

Pastor Daryl Diddle

Sermon Series: *Advent's Adverbs, No. 2*

**Humbly**

December 11, 2022

**Luke 1:26-38 (NIV)**

*In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, <sup>27</sup> to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. <sup>28</sup> The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you."*

*<sup>29</sup> Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be.*

*<sup>30</sup> But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. <sup>31</sup> You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. <sup>32</sup> He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, <sup>33</sup> and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end."*

*<sup>34</sup> "How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"*

*<sup>35</sup> The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on 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. <sup>36</sup> Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. <sup>37</sup> For no word from God will ever fail."*

*<sup>38</sup> "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled." Then the angel left her.*

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We're in the book of Luke today; would you take a Bible and turn back there with me to Chapter 1 of Luke's gospel?

Probably one of the parts of life that most of us like the least is **waiting**. We actually did a series of messages on waiting earlier this year, but you know, just this week, I've wondered if our inclination toward **impatience** is part of the effect of the fall in Eden, or not.

Conventional wisdom would say that it is, but I wonder about that because, in some instances, I think impatience is not inherently bad.

Like when we're wanting justice to come – when we're waiting for the right to be done – it seems that it would be good to be impatient for those things. I mean, there's nothing holy about endlessly tolerating evil.

And yet, it's true that impatience crosses a line when we refuse to submit ourselves to God's timing and instead, take matters into our own hands.

We saw that a couple weeks ago in King Ahaz. In spite of the prophet Isaiah's warnings and pleading, Ahaz, the King of Judah, refused to wait on God and on the salvation He promised to provide.

And, as we saw with Ahaz, that sort of impatience reveals a lack of trust in God that can very well destroy us and maybe even those around us, sooner or later.

That's why patience is not just "a virtue," as the saying goes. Patience is also a fruit of the Spirit, especially where the work and timing of God is concerned.<sup>1</sup>

To wait on God to bring us salvation – to wait in a godly manner and in a godly way – is to wait patiently. We said that last time.

Today, to wait on God's salvation – in a godly way – is to wait **humbly**. That's today's adverb: **humbly**.

Or to put it in noun form, **humility**.

Now, unfortunately, a lot of people have a mistaken idea about the meaning of Christian "humility." People think it means beating yourself up, or thinking badly of yourself – seeing yourself only as a wretched sinner.

Of course, it's true that we are sinners apart from God. And apart from His grace, we would indeed still be sinners, driven through life by our broken and disordered passions and lusts.

But **with** God – in Christ and His Spirit – we are much more. We are the image-bearers of a God who deeply loves us and who, by His Spirit, is working day and night to purify us and to make us like Jesus – shaping us into the people He created us to be.

And so, **humility** is the ability to keep these two perspectives of ourselves in healthy balance by thinking of ourselves as God thinks of us: neither too highly nor too lowly.

In the sixteenth century, St. Francis De Sales put it this way: "There is no need to fear that knowledge of God's graces toward us will make us proud, if only we remember this truth: that none of the good in us comes from ourselves."

Understanding that there's good in us, but it's not of ourselves: that is humility.

Living humbly is knowing we are valuable and worthwhile, but only because of the goodness of God. I'm not sure there exists a better example of living humbly than Jesus' mother, Mary.

In a superstar-oriented, ability-driven, bigger-is-better society like ours, it can be hard to believe that God chose Mary for the role she played.

Consider where Mary was from: Nazareth.

<sup>1</sup> Galatians 5:22

Nazareth was no place special.

Remember Nathanael's reaction when Philip first introduced Jesus to him and mentioned that Jesus was from Nazareth?

Nathanael's response was, "Nazareth? Can anything good come from there?"<sup>2</sup>

That reaction of his tells us all we need to know about how Nazareth was perceived. One person wrote, "It was little more than a disregarded valley in a backwater province of a conquered land."

In fact, Luke, who is writing to Gentiles here, even felt the need to explain that it was in Galilee, as we have to explain that Wilmore is just south of Lexington. Otherwise, nobody would know where it was.

Mary had no reason to tout her geographical origins, because she had no geographical origins worth touting. Sort of like Winston Churchill said about Mr. Atlee, "He is a modest man who has a good deal to be modest about."

No one would presume a Nazarene would fulfill such a noble task as Mary's.

Also, Mary was a woman.

Do I have a command of the obvious or what?

Mary was a woman, and a young woman at that, and even though Jewish society treated women much better than those cultures around them, still, women – and young women especially – were not highly valued. So again, Mary possessed no position, no footing from which to be seen or heard.

Beyond that, Mary was also not yet fully wed.

She was in that in-between time of more-than-fiancée, but not-yet-wife – a time like which we, today, have no equal – a time of vulnerability where she sort-of belonged to everyone and to no one at the same time.

These sorts of things also contributed to Mary's humility.

At the same time, one thing she could point to in her life with great satisfaction was that she was sexually pure.

