

Emmanuel—God With Us
“Mary: I am the LORD’s Servant” (Luke 1:26-49)
December 6, 2009 by Kevin Haah



I. Introduction

Introduction to the new series: Emmanuel—God With Us. We are going to look at Christmas beyond the Sunday school version. We are going to look into three people most identified with the Christmas story: Mary, Joseph, and Jesus, and one person not many people know about Anna.

The theme of the series: When Emmanuel happens (meaning when God comes to be with us—when he enters our lives), he does not come into our lives to fit into our lives as we have set them up, he comes into our lives to radically transform our lives from the foundation.

That’s what happened to Mary.

We are going to focus on a story commonly referred to as the Annunciation.

Let’s look at [Luke 1: 26-38](#). [Read]

This story tells us (1) what she gave; and (2) what enabled her to give it.

II. First, what she gave.

- She gave her life literally as a vessel of God. She said: [“I am the Lord’s servant. May it be to me as you have said.”](#) The word translated as “servant” is the Greek word “*doule*” which is the same word as *slave*. “I am the Lord’s slave.”
- It wasn’t easy for Mary to give herself like that. Imagine what this meant for Mary.
 - She was probably 13, 14 or 15 years old at the time. She was probably dreaming about what her life was going to be like. She was pledged to be

married to Joseph, probably a man in his early 20's. This pledge was a binding contract to marry usually lasting about a year. So, it's not like an engagement in modern times. You had to get a divorce in order to break-off the pledge. But, you were not allowed to consummate your marriage until the wedding day. It was considered adultery to do so.

- Now, not only was the ideal wedding plan destroyed (and wedding is a huge deal in this community), she had to deal with her pre-marital pregnancy. The Old Testament law says that the punishment for adultery is death by stoning. It is hard for women now to be single and pregnant. Imagine how it was for her in the little town she grew up in. Her life was in danger.
 - How was she going to explain this? “Uh, I met an angel and . . .” How was she going to explain this to Joseph, to her parents, to her neighbors, to the people in the synagogue?
 - Some of us might have said: “Why are you doing this to me? My life is ruined!” In fact, her life as she had hoped and planned for was ruined. To submit to God's plan was to face a life of suffering, scandal, misunderstanding, judgment, and possibly divorce/estrangement and death.
 - Despite these dire consequences, she said: I am the Lord's slave. May it be to me as you have said.
 - It's unconditional commitment! I'll follow you no matter what!
- Even though most of us agree that committing our lives to God like Mary did is a great thing, we find it extremely difficult to do so. Often, our commitment is conditional.
 - Sometimes, we condition it on whether it fits into our lives.

- Lord, I am your servant, IF you fit into my schedule, if I feel comfortable with it, if I want to, if it's fun, if it meets my needs, if it fits into my plans, if my friends are there, if there is an opportunity to meet someone special, if this and if that. Lord, I'll serve you if you fit into my life.
 - I saw this cartoon strip in Urbana Mission conference newspaper of this guy praying to God: "Lord, I'll do anything for you. Go anywhere for you. But I hear that the surfs in Australia are really nice."
- Sometimes, we condition our commitment on him blessing us with what we want. Perhaps we do this at a subconscious level. Serving God becomes a veiled attempt to bribe God with enough righteousness so that he blesses us or so that he will bless our business or so that he will bless our family. We turn God into OUR slave. Not the other way around. We turn God into our vending machine, a Genie, and we're always negotiating terms with him. Lord, if you do this, I'll give you that. Then, I'll submit my life to you. Some of us do that about relationships. Lord, if you make this relationship work, I'll give you my life.
- This is essentially a variation of the prosperity gospel. The primary problem with the prosperity gospel is that it's about us. We serve God because we want to be blessed by God with something other than God Himself.
 - The flip side of the prosperity gospel is the fear of punishment gospel. If I am not faithful to God, God's going to punish me. It's kind of like a hindu's karma view of the world: If I do enough good, good will come around or God will bless me; but if I don't do good, God will punish me. This is also the view of every other religion in the world. There's no real love in this relationship with God. It's more like fire insurance. No one likes paying fire

insurance premium, but we do because “just in case” there is a fire. We serve God just in case there is a heaven and hell or we serve God just in case God will punish us if we don’t.

- Don’t we do that? Don’t we condition our giving of ourselves to God on whether it meets our terms, our needs, our time?
- You can’t put conditions on giving yourself to God. You must give him a blank check, and say, “Lord, I am your slave. May it be to me as you have said.” It’s unconditional commitment!
- It’ll be the gutsiest thing you will ever do. It’ll be the most obedient thing you do. It’ll be the most powerful thing you do with your life. It’ll be the most beautiful thing you’ll ever do.

