

Let every heart prepare Him room – Mary \* Luke 1:26-38  
December 3, 2023 \* Langford Community Church \* Graham Gladstone

There's a line in the song that we just sang ("Joy to the World") that has always stood out for me and it's right there in the first verse: "Let every heart prepare Him room."

I have this memory of standing in our little country church as a kid, probably Christmas Eve, singing at the top of my lungs 'Let every heart prepare Him room;' it's just such an evocative and memorable picture 'let every heart prepare Him room' and the rhythm of the music just drives it home. I have a second, associated memory though; I also remember thinking – 'What does that mean – let every heart prepare Him room? What does it look like to make room for Jesus?'

And to be honest, I had that thought again last year when we sang those words, so I thought this year, why don't we take some time to think together about what it means for every heart to prepare Him room. Many of us sing those words every year but do we actually do them? It's good to tell the Christmas story but it's even better to think about what the Christmas story means for OUR story. So we're going to take some time this Advent season to ask 'What does it mean to make room for Jesus? And what does it look like for me?'

To answer those questions, we're going to look at the Gospel accounts of Mary and of Joseph as they prepared THEIR hearts for Jesus. We can learn a lot from them and God has given us their stories as His good and perfect Word to us, so let's go to the Bible and see what God is telling us about making room for Jesus.

Let's go to the Bible together and I want to show you three ways for every heart to prepare Him room.

Today we're going to look at Luke chapter 1. You'll find Luke about ¾ of the way back in the Bible – Matthew – Mark – Luke – John – Luke chapter 1 starting in verse 26. God speaks when we read Scripture so let's hear what He has to say. Luke 1:26.

26 In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee,  
27 to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary.  
28 The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you."  
29 Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be.

So picture this: we're in a little rural village, about the size of Onondaga and there's this young, unassuming girl named Mary. She is legally engaged to be married to a guy named Joseph but the marriage itself is still a few months off. She's working away in her parents' home, spinning wool into yarn or baking bread to feed the family, doing the kinds of things that girls her age did in that culture, when all of a sudden, an angel appears. This guy is sent as a messenger, directly from God and he says to Mary: 'Greetings, you who are highly favoured! The Lord is with you.'

Verse 29 I think is one of the greatest understatements in all of the Bible. 'Mary was greatly troubled at his words.' Yeah, I'll bet! There she is, going about her everyday life, when all of a sudden, this heavenly visitor appears out of nowhere and says 'Greetings Mary! You'll never guess! God is with you and has a surprise for you!'

I wonder what I would have done in that situation. I mean, I'm skeptical whenever the phone rings and it's a recording saying 'You've won a cruise, please press 7 to find and more and have your credit card nearby.'

But cruises and credit cards didn't exist back then and Mary it seems was willing to cautiously hear what this angel had to say.

And I know that from the rest of verse 29: 'Mary was greatly troubled at his words and *wondered* what kind of greeting this might be' (Luke 1:29 NIV).

Now that's a fine translation of the word that appears there, 'wonder,' but I think you could probably use a stronger word to get at what Mary was actually doing. The word there is more like 'debate, puzzle out, reason, like 'apply yourself to understanding and figuring something out.' So like 'I *wonder* if the Leafs will win the Cup this year (ie. I wonder without giving it too much thought) but I *apply myself to figuring out* how to make the church grow for the future.'

That's what Mary is doing here. She is working hard to figure out what exactly this angel means by showing up in her living room and saying 'God's got an important message for you.' (cf. But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and *tried to discern* what sort of greeting this might be. (Luk 1:29 ESV).

And this brings us to the first way that we can prepare our hearts for the Lord. We prepare our hearts by being willing to listen. We prepare our hearts by being willing to listen.

At this point, Mary could very well have run out of the room screaming 'stranger danger, stranger danger.' She could have just been like 'oh ok, whatever' and gone on with her life as if nothing had ever happened. She could have just dismissed the messenger out of hand.

But she didn't. She was willing to listen. Just because it was new and different and hard to understand, she didn't close her heart to it; she was willing to listen and puzzle her way through it because she sensed that what the angel had to say was important. So, the first way to prepare our hearts is to be willing to listen.

