

YEAR END GIVING **SLIDE**

- Our goal: \$40,000 ~ 10% of our budget (missions)
- So far: just over \$26,000
- First & best = 10% tithe + about 2% year end giving
 - All our staff and elders give.
 - We're all-in on this place, just FYI.

INTRODUCE **SLIDE** ADVENT

Alright, if you have your Bibles, and I hope you do,

- please grab them and turn to Luke chapter 1.
- You can open a phone or a tablet to Luke 1,
- or you can use one of the hard-backed black bibles
 - under every single chair.
 - You'll find Luke 1 on page **855**.

INTRODUCTION: DOG FOOD

So, I went to Colorado Christian University...like 20 years ago!

- And it was a mish-mash of students...
- from all over the country...
- with a mish-mash of backgrounds.

But here's where I fit: I had a car.

- And that made me the...
 - "hey, can you pick me up from the airport?" guy.

So, I had a lot of friends...

- who would fly home for Thanksgiving or Christmas,
 - fly back,
- and ask me for a pick-up from the airport.

And I would intentionally find out when they landed...

- and told them I could only come like 4-hours after they landed.
- so they would have to hang out in the airport.
 - That was my little punishment to them...

And one guy who asked me for a ride was this friend, Jed from Nebraska.

So, I'm picking Jed up from the airport after Thanksgiving,

- and Jed is this big-ole farmer kid...
- who was always hungry....
 - Jed could eat anyone under a table.

So, I pick him up, and Jed's like,

- *"Man, I'm starving, can we stop and get some food?"*
- And I'm a poor college student...
 - who spent all his money on gas...
 - to pick his friends up from the airport!
- So I'm like, *"nah, let's get back to school and hit the caf."*

So, we're driving on I-70 back west, and Jed is hungry.

- And as we near downtown Denver,
- Jed says, *"Oh man, what smells so good.*
 - *I'm so hungry. What is that?"*

Now, if you've driven on I-70 towards I-25...

- you know exactly what I'm talking about!
- Jed had picked up the scent of the Purina Dog Food factory.

So, I'm like,

- "Jed, that's the dog food plant.
- You're so hungry you're salivating over dog food.
- Yeah, we should probably stop for some food."

So we stopped at Taco Bell, which is just about the same thing as dog food.

TRANSITION

And church, I sometimes think we approach Christmas like this.

Strange introduction to a sermon? Stay with me!

We catch a whiff of what we think Christmas is.

- It's presents,
- and it's TV specials,
- and it's parties,
- and it's cookies...

And we catch a whiff of what we think is Christmas...

- but that ain't Christmas.
 - You're smelling dog food.

So, in this Advent series...

- We're reading some familiar texts,
- and trying to identify the rich, nourishing meat to be had...
 - and to identify where we might be settling for Taco Bell.

So, last week in Luke chapter 1, we met Zechariah and Elizabeth.

The parents of John the Baptist.

- And we saw how Zechariah's disappointment with God...
- led to his disbelief...
- which resulted in God disciplining him for 9 months.

And today we meet our second pair of characters.

SLIDE JOSEPH & MARY

- And let's not settle for the dog food version of this story...
- Because there's so much more to be had.

Luke chapter 1. Let's pick it up in verse 26:

LUKE 1:26

[26] In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth,

EXPLAIN: NAZARETH

Ok, so six months have passed since what we looked at last week,

- when this same angel,
 - the archangel Gabriel,
- showed up to Zechariah in the temple...
- and promised him a son.

But now the same angel is sent to a city called Nazareth.

- Now, WE all know Nazareth...
 - because it was put on the map by Jesus of Nazareth.

But hear me...Nazareth was a nothing town!

- It isn't mentioned anywhere in the Old Testament.

In Jesus' day Nazareth was a town of anywhere from 50 to 200 people.

- You ever pull over in a truck-stop town...
 - and you notice a house or two in the town...
 - and you think to yourself,
 - *"How could anyone EVER live in a place like this?"*

That's Nazareth. Verse 27:

LUKE 1:27

[27] to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary.

EXPLAIN: JOSEPH & MARY

So, there's our couple. JOSEPH & MARY.

We know these guys because we hear about them every Christmas.

- Come on...they're in the nativity scene.
- But we can sometimes have a romanticized version of them.

So, let's dig in a bit.

JOSEPH

First, Joseph was likely a teenager...

- maybe 16 or 17 years old.
 - They married young back then.
- He was from Nazareth,
 - so, a small town guy...
- and he was poor.
 - We know this because in chapter 2,
 - when they go to the temple to make a sacrifice,
 - they sacrifice two pigeons,
 - which was the sacrifice of a person...
 - who couldn't afford anything better.