But, some of us are saying: how do we get the ability to actually do this? Where do we get the power to do this? I kind of want to but what do I do? Some of us are afraid of making a bold commitment to God because we’ve done that before and we ended up disappointing God and feeling more guilty.

III. That leads me to my second point, what enabled Mary to do that? What was behind Mary’s unconditional commitment? If we can figure this out, it will help us figure out how where we can get the power to do what she did.

- Was she a saint? I mean, she’s the Mother of God, the Catholic Church calls her. There’s a whole segment of people who actually worship her. Was she such a superstar follower of God that she was able to do what she did? For us ordinary people, is it hopeless?
 - Well, Luke 1:28 says, “The angel went to her and said, Greetings, you who are highly favored. The Lord is with you.” The word translated “highly

favored” really means—found grace with God. One commentator says that word means “receiving God’s grace on the basis of his sovereign action.” This means God’s selection of Mary was not because she was some kind of super-righteous person. It means in his grace and mercy, God decided to call Mary. `

- In other words, Mary was an ordinary 13, 14 year old.
- How was this ordinary teenage girl from a boon-dock town called Nazareth able to give herself to God in such a powerful way?

Let’s look at what the Bible says. [Luke 1:26-28]

In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David.

Mary was able to give herself to God unconditionally because she had a glimpse of God’s new reality.

- She actually interacted with an angel of God who came from the presence of the Lord. Mary experienced the in-breaking of the Kingdom of God into her life. Mary saw that there is another reality out there in God that is greater than her own reality. As the disciples later experienced the new reality in the resurrected Jesus, she experienced a new reality in her encounter with angel Gabriel.
- If we think, consciously or unconsciously, the world that we see is pretty much it, then we are not going to be able to give our lives to God unconditionally.
- We have to let the reality of the eternity saturate ourselves and our thinking because to the extent that it happens, we will start to live by the eternal values of God instead of the temporal values of what we see in the present reality.

Then, verse 28 says: The angel went to her and said, “Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.”

Mary was able to give herself to God unconditionally because she experienced God's grace.

Remember, this verse means you found grace with God, and so, the Lord is with you. In other words, your relationship with God is not by your good works, but by the grace of God—it is the gift of God.

- Every religion in the world says your standing before God is determined by your works; but, Mary started to understand the gospel for the first time—that our standing before God, our relationship with God is based on God's grace—not on our works.
- There is no way we can give ourselves to God unconditionally if we don't fully understand and experience God's grace in our lives.
- You see, it's not about having our lives all nicely arranged and giving our lives to God. It's going to God as we are. Messed up. Broken. With all the faults. With all the hang-ups. God doesn't care about gift-wraps.
- If you are here this morning and you have not experienced the amazing grace of God, I hope you come back next week because we are going to focus on God's gift to us and embark on a process of seeking God.

Let's read on. [\[Read v. 29-33\]](#)

Mary was able to give her life to God unconditionally because she started to understand God's purpose for her life. She started to understand the enormity of the plan of God. She started to understand that God was about to do something awesome through her. It's amazing. Just listen! You are to give him the name Jesus. The name means Lord Saves. He's going to be the Son of God, the King, and reign forever! She understood that God's plan for her life was much much grander and greater than anything she could have conceived for her life.

- God's plan for OUR lives is so much greater and grander than anything we can put together for ourselves. God wants to use us to become difference makers for eternity. God wants you to be in this loving joyful relationship with God and help others also find that relationship with God. The more we understand in our minds and in our hearts the amazing purpose for which God has called us, the easier it is for us to give our lives to God. In fact, it is very difficult to give ourselves to God unconditionally unless we understand his purpose. This great plan that God has for your life . . . it's not an easy life; it's not a comfortable life; but it is going to be the most meaningful life and rewarding life you can imagine.

Let's read on.

Verse 34: she says: "[How will this be since I am a virgin?](#)"

- She asked questions.
Asking questions helped Mary give her life to God unconditionally. It's not a sin to doubt and ask questions to God as long as you have sincere doubts. Mary didn't understand and she was honest to the angel and the angel answered her question.
- If you look at the story right before this in Luke, the angel appears to Zechariah and tells him that his wife Elizabeth is going to have a baby. Then, Zechariah asked questions and doubted as well. Then the angel got mad and made him mute until the baby was born. How was it that the Angel (and by the way, it's the same Angel Gabriel) got upset at Zechariah when he asked questions and didn't get mad when Mary asked? Both had doubts. One commentator points out that the distinction is the attitude of their hearts. Mary's doubt was a sincere doubt. She wanted to know more and was open to change based on what she found out. Zechariah's doubt was a dishonest doubt. Some people have doubt for doubt's sake. It's the attitude of their heart. They don't really want to know the answer. They just continue to doubt. It's really cynicism.