Let's pick it up in verse 30:

30 But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God.

31 You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus.

32 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, 33 and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end."

34 "How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"

Now there is a LOT going on there but for now let me point out three things.

1. This is God making good on a promise that He had made centuries before. Way, way back in Old Testament times, God had made this covenant with King David that said that God would make kings out of David's family tree so that David's family could lead the people by example in walking with God. They didn't always do that and that led the nation into all sorts of trouble. But now God was saying: 'I will send my son ('son of the most high') in the line of David (Verse 27 – Joseph is part of David's family tree) to be the king who will get it right.' So this is God keeping a promise.

2. Our culture just kind of assumes that we start off on neutral ground with God (if it's even willing to acknowledge that God even exists). Right? The general consensus seems to be if 'I'm a nice person' + 'God loves everybody' just kind of nets out to 'God and me, we're good.'

But I'm sorry to say that that's just not true. I mean, I tried to believe it was true for years and years and yet I could never shake the reality that God had created me and given me everything I needed to thrive and yet I ignored Him and gave Him no credit for anything I had. And that's not just me, that's a universal human experience. I mean, forget keeping laws and breaking Ten Commandments and stuff; the most fundamental sin that we're all guilty of is saying by words or deeds 'God, I want nothing to do with You.' And that's a problem, because you can't just ignore your Creator. That separates you from the source of true life.

And yet here, God is saying 'I'm going to deal with that.' I'm going to deal with that rejection that separates us. It might not be immediately obvious but think about what Mary is supposed to call the baby. Jesus. Matthew 1:21, an angel talking to Joseph says 'call Him Jesus because He will save His people from their sins.'

Now that doesn't immediately strike us because we're so used to thinking of 'Jesus' as a name. And it is. But in the language Mary and Joseph were speaking, 'Jesus' literally meant 'Saviour' or 'Deliverer.' They were being told to literally name their son 'Saviour.'

You know how we talk about a weed wacker? What does a weed wacker do? It wacks weeds. Dustbuster? Cheese grater? Pace maker? What does Jesus do? He Jesuses! He delivers! He saves! They put it right in His name!

Jesus came to deliver us from sin by paying the price for our sin on the Cross so that we could receive the blessings of His perfect life. And that's all tucked into His name. God is taking the initiative here to restore us to Him.

And 3. Mary I think gets all this (she says some things later in this chapter that would support that (Luke 2:46-55) but there's a practical problem. She's never even been with a man so how's she going to have a baby?

This I think is the second way to prepare our hearts. We prepare our hearts by being willing to ask questions.

Mary could have said 'well listen, I'm not going to be with Joseph for a bunch more months so this is not happening any time soon.' She could have said outright 'this is just not going to happen.' I mean, her uncle, Zechariah, had a similar conversation earlier in this chapter and he ended up mute for nine months because he just outright shut his heart to the idea that any of this was even possible.

Mary though was willing to explore. Willing to ask questions with the goal of understanding what God was doing. I think that she got intuitively that what God was doing was good; she got intuitively the need for a Saviour. She just wasn't sure how she fit into it and how this all would work given the birds and the bees. She was willing to listen and she was willing to ask questions.

And you know, God was willing to answer. Verse 35.

35 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.

This is how God will overcome the whole 'virgin' part – the Holy Spirit would produce in her a child with no earthly father – a divine child unlike anyone who has ever or will ever live. This child would not just be Mary's son but God's Son.

And just in case Mary wanted to have some assurance that this highly unlikely thing would happen, the angel points out to her another highly unlikely thing that was already happening. Did you notice that this reading started out 'in the sixth month.' 'In the sixth month of what?' Here we find out.

36 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.

Nobody would have thought that her aunt Lizzie would get pregnant, but now she was in her sixth month of pregnancy and already rocking a baby bump.

37 For nothing is impossible with God."

If God can produce life in a very old couple, He can produce life without the benefit of a man.

38 "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May it be to me as you have said." Then the angel left her.

