

## **The Majesty of God Revealed: *To Mary and Joseph***

This advent season we are exploring the theme of *The Majesty of God Revealed*. God is a majestic God. As we saw last week, God's majesty speaks of his greatness, of his glory – the sum of his perfections. The psalmist, in Psalm 104, makes this grand statement about God:

Bless the LORD, O my soul! O LORD my God, you are very great! You are clothed with splendor and majesty. – *Psalm 104:1*

The splendor of God, the greatness of God, is displayed in many ways: in creation, in redemption, in judgment, for example. But surely the greatest display of his majesty is in his Son, Jesus. In preparation for his coming to earth, God was revealing his majesty. Last week, we considered his majesty revealed to the prophets. This morning, we turn our attention to Jesus' earthly parents: Mary and Joseph.

Let's begin with Mary. Turn in your Bible to the Gospel of Luke, chapter one. Luke, writing a history of the story of Jesus, introduces us to this young woman. Follow along as I read, beginning with verse 26.

### **Luke 1:26-38**

Mary is just a teenager. In the Jewish culture of that day, most girls were engaged to be married in the time frame of 12-14 years of age. It appears that she is from a humble, probably poor family. She is a devout believer in God. And, she was very much in love. She is engaged to be married.

Now, why would God reveal his majesty to this teenage girl? The clue is in how the angel greeted her: "O favored one."

The point here is not that there was anything extraordinarily special about Mary, but that she was the object of God's divine favor and divine plan – selected to play a special role in the fulfillment of God's salvation plan for humanity.

A literal rendering of this Greek word would be "having been favored one." It means to be made the object of favor or to be visited with free favor. Only one other time in Scripture does this exact term appear. Paul uses it in Ephesians, chapter one, to describe how God has favored us as his children. He writes:

In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has *blessed* [favored] us in the Beloved. – *Ephesians 1:5-6*

Mary was a very ordinary person, but God in his grace chose her to accomplish an extraordinary thing. This is a grand truth that applies to us today. God chooses to reveal his majesty to ordinary people. And God uses ordinary people to accomplish extraordinary things. He does this that he alone might receive the glory.

The angel, Gabriel, reveals the majesty of God to Mary in his description of this Christ-child whom she would bear. Five things he mentions:

**1) He will be great** (vs. 32). The greatest of God would be revealed in his son. As such, he should be worshipped. Psalm 48 opens with this great declaration:

Great is the LORD and greatly to be praised. – *Psalm 48:1*

The Apostle Paul picks up on this revelation of majesty in his letter to Titus when he speaks of the “blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.”

**2) He will be called the Son of the Most High.** In the language style of the Hebrews, this is to say that he would be the Son of the Most High. The designation of God as “Most High” goes all the way back to the time of Abraham. In Genesis, chapter 14, Melchizedek, king of Salem, blesses Abraham with these words: “Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth....” (*Genesis 14:19*).

David speaks of this designation of God in his song in Psalm 7:

I will give to the LORD the thanks due to his righteousness, and I will sing praise to the name of the LORD, the Most High. – *Psalm 7:17*

Mary is told that God’s majesty would dwell in this Son of the Most High.

**3) He will be given the throne of David.** The promise God gave to King David that the Messiah would sit upon his throne is to be fulfilled in the Christ-child.

**4) He will reign over the house of Jacob forever.** This revelation of the Christ’s identity is a linkage to the continuity of God’s promise to Jacob and his descendents. This was the identity of the ancient people of God, and now the Christ’ child is

identified as the ruler who would descend from Jacob and exercise his rightful reign over them.

**5) Finally, Mary is told that His kingdom will never end.** This is another Messianic indicator of this Child. Alfred Barnes in his notes on Luke's Gospel writes:

He shall reign among his people on earth until the end of time, and be their king forever in heaven. *His* is the only kingdom that shall never have an end; *He* the only King that shall never lay aside his diadem and robes, and that shall never die. *He* the only King that can defend us from all our enemies, sustain us in death, and reward us in eternity.

The majesty of God revealed to Mary as to this identity of the Holy Spirit-conceived Son. Mary's response to this revelation of God's majesty – **Verse 38**. Humble submission to the will of God.

Mary reveals more about this revelation of majesty in her song of praise when visiting her cousin Elizabeth. In what is called *The Magnificat*, she calls attention through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to aspects of God's majesty.

- Verse 47 – God as Savior
- Verse 49 – God who is mighty in his works, and whose name is holy.
- Verse 50 – A God of mercy
- Verse 51 – God who shows his strength
- Verse 52 – God who brings down the proud and exalts the humble
- Verse 53 – God who provides for those in need

All of these things speak of the greatness of God, the majesty of God. All revealed to this teenage girl whom God chooses to set his grace upon and to use in his redemptive plan.

Now, jump ahead to chapter two – the account of Jesus' birth. I want to pick up in the story following the angels' appearance to the shepherds.

### **Luke 2:15-19**

All that was revealed to the shepherds, they now reveal to Mary. What majesty was revealed to them out on the hillside? "Born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."

And what is Mary's response to this revelation? Not a song of praise as in *The Magnificat*, but a quiet reflection of the meaning of the revelation of majesty.

Luke says two things about Mary's response. She *treasured* up these things. The word means "to preserve, keep safe, keep close." She bound them up within herself. And, secondly, she *pondered* them. Vine says this word means "to throw together, confer, etc... to put one thing with another in considering circumstances."