- God welcomes honest doubts and questions. In fact, it is very difficult to give our lives to God if we can't ask God any questions. If you have intellectual issues about God, what he really wants you to do is to be honest about your doubts and present them to God. But do it with an open and sincere heart, and not a cynical heart. You see, Christianity is not a religion of blind faith. The Bible invites us and says: "Come let us reason together . . ."
- In order to authentically commit your life to God, you have to ask a lot of questions. "What does this mean? If that's what you want to do with my life, how am I actually going to do it?" Don't be afraid and engage God with questions.

Let's go on. [Read 35-37]

The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month. For nothing is impossible with God.

Mary was able to give her life to God unconditionally because she realized that it was by the power of the Holy Spirit. Ultimately, this whole thing is something that God wants to do through the Holy Spirit, and it is not through our own power.

- Often, we don't give ourselves to God because we don't think we can do much for God. Folks, it's not about you. It's about what God can do through you. It's about making yourself available to God. God is more concerned about our availability than our ability. One commentator said: "Behind the availability to service is an attitude that trusts God for direction and enablement. God has called all believers to minister to the body, and he does not call us to a task he will not prepare us to perform."
- When the Holy Spirit comes upon you, you will have the power to serve God and give your life to God in a way that God desires. You see, "For nothing is impossible

with God.” When you submit yourself to God and his purpose, it will seem like it is going to be impossible. How can I actually keep this up? How can I do this? God is with us and nothing is impossible with God!

Now, why do you think the angel told Mary about her cousin Elizabeth being pregnant? What was the purpose? Well, right after this encounter with the angel Mary went to visit Elizabeth.

Let’s read on. [verse 39-49]

- Mary went to see Elizabeth. They had the first Christian community. In fact, the only two people in the world (other than Zechariah—Elizabeth’s husband, who was muted by the angel) that composed the gospel Christian community at that time was Mary and Elizabeth. The angel was telling her to go do life together in community with other believers. When Mary got there, Elizabeth affirmed her.

Doing life together with other Christians in community helps us to give ourselves to God unconditionally. This is my favorite point of the sermon.

- I think Mary took the step of submitting her life to God when the angel explained things; she got it and she submitted herself, but it does seem like she was very excited by it; but it’s only after experiencing Christian community with Elizabeth that the penny dropped. She breaks out in a song: the *Magnificat*. “My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.” It is in the context of community that things get really crystallized, that she starts to appreciate the breadth of what this means.
- Have you experienced that? Sometimes you have a great quiet time, but when you come together with other believers and start to talk about things, about giving our lives to God, it creates a new level of excitement that you can’t create on your own. The full impact of the joy comes from our interaction with the community.

So, this is the process Mary went through, and it might be the process we need to go through to give ourselves to God this Christmas and the coming year. I invite you to examine your heart and your life and honestly assess where you are in the way that you have committed to God. Have you made an unconditional commitment to God? Are you following God no matter what?

IV. Conclusion

Now, what happened when Mary gave herself unconditionally to God? She became the vessel by which God incarnated. Through her gift to God, God was able to give us the greatest gift of all: Jesus.

Concluding story:

- Now, let me ask the question that I asked earlier in the sermon: What do you give to God who has everything? What would Bill Gates, the richest man in the world, want more than anything this Christmas? What would he give up everything he has to get?
- I think if he had lost his son, and if giving up all the money that he has is going to get his son back, I think he would give it all up. I think the return of his lost son would be the thing that he wants more than anything else in the world this Christmas.
- I think it's like that with God. He loves you so much and he has everything but he's lost you. You decided to turn away from him. You decided to drift away from him.
- He loves you so much and what he wants more than anything is for you to come back to him this Christmas. He wanted to find you so much that he came and died for you and paid the penalty that we should have paid so that we can have a relationship with God.
- What God wants more than anything is YOU, just as you are, unconditionally.

Imagine if we all gave ourselves to Jesus like that. Wouldn't this be an amazing community? Imagine what we can do together in this world. Do you see a vision for the power of God working through this community if we all gave ourselves to God unconditionally?