

Session 4

December 25, 2022

SUBMISSION TO GOD IN PLACE OF FEAR

Luke 1:26-38

We protestants have a hard time with Mary. On the one hand, we refuse to give her the adoration (dare I say worship?) that the Catholics offer her. On the other hand, we too often treat her as just another woman. Clearly the truth lies somewhere in the middle. Certainly, she should never be worshipped. But just as certainly she should not be ignored for the courageous yet humble faith she demonstrated in bearing the Christ child. Imagine the rush of emotion that must have flooded her world when the angel first appeared with such a startling announcement. At the forefront was simple fear. But notice how Mary progressed from fear to faith. In her case, it was a three-step process. Three key words mark the process.

Startled (vv. 26-29). The sudden appearance of Gabriel must have been startling enough. Yet the manner and content of his greeting was what disturbed Mary the most (v. 29). Notice the *careful details* Luke—the historian—included in his narrative. The specific time (six months after Elizabeth had conceived); the specific angel commissioned by God (Gabriel); the specific location (Nazareth in Galilee); the specific young woman (Mary); the specific circumstances (a virgin who was engaged); and specific details about her fiancée (his name and lineage). Notice as well the *certain declaration* that is made. The exhortation to *rejoice* is the best translation of the word. To turn it into some kind of prayer (as the “Hail Mary” that Catholics do) is not even hinted at in the text. Rather, it was a typical greeting of the day. That she was favored by God does not make her “full of grace,” either. It simply means that God had chosen Mary to be the earthly vessel by which Christ would come. That is what made her a very special young lady! For reflection: *Why do you think it was so important for Luke to include all of those details? Besides just details, what do they add to the narrative?*

Skeptical (vv. 30-37). Here, Gabriel explains why Mary is so favored. Notice that very little of the explanation has anything to do with Mary. It’s all about Jesus! The name Jesus (v. 31) means “the Lord is salvation” or “the Lord saves” (see also Matt. 1:21). Verses 32-33 describe Him in terms reminiscent of Isaiah 9:6ff. “Great” is the word *mega*. It means expansive in every possible way. “The Son of the Most High” means the Son of the *supreme of the heavenlies*. Ironically, it’s the term used by the Gadarene demoniac in Mark 5:7. The throne of David not only connected Jesus to His earthly lineage, but to His heavenly reign (see 1 Kings 2:4; 8:25 et al. Some say that of the three offices of Christ—prophet, priest, and king—Christ has only fulfilled the first two. His kingly reign will occur during the millennial reign. See Rev. 20:2-7). Here’s where the skepticism came in. All of those prophecies were great. But there was a problem: Mary was a virgin. Although she was betrothed to a man, she wasn’t even married, much less intimate with anyone (v. 34). How could she have a child? Ironically, Gabriel offered both an explanation and an example. She would not need a man to father the child, for He would be the Son of God Himself (v. 35). And for further proof, he mentioned her sister Elizabeth. While John the Baptist was not conceived of the Holy Spirit, his birth was still miraculous, as it was ordained by God so late in her life (v. 36). For reflection: *What significance do you see in the demoniac’s use of the divine title in referring to Jesus? How does James 2:19 relate to this?*

Submissive (v. 38). “I am the Lord’s slave,” and “may it be done” should not be taken as simple resignation to God’s coercion, but rather as Mary’s sweet and willing submission to God’s sovereign plan. See in it both wonder at this incredible event...and faith in the One who promised it. For reflection: *What lesson(s) do we see in Mary’s progression from fear to faith? Do you think her fears disappeared when Gabriel left?*