

LUKE 1:26-38

**WHEN
LIFE'S
MYSTERY
HITS US**

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Scripture Passage

Luke 1:26-38

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" 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. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also

conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God." 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.

Sermon

When Life's Mystery Hits Us

Some people find this passage very difficult to accept. They say that it is impossible for a virgin to give birth. Scientifically and logically, it doesn't make sense, they say. It is not something they can see and experience in the world we live in.

Yes, that's right. Christmas doesn't make sense. Today is Christmas Sunday and we are celebrating Christmas together. What we are celebrating is not just the virgin birth. We are celebrating a much bigger thing. We are celebrating that God became a human being. To many people, this doesn't make sense, God becoming a human being, and that is what we are celebrating today.

But somehow today's passage gives me comfort. Comfort in a sense that what I see and what I touch, what I can understand with my logic is not everything about life. There is something more. Something beyond what I can understand and comfortably accept. To me, that is mystery. In life, there is mystery. Without

mystery, life is not fun. It would be totally predictable and even suffocating. Life where there is no unfathomable mystery - that is not what really life is. That is not what I experience every day. We experience the unfathomable mystery.

The Mystery of Life

At Christmas, we celebrate the mystery of life. We celebrate God's mysterious work of salvation.

When Sarah heard that she would give birth when she was 90, she laughed. She laughed because it was ridiculous. So after giving birth to a son, she named him "Isaac", and the name means, "he laughs", or "he will laugh." What a way to name your own son, 'he laughed' or 'he will laugh'. She laughed at first because it sounded ridiculous but after giving birth to a son, she laughed because it was utterly amazing. What she thought was ridiculous was the beginning of everything. The whole of Judeo-Christianity began with that.

Our life is a mystery. The fact that God created the world is mystery. The fact that God came to us in a human form is mystery. The fact that we will die and rise again is a mystery. It started with mystery and will

end with mystery. When we start seeing life in that way, we will realize how wonderful and amazing our life is. Yes indeed, our life is amazing, wonderful. It is full of unexpected mysteries.

Here I Am

When the angel Gabriel first came to Mary, she couldn't understand what he was saying. What she heard was totally against the logical world she was familiar with. This is what she said: Mary said to the angel, **'How can this be, since I am a virgin?'** But soon, she realized something bigger was going on when she heard from Gabriel that nothing will be impossible with God. She realized that something bigger was going on. As soon as she recognized that something bigger was going on, what came out of her mouth was a very simple statement. ***Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word. (Luke 1:38)***. She didn't say, "Yes, I will do it." She said, "Here am I, Let it be." That is the confession of all those who experienced the mysteries of life.

When Job experienced the mystery of life after all the hardships, his last words were "Here am I." When Samuel heard God's calling and experienced the

mystery of life, all he said was, "Speak, for your servant is listening." When Isaiah experienced the presence of God in the temple and experienced the mystery of life, he said, "Here I am. Send me." That is the confession of all those who experience life's mystery.

It is mystery not because a virgin gave birth but it is mystery because God was with her. Mary realized that God was with her. So Matthew, the Gospel of Matthew, confessed in this way, **"Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel, which means God with us". (Matthew 1:23).** That's how Matthew saw Christmas. You don't need a miracle to experience that life is mystery. When we experience God's presence with us, life's mystery opens up. Yes, Mary must have had a lot of questions when she first met the angel Gabriel and what she heard from him. So many thoughts must have crossed her mind. What should I tell Joseph, her fiancé? How can I explain this to my parents? What about village people? How do I deal with them? Many thoughts must have crossed her mind. But when she realized that God was with her, all her troubling thoughts disappeared, evaporated, and vanished. For nothing will be impossible with God, she realized.

Her answer was simple, ***“Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.”***

(Luke 1:38). I believe that behind many things we experience in life, there is God. There is God, hidden. All these things didn't happen accidentally or randomly. There was and there is Emmanuel; God. When we experience the presence of God, our life becomes a mystery. That is when we realize that God is in control, not me. God is in control of this universe and God is in control of our life.

