



Mary: Preparing for the Unexpected

December 8, 2024

By Pastor Joshua Clough

Group Leader Notes

Welcome to the second week of *Let Every Heart Prepare Him Room* series. I want us to take a look at how people in the Christmas story prepared their hearts for Jesus because they have something to teach us today. Last week, we started with the prophets who hoped for the coming of the Messiah. They said a messenger would prepare the way for the Lord and called people to return to God. Today, I want to turn to Mary, Jesus' mother. Mary's story is unique; she experienced the unexpected. Every life is full of turns we never expected, saw coming, or maybe even wanted.

Questions: How does Christmas prepare us for these unimagined experiences; what does the story of Mary tell us about God and this child we celebrate, and what does it mean for our lives today?

Bottom Line: The invitation to prepare our hearts for Christmas is about saying, "Here I am, Lord, use me."

Take Home Message:

Mary prepared her heart for something unexpected. And God said I'll do something great through you if you only say yes. To prepare our hearts is to humble ourselves before God. We're meant to say, "Here I am, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word."

Memory Verse: Luke 1:38

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

Other Scripture References

Isaiah 11:1-4

Luke 1:30-33

Peter 5:5-6

1Corinthians 1:27-28

Luke 1:35

Philippians 2:3-5, 8

Luke 1:28

Micah 6:8

Teaching Points:

- God looks for the meek, the humble, the unexpected people, and places to use for his greatest purposes.
- The meaning of Nazareth comes from the word NETZER, meaning branch or shoot
- Grace comes from the Greek word KECHARITOMENE, which means God's kindness, love, and care- his gift given freely, even though we don't deserve it.

Group Discussion

Begin in prayer before reading and discussing the text.

1. Read Luke 1:28.
God speaks to Mary through the angel Gabriel. God also speaks to us through Scriptures, sermons, worship music, and the people in our lives. Consider that anyone you encounter at any time could be an angel sent by the Lord with an invitation or a message specifically for you.
 - Take a few minutes to think about a time when God spoke to you.
 - Through whom or what was this message delivered?
 - How did you discern that this was from God?
2. Mary took on a posture of humility when she surrendered her heart to God. Pastor Joshua discussed the Christian value and practice of humility. Read Philippians 2:3-5 together.
 - Take a moment to think about your closest relationships. Ask for one or two members to share how they can humble themselves to lift others up.
3. Pastor Joshua shared his family's story of a lost pregnancy between the births of Adah and Elsie. Joshua and Claire chose to grieve by praying and releasing seeds into a pond in Kansas City to give their heartache, loss, grief, and all of their hopes and dreams back to God.
 - Take a few minutes to reflect on a time when you experienced the pain of loss and grief. Ask if anyone would be willing to share what their relationship with God was like at that time. How did they manage to survive through it?
4. When we look at Mary's story, we realize that what God calls us to do is hard. He invites us to step out of our comfort zone. Sometimes, he calls us to love people who appear unlovable.
 - Is this really how God shows his favor, to call us to hard, difficult things?
 - Explain how God's invitation to us relates to Jesus' new command (John 13:34-35).

Let's Pray

Heavenly Father, thanks for calling us back to you and inviting us to become a part of your story. Even at the low points in our lives when we feel broken and unworthy, You have a plan and purpose for our lives that is greater than all we can ask or imagine. As we prepare our hearts for Christmas, help us be alert to the unexpected ways we can serve you, to be the hands and feet of Jesus. We pray the prayer of Mary, "Here I am, Lord, use me." In Jesus name, Amen.