Luke 1:38b “See, I am the Lord’s servant. May it happen to me as you have said.”

It is extraordinary isn’t it? I am talking about the whole history that is before us. We’ve heard it our entire lifetimes and we are so familiar with it. At least we think so. We think we have the history of Jesus down pat but time and time again I have helped people understand even more.

I say that because usually at this time of year in our Bible classes I do a “Timeline of Christmas” for the members of the Bible class. We have been doing this for a number of years. What strikes me is that though we have been doing this for many years, every time I present this study somebody always seems to have that “Oh wow, I forgot that part!” moment. There really is lots and lots to consider in this history of the birth of Jesus.

For instance, did you remember that Mary and Elizabeth were relatives? Now if you don’t have your thinking cap on, you might not even remember who Elizabeth is. Elizabeth is an older woman, whom everyone thought barren, but Elizabeth is now with child who will be named John. Eventually he will be known as John the Baptist and it will be clear that John is the forerunner, the harbinger of the Christ, the Son of God to be revealed at the proper time. If you pay attention to the sequence of events, you realize that Mary, evidently right after the Angel spoke with her, headed off to see Elizabeth. By my reckoning she stayed with Elizabeth for 3 to 4 months. It is when she returned home and is now “showing her pregnancy” that the trouble between Mary and Joe erupted.

I think Mary expected that trouble to happen. She goes away and she comes back obviously pregnant. We all know the questions that come out of Joe’s mouth. “Mary, I love you, we are engaged to be married but you are with child. I know it is not my child, Mary! So who is the Father?” Yep, that pregnancy caused some problems.

Do you know of any other problems that pregnancy caused? I think quite a few. But let’s you and I take a closer look at this young lady name Mary and see just what kind of example of faith she gives us. Our theme will be: **MARY’S EXAMPLE OF FAITH!**

I will tell you, as you look more closely at this history before us I do think it very clear why the Lord chose this young woman to be the one who would give birth to his child. Understand, Mary is not holy and perfect. For that matter in the Magnificat, that Song of Mary given to us when Mary and Elizabeth first met, that song caused as the Holy Spirit caused the baby in Elizabeth’s womb to leap with joy at the presence of Jesus in Mary’s womb! Both woman gave praise to God at the moment. In her words of praise Mary says, **“My spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior.”** There is Mary telling you that Jesus was her Savior! A perfect and holy person doesn’t need a Savior, but Mary says that Jesus is her Savior, an admission of the sin she knows is in her life and she needs a Savior from.

Here is this young lady that the Lord choses, choses no doubt because of her strong faith in the promises and power of the Lord. By the way, if Mary is pledged to be married that would put her age at this point around maybe 17 or 18 years old. It just the way things happened back then. Marriages were arranged by the parents. This marriage could have been arranged years ago, but it will only take place once the parents of Mary determine she is a full grown woman, typically in those days, 17 or 18 years old.

Mary, pious young woman that she is, finds herself confronted by an Angel of the Lord. In this case we know this is the angel Gabriel. This angel appears to Mary to inform her that she has been chosen by the Lord to be the mother of the son of God. But it is this encounter that shows us the very first important trait of the faith that Mary had. That important trait I will label as: The faithful Mary listens!

While I think it is clear that Mary was a listener to the Lord beforehand, that trait comes out all the more during this encounter. Now, when I say that Mary listened beforehand I simply mean to say that as a believer in the Lord she knew and understood the importance of God’s Word and promises in her life. She also clearly knew the implications of the law of God. Why? Listen to the exchange here.

**“28The angel went to her and said, “Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you. Blessed are you among women.” 29But she was greatly troubled by the statement and was wondering what kind of greeting this could be.”**

Do you see what I see? The Angel calls Mary, **“highly favored”** and **“blessed among women.”** That’s what bothered Mary. She knew according to the Law that she was a sinner who deserved nothing from God and yet this heavenly being calls her **“highly favored and blessed”**! I am pretty sure it is traumatic enough to have a heavenly being before you, and I have no doubts whatsoever that this Angel emanated the power and wonder that an angel of the Lord would surely have. And that’s just the point. Though finding herself in front of an angelic being, we still find Mary clearly and closely listening to what Gabriel is saying! She is bothered because as a sinner she knows she deserves nothing from God, especially being called favored and blessed!

Mary continues to show how she listens. The Angel tells her she will give birth to a son, who is to be named Jesus. This child, this son will be the Son of God! Mary is listening. Mary says, **“How will this be since I am a virgin?”** Mary wants to know how she’s going to be pregnant as a virgin, while remaining a virgin! The angle assures her that this will be done by the power and wonder of God! Mary’s response: **“May it happen to me as you have said.”** In other words, as long as it is what you say, “Okay.”

The other way to show that Mary was listening is the fact that the angel told her that her relative Elizabeth, who was said to be barren is also pregnant. Do note that one of the first things Mary does after this visit of the angel is to go and visit Elizabeth, I believe to literally verify that what the angel said is true. Mary’s first example of faith is to listen!