Here is Mary reaching back nine months before to the appearance and announcement of the angel Gabriel, revealing the majesty of God in her miraculous conception of the Christ-child. And now that all has come to pass in the fulfillment of the angel's word, Mary gathers this all this and puts it together.

Can you begin to sense the thoughts running through her mind, the feelings of her heart in all she has heard and experienced? A little of this is captured in a song written by Mark Lowry and Buddy Greene titled *Mary, Did You Know*. As Cheryl comes to sing, listen to the words of one of the verses:

Mary did you know that your baby boy is Lord of all creation?  
Mary did you know that your baby boy will one day rule the nations?  
Did you know that your baby boy is heaven's perfect Lamb?  
This sleeping child you're holding is the great I am.

*Mary, Did You Know*

Mary is one-half of the team we are exploring this morning. We must turn our attention now to Joseph. Turn in your Bible to the Gospel of Matthew, the first book in our New Testament.

### **Matthew 1:18-25**

Do you realize that Joseph is the only one in the Christmas story who never says a word that is recorded in the gospels? As far as the biblical record is concerned, he is silent. But he plays a huge role in God's plan and his actions speak much louder than words.

What do we learn about Joseph from this passage?

**1) Joseph was an ordinary man.** He felt deeply about his fiancée Mary. He loved her; he looked forward to their life together. Can you imagine how hard it was for Mary to tell Joseph what was going on? Can you imagine how hard it must have been for Joseph to hear what Mary was telling him?

**2) Joseph was a righteous man.** He could not go through with the marriage. Right was right; wrong was wrong. He could not condone an illicit affair – a pregnancy outside of marriage.

**3) Joseph was a loving man.** Rather than subject Mary to a public, shameful divorce, he planned to quietly divorce her, sparing her as much pain and disgrace as possible.

Joseph begins to make a plan so he can get on with life. And then his life was severely interrupted. God broke into the ordinariness and planned pattern of his life. God sent the angel Gabriel to him to let him in on the secret.

**4) Joseph was a humble man.** He chose to submit to the will of God, just like Mary had.

**5) Joseph was an obedient man.** Matthew's account tells us that Joseph did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him to do.

With Joseph, there is no hesitation. He understood clearly what God expected of him, and was ready to obey! He would take Mary to be his wife and suffer the cutting remarks regarding a child conceived prior to their wedding. He would obey in spite of the fact that this child of divine promise would be born under a cloud of adultery. He called his adopted son "Jesus," just as he was told to do. Joseph believed God and obeyed him.

The Bible defines faith with obedience and obedience with faith. In other words, they are two sides of the same coin. You cannot have one without the other. Obedience is doing what God has said. Obedience is not doing what others say, or doing what others say God has said, or doing what you wish God has said. It is simply doing what God says.

It's vital to believe in God, but unless we are ready to obey him, then our belief is useless. The great 19<sup>th</sup> century evangelist D.L. Moody was conducting a series of meetings in Brocton Mass.; leading the congregation in song was Daniel B. Towner. One night a young man responded to the invitation and said, "I'm not quite sure -- but I'm going to trust and I'm going to obey."

That statement struck Mr. Towner, who jotted the sentence down, and sent it to J.H. Sammis, a Presbyterian minister. Together they gave birth to the hymn, "Trust and Obey". A Christian's philosophy can be summed up in these three words: Trust and Obey.

Joseph made a decision that most of us probably can't understand. He would raise this son as his own. Michael Card wrote a song titled *Joseph's Song*. I want you to see a few of the lines from this song. Look closely, and from what you know about Joseph, see if these words could have come from Joseph's heart:

Lord I know He's not my own.  
Not of my flesh, not of my bone.  
Still Father, let this baby be  
The Son of my love.

Father show me where I fit into this plan of Yours.  
How can a man be father to the Son of God?  
Lord, for all my life I've been a simple carpenter.  
How can I raise a King?  
How can I raise a King?

Joseph had a rendezvous with a simple, faith-filled, humility before God. And he responded in grace, in trust, in obedience and, I would have to suppose, even in wonder.

Why could Joseph respond in such a way? Part of the answer, I think, lies in the fact that the majesty of God was revealed to him by the angel Gabriel. Go back and look again at the words he received:

### **Matthew 1:20-21**

All of the Messianic prophecies in the Old Testament, beginning way back in Genesis 3:15 are now to be fulfilled in this Child he will raise with Mary, Jesus' mother. It would be Joseph's responsibility to name this child. He would not be named after someone in his family, as was the custom. He was to be given the name *Jesus*.

This is the Greek form of the Hebrew name *Joshua* – Yě hōshū ā, which means *Jehovah is Salvation*.

God didn't simply say, "Joseph, just get with the program. You don't need to know what's going on. Just do what I say."

Instead, God reveals his majesty to Joseph in the divine mission and name of this Child. It then was reasonable for Joseph to believe God and to obey God.

What should we walk away with this morning? Let me suggest this. God revealed his majesty to Mary and Joseph by showing them that the Christ-child was God's answer to the need for redemption. The greatness and splendor of God's plan to do what only he could to save people from their sins was bound up in his gracious gift – the gift of his son Yē hōshū ā.

Only through the Christ-child could even Mary and Joseph experience God's forgiveness and gift of eternal life. Only through the Christ-child can you and I experience God's forgiveness and gift of eternal life. That's what we celebrate this Christmas season.