This I think is the most important thing to do to prepare our hearts for God. We prepare our hearts by being willing to trust. I'm sure that all of this was happening VERY quickly for Mary. Nothing in her life had ever prepared her for this. I don't know if she realized it in the moment but this unexpected, highly unusual divine pregnancy would cause hardship and isolation and ridicule for her. She would face the breakup of her marriage and the prospect of an uncertain future, but she was willing to trust that God knew what He was doing. She was willing to trust that what He was doing was good and that He would bring her through.

She was willing to listen, willing ask questions and willing to trust.

And I think that that helps us to answer the question 'how do we make room for Jesus?'

We prepare our hearts for Him by being willing to listen, willing to ask questions and willing to trust.

As we said already with the kids, Jesus is coming again to be the Deliverer, the Saviour of the world for all those who will let Him. He is going to put all things right in the end; He is going to deal with every injustice and illness and He will lead His people into an eternal life of perfection and glory. How do we get ready? How do we prepare Him room?

Well first, by being willing to listen.

Jesus may be coming back in the end but He's not going to wait until then to speak into our hearts; He is eager for us to hear from Him and to know Him better every day, the same way that you check in with

and listen to your friends and loved ones every day. He is inviting us to know Him personally and to hear Him and to hear the words that lead to real life. There are all sorts of voices competing for attention in our culture, from podcasters and influencers to TikTok and Twitter; only one leads to life. So take time to listen.

Take time to quiet your heart. To get rid of distractions. To put your phone on 'Do not disturb' and to listen to the voice of the God who created you and loves you enough to create you and redeem you and sustain you. God speaks most clearly through His Word so carve out some time to listen to Him in the Bible every day. The reading plan I mentioned earlier is a great, easy way to make some space and listen to God. And other people are doing it too so we can listen for God together.

And listen, if this is your first time hearing about Jesus or you're sitting on the fence, I'm glad you're here; you've already shown that you are willing to listen. Keep that open heart. Keep listening and if there's things you don't understand, ask somebody.

That's the second way we prepare our hearts right? We prepare our hearts by being willing to listen; we prepare our hearts by being willing to ask questions. I didn't have it all together when I first started to walk with Jesus. Far from it. There were things that I didn't understand and I needed older believers to help me along. Some people may think that church is a 'check your brain at the door' kind of thing, but look, if you're going to walk with Jesus through thick and thin, you need to know Him inside and out, and the only to do that is by asking the questions that will get you there.

If your head is saying 'I don't really get how all this works' but your heart is saying 'I think God's doing something good here' then ask the questions that will help to bring your heart and head together here. Again, the reading plan is a great way to get into this – we interact over the readings on Facebook, we answer each others' questions (the only stupid question is the one you don't ask); we help each other in this journey – so that we can get to the place, ultimately, where we are willing trust God.

And that's our final point. We make room by being willing to listen, willing to ask questions and willing to trust.

I mean, this is ultimately where this lands. It was one thing for Mary to listen to what the angel had to say and then another to clarify what he was talking about but it was another thing altogether to trust that God knew what He was doing. At some point, she had to move this from the realm of theory to the realm of reality and say "I trust that in this world and in my life nothing is impossible for God and I'm coming with You."

Some of you will remember Drew; I met him in the hospice. He heard about Jesus and what He had done and decided to follow Him for whatever was left of his life. I remember having a little Christmas get together in the lounge at the hospice – some of you were there – we sang carols and read the Christmas and I asked Drew if he had any insight he wanted to share. He said 'sometimes you have to take a leap of faith.'

I want to encourage you, whether you've never walked with Jesus or whether you've followed Him all your life, cultivate that kind of trust that says 'nothing is impossible with God.' 'May it be to me as You have said.' God is just as much at work today as He was two thousand years ago and we all need the Saviour's work in our lives.

I want to invite you today to open up your heart. Sweep away the cobwebs. Let down your defenses. Clear out the distractions that are taking up space in your hearts and invite the Lord to take up residency in your heart.

Prepare Him room by being willing to listen, willing to ask questions and willing to trust.

#### BENEDICTION

2 Peter 3:18 - (May you) grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.