Leave Your Life in God's Hands

From when we were young, we have learned and we have been trained and taught to be in control. Be in charge! - we were told. And we have struggled all our lives to try to be in control. But you know what? The more important thing to learn is to learn to let go, leave our lives in God's hands. I think that is the more important lesson to learn, to let it go. Not to be in control. God leads us, guides us, and protects us. When we know that, then we can leave our life in God's hands. When Mary said, “Let it be” – this “Let it be” is important. When she said that, she knew what it meant to leave her life in God's hands. As the angel said, soon, she got pregnant and her belly started showing. The

questions Mary had were still not answered yet. But somehow the Scripture was very quiet about them. Very quiet about what happened to Mary. The silence of the Scripture speaks volumes. It meant nothing happened. Even though a virgin got pregnant, there was no problem. Nothing happened! She wasn't stoned to death! It tells us that God took care of all the questions Mary might have had when she let it be. To Joseph who was trying to break off the marriage quietly, God appeared in his dream and took care of it.

Let it Be

When we leave our life in God's hands, we experience that God takes care of us. You will experience that. Sometimes letting it be is the best thing to do. Every day let us practice the discipline of leaving our life in God's hands. Every morning, leave your day in God's hands. Every evening, before you go to sleep, leave what happened on that day in God's hands. Every morning you wake up, and the first thing you can say is 'Lord I lift today in your hands'. And at the end of the day, you can say, 'Lord I lift whatever happened today in your hands'. In the morning, and the evening, we leave our life in God's hands.

Leaving our life in God's hands does not mean that you don't do anything. On the contrary, you can be more creative in dealing with life's challenges when you leave things in God's hands. When we know how to leave things in God's hands, we can handle the greater challenges. Instead of being shaken by seemingly impossible challenges, we will have the creativity to deal with our situations like Mary did. For those who know how to leave things in God's hands, life's challenges will not be any more stress to them; but rather they become new opportunities of experiencing God's mysterious power. So for them, a bigger challenge is the opportunity to experience what God will do. Trying to control your situations is not always the best way to deal with our situations. Sometimes by doing that, you make the situation worse, don't you experience that? Sometimes, just letting it be is the best way.

God's Greater Mystery

We will be able to enter into God's greater mystery. Mary was a blessed woman, why? Mary experienced that throughout her life. She experienced the great mystery of life by raising Jesus. Whenever she experienced the wonders of life, she didn't tell people but she kept them in her heart. Luke 2 describes Jesus'

youth. Once the whole family went up to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. On the way back home, there were so many people and caravans, they lost Jesus. They realized they lost Jesus and went back. And finally, they found him in the temple. And this was what he said. ***He said to them, 'Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?' But they did not understand what he said to them. Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them. His mother treasured all these things in her heart. (Luke 2:49-51).***

Mary's whole life was filled with life's mystery. In that sense, she was a blessed woman. People who live their lives experiencing life's mysteries are blessed people. They are truly blessed. Every day is exciting because they experience something wonderful.

Let Us Be Comforted

Today is Christmas Sunday. In the previous year, people came out on Christmas Sunday and this sanctuary was filled. We said Merry Christmas and hugged each other. But today, we are under 10 people in the sanctuary and see all of you only through the

screen. We cannot even hug each other.

But let us be comforted. Even Jesus was born in a manger. No celebration. Alone. But the shepherds in the field experienced life's mystery. This is what the Scripture says, ***"And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favours!'" (Luke 2:13, 14).*** When they shared that with Mary, Mary kept that in her heart. ***...and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. (Luke 2:18, 19).*** All throughout her life, she experienced all these mysteries.

I pray that this Christmas may be a Christmas of experiencing God's mystery. The glory that appeared to the shepherds in the field and grace that appeared to Mary may also appear to all of you.

Merry Christmas. May this day be a blessed day and may your life be full of mysteries.