So, picture a sixteen-year-old guy,

- trying to grow some facial hair...but can't, right?
 - Like has some sketchy, wispy mustache.
 - but not much more than that.
- He's a broke kid,
- who took up a trade,
- and he's now engaged to a young girl from his tiny town.

That's Joseph. We don't get too much more about him in this text.

MARY

But what about Mary?

Well, we find out that she is betrothed to Joseph.

- Now, betrothal isn't a word we are super familiar with...
- in fact, I don't know that I've ever heard it...
 - outside of the Christmas story.

We do engagements...not betrothals!

But, a betrothal is the initial stage of a Jewish engagement.

- This stage involves a formal witnessed agreement to marry...
- and a financial exchange of a bride price.

But in betrothal,

- the woman legally belongs to the groom...
- and is referred to as his wife.
 - This is why Matthew's account points out...
 - that Joseph would have had to divorce Mary...
 - to break the betrothal.
- And for the first year...
 - the bride would live with her parents...
 - until the marriage ceremony took place...
- at which point the husband can take his wife home...
 - and then they would consummate the marriage.

So, we had 7 Fathom weddings last Summer

- AND a bunch of you are engaged right now.

Any of you engaged people want to go back to the betrothal process?

- No you don't!
 - It was all the responsibility of marriage.
 - with none of the benefits!

Now, Luke does not give Mary's age,

- but betrothals came as early as 12-years-old...

Mary is likely between 12 and 14-years-old.

She's like a Middle Schooler!

Call her Middle-School Mary!

TRANSITION

Now, I bring all this up, to contrast it with last week.

- Zechariah was a someone.
 - He was a priest.
 - He was respected.
 - He was righteous and blameless.
- Joseph and Mary are no-bodies from no-where.
 - We've got a poor young man,
 - and his Jr. High fiancé,
 - in a small town.

Finally, it's noted that Mary is a virgin,

- which is a good thing in this society,
 - because a Jr. High girl who is not a virgin...
 - was not a candidate for marriage.

But this is the scene.

- She's a young, engaged girl...
- planning her wedding.

And it's into this that God sends his number one angel...

to bring a spectacular message.

Verse 28:

LUKE 1:28-30

[28] And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" [29] But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. [30] And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God."

EXPLAIN: TROUBLED

So, Gabriel greets Mary,

- and it says that she was greatly troubled.

Now, why is she troubled?

- All he's said is, 'You've found favor with God.'
- What's troubling about this?
 - He hasn't said anything else at this point!

Is she just freaked out because it's an angel? Like I talked about last week?

Well notice, it says she was greatly troubled AT THE SAYING.

- That is: she's troubled that he calls her the favored one.
 - This could also be translated, *chosen one*...
 - or *accepted one*.

Gabriel says,

- "God has favored you!"
- He's chosen you.
- He's looked over the earth,
- and he's favored you, Mary."

But hear me, I think what's troubling Mary is that...

- she knows she's a nobody!
 - 'God, why would you favor little Mary, here?'
- She's troubled because this doesn't make sense.

POINT 1: QUESTIONS

But then the text says...

- that she **tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be.**

And it's the first point I want to make about this event.

When the angel appears...Mary **SLIDE QUESTIONS**

- She QUESTIONS!
- She **tried to discern.**

Now, one pushback I get from non-Christians is this,

- *"You Christians, you just don't ask questions.*
- *You just believe stuff on blind faith.*
 - *I'm a skeptical person.*
 - *I'm a rational person.*
 - *I ask a lot of questions.*
- *But you religious people, you just believe.*
- *You just turn off your minds.*
 - *You stop questioning...*
 - *and you stop reasoning...*
 - *and you just believe!"*

But listen, that's not what Mary did.

When the angel shows up to her, she's not like,

- *"Wonderful...*
 - *an angel!*
- *I've heard of this kind of thing happening!*
- *I've always wanted to meet an angel!"*

No! She's **troubled** and then tries to **discern.**

EXPLAIN: DISCERN

Now, the Greek word for *discern* is:

- *dialogizomai* (dee-al-og-id'-zom-ai),
- which actually is an accounting term.
 - It literally means: *to take an audit*.
- It means to be furiously rational!

What that means is...

- that when the angel shows up...
- Mary immediately starts asking questions.
 - She's taking stock...
 - she's adding things up...
 - she's weighing things out.

Did you know that believing in God is a whole brain experience?

- It's rational...
- and emotional...
- and psychological...
- and social.

It's not just a feeling...it's discernment.

It's not just heart...it's head.

TRANSITION

Now, onto the actual message from Gabriel to Mary.