Sadly, it was far more common in her day than it is today to be so on her wedding night, but that was still a source of, not pride, really, but peace. She had lived as God says young women (and men) are to live, so that the wedding might truly be an occasion of full celebration.

What's remarkable here is how Mary's one great accomplishment in purity is the thing that would be tremendously affected by God's plan. Mary would experience birth before she would experience intercourse. She and Joseph received and understood this because of the angels' messages. But what about all of her family and friends? Would they believe the angel stories?

Would you and I have believed them?

Her purity – one of the truest and noblest things she brings to the situation, you see – will be, remarkably, the very thing required of her to give away.

And she agrees – though not without question.

In verse 34 there, understandably searching for a little clarity, she asks, "How will this be?"

Mary knew enough about biology to know that something didn't add up.

And yet, Mary knew enough about God to put theology above biology.

Somehow this uneducated young, Nazarene woman had her "–ologies" in the right order, and was willing to believe that the same Spirit who hovered over the waters for the world's creation could hover over her for the world's redemption.

So, she accepted Gabriel's message humbly, with both question and confidence.

We also see Mary's humility in verse 29 there, in her response to the angel's declaration that she was "*highly favored*" and that "*the Lord is with her.*"

Her reaction to that was to be "*troubled,*" Scripture says. "*Greatly troubled,*" in fact.

You see, Mary's head did not swell with pride at this news. The fact is, it took her by surprise to hear it – just as all people who humbly wait upon God would be surprised. They're not really aware of their beauty – that's why to be surprised and even troubled by a compliment is a sign of humility.

And then (this is beyond our text today), we could notice too that, immediately after Mary hears this great message from the angel, she leaves. To do what? To go and to serve someone else – her aunt, Elizabeth, who was old and yet miraculously expecting a child herself.

Mary is given all these tremendous honors, and yet she is able to not let them carry her away. She's the lottery winner who just returns to work the next day like normal.

The truth is, even Elizabeth seems surprised to see her doing that. She asks back in verse 43, "*But why am I so favored that the mother of my Lord should come to me?*"

But that's who Mary was, you see? Instead of feeling herself deserving of the service of others, instead of waiting for people to come to her and to serve *her* and give to *her* and to provide for her, Mary goes and serves and gives and provides for someone else.

"But what can I do for others?" That's how truly humble people respond to things: good things, blessings, even miraculous, divine affirmations.

That's who Mary was, and that's why God chose her for this most important task. God can do quite a lot with people who will humbly wait on Him.

Somehow, this young girl had come to truly know who God is and who she is before Him. That's why

<sup>2</sup> John 1:45-46

her reply to the angel there in verse 33 was simply, *“I am the Lord’s servant, so may it be to me as you’ve said.”*

That’s waiting humbly on God.

We hear this again in her song later in verse 46:

*“My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has regarded the low estate of his handmaiden...He has done great things for me, and Holy is his name.”*

Like a destitute beggar who, out of the blue, has been handed great, great wealth, Mary takes no pride in herself, nor in what she’s been told, nor in what will happen to her, because she knows that all she’s been given has come only by the kindness and benevolence of someone far greater and richer than she.

Humility knows that all good things we enjoy come from God, and so to recognize and embrace that: that’s what it means to wait upon the Lord *humbly*.

As you and I will see, and as Mary saw, every ability, every honor, every responsibility and even every sacrifice we’re asked to make are to be seen as part of God’s salvation plan. Then even the simplest, humblest chores of our day take on a new meaning and value.

They all become part of serving Jesus’ mission, part of waiting on Him to complete the process of saving our world.

Of course, it’s true that what God gives us to do is sometimes hard, often repetitive, and many times unappreciated by those around us.

Yet, look at what God can accomplish through just one poor young Nazarene girl. Look at what God can accomplish through just one who will choose to live humbly before Him.

With one Mary, He brought salvation to the world.

If all of us here today were to live as humbly before Him, what else might God be able to do?

I Peter 5:5 declares, *“God gives His grace to the humble.”*

You know why that’s so? Because it’s hard for God to find room for His grace in a heart that is full of itself.

In Mary, God found an open heart with room for Him and His grace.

The question is, does He find that same sort of openness and room in ours?

In these days of Advent, will you join Mary in waiting humbly on Christ?

Will you attribute nothing to your own abilities and resources, and instead, attribute all good you enjoy to God?

Will you see yourself as tremendously loved and valuable, yet at the same time utterly dependent on God’s mercy and grace?

Will you live and wait humbly for Jesus? God looks, today, for people who will.

*Father, help us to be those people. Holy Spirit, empty our hearts of our preoccupation with self – so there might be room there for Your grace to enter in.*

*Help each of us today to see, like Mary saw, both You and ourselves as we really are, so we might live humbly before You, and so You might use us in some good way in Your redemption of Your world.*

Service of Holy Communion

Closing Song: *Only One Life to Offer*

Benediction: *“May it be to me as you’ve said.”* To say that to God and mean it, regardless of cost – that is the measure of humility. Thanks for coming to worship. Go in peace.