of Luke, preparing for the birth of Christ,  
the angel Gabriel came to Zechariah, a priest working in the Temple,  
an older, well-seasoned & respected religious leader, vs. 12~15

When Zechariah saw him, he was terrified; and fear overwhelmed him. But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will name him John... and many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord.

But the priest Zechariah doubted and didn't really believe,

"No that's not reasonable & I don't see how God can do that, vs. 18-20,

Zechariah said to the angel, "How will I know that this is so? For I am an old man, and my wife is getting on in years." The angel replied, "I am *Gabriel*. I stand in the presence of *God*, and was sent ... to bring you this good news. But now, **because you did not believe** my words, which will be fulfilled in their time, you will become mute, unable to speak, until the day these things occur."

It's, just a few verses later, that the same angel came to Mary.

Now Mary was a young peasant girl, barely a teenager,

seemingly of no great importance or influence, vs. 30, 35

The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with *God*. The angel said to 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 holy; he will be called Son of *God*."

In clear contrast to Zechariah, Mary believes and responds, vs. 38

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

I especially like JB Phillips paraphrase of her faithful response:

"I belong to the Lord, body and soul. Let it happen to me, just as you say."

"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 is willfully fully embracing God's word, call 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 well-worthy **for us to follow...**  
... in doing whatever God commands as revealed in Scripture,  
doing whatever is right and faithful in trustful obedience,  
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,  
grateful that God would choose her, amazed to be a part of God's plan.

- **faithfulness**, in accepting and desiring to follow 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 #1 priority.

Mary's place in the Christmas story exemplifies our call to believe,  
to embrace God's agenda, and place it ahead of our own desires,  
**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 real difference that matters  
as we become a blessing in the world around us.**

Unlike the peaceful, pastoral scenes depicted on Christmas cards,  
Mary was very young and had to be confused, anxious and frightened,  
with her whole life, her dreams and plans before her,  
and engaged to marry Joseph & make their life together-  
**but God had another plan and purpose for her --- to which  
she chose to submit, to accept God's will over her own.**

In Mary and her response to God's call we see willing acceptance,  
and **absolute surrender** to the will, purpose and plan of God.

She trusted, and willingly accepted discomfort and inconvenience,  
with considerable courage, for sake of fulfilling God's will,  
"If that is what God wants of me, than let it come to pass."

But you may be wondering and would welcome a clear answer,  
how do we **in our lives** possibly know for sure the will & call of God?

Generally, and at least in my life experience,

God's will is more about relationships than accomplishing projects,  
and God's call is usually the more demanding and difficult path.

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 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.**

And after submitting, she celebrates and praises the Lord her God

**for allowing her** to participate in God's ongoing purpose and plan,

in the Lord's continuing agenda of mercy & justice, vs. 53, 46-48

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.

... 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."

By the word 'magnify', she means she has been filled & is overflowing with God's glory, presence and power – the Holy Spirit within her.

To magnify, is to make something more visible and clear

by enlarging & making hidden details more recognizable.

**Here, magnify means**

**that God's love, purpose and good will shine through her.**

These words Mary speaks in this passage are called **the Magnificat**.

They are a description of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ,

which fulfilled God's promise given through Isaiah 61, vs. 1

The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners.

Mary seems to grasp that through her and her faithful obedience,

the glory, grace, love, justice and compassion of God

will be made more visible and revealed to the world...

**... and she feels blessed that through her**

**God will fulfill his promises and gracious saving purpose.**

**She is truly a most remarkable person of faith and discipleship.**

Mary took God at his word,

and simply accepted, trusted, embraced and obeyed God's word,

despite any fear or uncertainty of her rearranged-future,

and so she becomes a model and ideal of **Christian discipleship**.

Quite literally, in accepting God's call to become mother of Jesus,  
in mystery and wonder God's Presence lived and grew within her.

Much like the Holy of Holies of the tabernacle and the Temple,  
Mary became **the physical dwelling place of the Lord**,  
where over the nine months, **God's Spirit became human flesh**,  
**which was then revealed to the world when Jesus was born.**

In a literal sense, and in a physical way, **in the flesh**,  
Mary represents the spiritual life of every Christian,  
when by faith we accept Jesus as our Lord and Savior,  
and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit and salvation.

And through **the indwelling of the Holy Spirit living within us**,  
our faith grows and develops as we are healed, transformed & saved,  
and called by God to reveal and reflect God's love,  
to magnify that grace back out into God's Creation...  
**... which is to reflect God's gracious mercy, love and compassion**  
**as the light of truth shining into the darkness of this world.**

That **theology of the incarnation** and word of God becoming flesh  
is a profound mystery that is beyond human explanation,  
but Mary helps us keep it real and practical,  
with clear application to our Christian lives.

We don't get to decide what we'll encounter and have to face in life,  
but we can & most certainly do decide **how we will choose to respond.**

It's a choice we make to trust and believe God,  
as young Mary did, or not like Zechariah.

The promise is, that through God's power and grace and presence,  
even amid disappointment, suffering, failure or defeat  
yet God will accomplish victory and make good in our lives.

Mary demonstrates what it means  
to focus on God beyond the personal, worrisome and immediate,

to look past our struggles, difficulties and trials

by trusting that God is up to something for good.

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

**... as through our discipleship and our walk of faith with the Lord,  
we can make a difference as a blessing in the world around us.**

**Our call is to follow the faithfully-obedient example of Mary,  
who offered her whole self, even her body and future plans,  
her all in magnifying God's love and mercy,  
by bringing Jesus Christ into the world...**

**... everything in response to the love, grace and promises of God,  
for that is how our faith deepens, expands, ripens and grows.**

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.**

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

My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.

And

blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord. (vs. 38, 46, 45)

**May what Scripture has to say about Mary, also be said about us,  
that we believed, trusted, embraced & obeyed the promises of God.**