By the way, I like another aspect of Mary’s faith. Did you note as Mary was listening that she asked questions! There is never anything wrong with asking questions, but don’t forget to ask questions right. Take for instance the difference between Mary and Zachariah, the father of John the Baptist. When Zachariah is told by the angel that he and his wife would have a child and to name him John, he says this: **“How can I be sure of this, because I am an old man, and my wife is well along in years?”** That might seem a legitimate question but the angel’s reaction shows the truth. The angels says, **“I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God and was sent to speak to you in order to tell you this good news. Now listen, you will be silent and unable to speak until the day when these things happened, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled at the proper time.”**

Do you catch the difference? Zechariah doubted the words of the Lord and Mary affirms the words of the Lord. Mary asked questions to clarify while John asked questions because of doubt. It is never wrong to ask questions but what is behind the questions is very important. Are you asking to clarify the Word of the Lord or are you asking because you doubt the truth and veracity of the Word of the Lord? Keep that in mind in your own faith. Ask questions right! Clarify what God’s Word says, but do so in a spirit of trust and confidence. Mary once again has shown us the best example of faith!

Then there is the last aspect of how Mary displays her faith. It comes out in a few ways. Mary is told of wonders and marvels to come and Mary believes what is said. Let me tell you why that is so important.

Do you think Mary a fool? Do you think she knew nothing of life and how life really worked? She is a young woman who will end up pregnant outside of marriage. She understands how this reflects on her. She can tell everyone around her, “Hey, this is God’s child! I am a virgin. This is the work of God!” but you and I know that no one is going to believe her. She is going to be branded, by a Jewish world, as an adulteress and this will bring her no end of trouble.

Her first trouble comes when Joe see her after she comes back from Elizabeth’s home. Joe looks at her and sees she is pregnant. You and I know what’s coming. God’s Word records it this way in Matthew 1, **“This is how the birth of Jesus Christ took place. His mother, Mary, was pledged in marriage to Joseph. Before they came together, she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit. Joseph, her husband, was a righteous man and did not want to disgrace her. So he decided to divorce her privately.”** Remember I mentioned that trouble erupted between Joseph and Mary, here it is. Says Joe, “I see you are pregnant. I am not the father! Who is the father? What have you done, Mary?”

Mary says, “Yes, I am with child Joe, but this is God’s child. I am a virgin. God has done this miracle and this child is the Savior of the world. An angel told me of this and it is true. This is God’s child born of a virgin!

Joe says: “Yeah, right! Virgin birth! Do you take me for a fool?” We are not really told about all of this in Scripture, but you know, as well as I do, that this “pregnancy” caused a deep problem for this couple. Joe, because he is contemplating divorce, clearly does not believe Mary. I am sure that Mary is deeply troubled, but here is what I will also tell you. I don’t think Mary is worried. I think Mary, in keeping with the faith she has, simply trusts that the Lord will take care of the problem that is found here. Mary, as a believer, trust that everything will work out for her eternal good and for Joe’s too! I believe Mary, simply and wonderfully believed that her Lord would solve this problem.

Matthew records that such is exactly what happens. Here is the record: **“But as he was considering these things, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.” All this happened to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet: “Look, the virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son. And they will name him Immanuel, which means, God with us.”**

I want you to know that Matthew’s record of this is interesting. Is it Matthew saying the prophecy is being fulfilled or is it the angle who speaks of the prophecy as being fulfilled? I think it was a part of the words of the angel. For that matter, I think Mary appealed to God’s prophecy as she spoke to Joseph. I think Joseph also took time to look into this prophecy. Again the difference between Mary and Joe was that Mary believed what God said and Joe doubts! But Joseph is set straight and I believe Joseph from this point on also becomes a person who firmly trusts in the Word and wonder of God!

Nor do I think that for both of them the troubles are over. As they go to Bethlehem for the census, why don’t they stay with relatives or other family members in town? It was their hometown! Why does this couple have to seek out an Inn? Is it because in Jewish society they are branded “adulterers” and have that shadow upon them. I have no doubt they told everyone who listened that Jesus was God’s son, but that seems to be ignored. Even thirty years later when Jesus is going to be rejected in Nazareth, where he grew up, what do the people say, and I believe say with scorn: **“Isn’t this Joseph’s son?”** They carried this burden for many years.

But think of what that says of faith? Mary took on this role, knowing the trouble it would be, and simply trusts that God would be with her and take care of her. Later on, Joseph has the same type of faith. What a great example! Even though following God, believing God, trusting God brings difficulty and trouble in this life, it is still the best way to be and live. I love this truth about Mary. Humble young woman, who for the glory and honor of God believes and trusts in God to be with her and take care of her no matter what.

I would encourage you in the same faith that Mary has. God can do the impossible. God can do the wonderful. Following God may bring trouble and hardship, but, faith simply trusts in God. You don’t have to yield to adultery in order to ensure a boyfriend of girlfriend. You don’t have to hide and cover up your faith because the world will diss you, boldly step out and let the wonder of God shine forth. God will take care of you. God will bless you! Mary is proof of that. Amen.