Verse 31:

LUKE 1:31-34

[31] And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. [32] He will be great and will be called the Son of

the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, [33] and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.”

[34] And Mary said to the angel, “How will this be, since I am a virgin?”

EXPLAIN: MORE QUESTIONS

So even after this incredible message from the Angel...

- *You're gonna have a son!*
 - *And this son, he's gonna be great!*
 - *His name will be Jesus.*
 - *He will be the Son of the Most High.*
 - *He will have the throne of David.*
 - *He will reign forever.*
 - *And his kingdom will have no end!*

After all that...she STILL has QUESTIONS!

Now, back to our skeptic friend...and really, our skeptical world.

We are all products of the Enlightenment and the Modern period of history.

And so, we have bought into this myth that says...

- we are the enlightened ones...
- and we are the developed ones...
- and we're the smart ones...
- and we've got the inside track...
 - on knowledge...
 - and wisdom...
 - and how to do life.

And we look down on Bible times and think:

- *“well, they’re just pre-modern...”*
- *pre-developed...*
- *pre-scientific...*
- *Superstitious people.*
 - *They’d never believe this stuff if they lived today.”*

As if people back then were just ignorant suckers!

We, in the modern West,

- are among the most arrogant humans...
- who have ever walked the planet.

But they, back then, had reason to question, too.

You see, as modern, post-Enlightenment thinkers,

- we have been trained to NOT believe in the supernatural!
- We have de-mystified everything!

But Mary,

- as a first century Jew,
- would have been trained to believe...
 - that God could not possibly...
 - become a human being.

They had an incredibly high view of deity!

- So, THAT was tantamount to heresy.
 - That’s actually why they killed Jesus...
 - because he claimed to be God.

So, her barrier to believe the angel’s message was just as high as ours is.

And Mary has more QUESTIONS.

APPLICATION: YOUR QUESTIONS

So hear me, some of you have questions about all this Christianity stuff.

- Maybe you don't believe in God...
 - you're skeptical...
- or you're interested in God...
- or maybe you even want to believe in God!

And of course you have questions!

BUT, maybe you already do believe in Jesus.

- He's your savior.
- You are trying to follow him.
- AND you still have QUESTIONS.

"So, if I believe in Jesus...but I have questions...am I still a Christian?"

The answer is 'yes'!

You can have faith AND have questions.

The problem is, there are some strands of Christianity,

- where questioning has been looked at...
- as having a lack of faith.

But that is nonsense!

- Church, I have questions.
- That's why we study God's word like crazy.

Questions are not incongruent with faith.

- In fact, if you don't have any questions...
- you might not be mining deeply into who God is,
- because he isn't easy to understand!

I believe...AND...I am working towards understanding.

EXPLAIN: CONTRAST

So, Mary QUESTIONS.

Now, you might be remembering last week's passage, and thinking,

- *"Hey, what about Zechariah?"*
- *"He had questions for Gabriel."*

Remember, the same angel came to Zechariah saying,

- *"You're old, and your wife is barren,*
- *but you're gonna have a miracle son,*
- *and he's gonna be John the Baptist!"*

And Zechariah's response was,

- *"How shall I know this?"*

And for that the angel strikes him mute...as discipline for his disbelief.

- So, same angel.
- Similar message.
 - But when Mary asks questions...
 - the angel gives her answers and then leaves.
 - No discipline at all!

So, what was that all about?

- Did Zechariah get a grumpy Gabriel,
- and was he just in a better mood for Mary?

EXPLAIN: MOTIVE

Well, Tim Keller points out...

- that what we have here...
- is a wonderful nuance in the Bible...
- about QUESTIONING.

In the Bible...QUESTIONING can be either HONEST or DISHONEST.

There's a kind of questioning...

- that's a sign of an open mind...it's HONEST.

AND THEN there's a kind of questioning...

- that's a sign of a closed mind...it's DISHONEST.

There's a kind of questioning...

- that wants answers.

And there's a kind of questioning...

- that doesn't want answers.

There's a kind of questioning...

- that shows that a person is open to the truth...
- and willing to suspend disbelief.
 - It stares upward with awe, and says,
 - *"How can these things be true?"*
 - *"I don't understand, God, but I am ready to learn."*
- That was Mary.

And then there's a kind of questioning...

- that is about staying in control of your life...
 - it's proud and defiant.
 - It looks inward at itself, in bitterness,
 - and says to the promises of God,
 - *"There's no way this could be true."*
- That was Zechariah.

POINT 2: TRUSTS

And it's my second point. Yes, Mary QUESTIONS.

But while she QUESTIONS...she **SLIDE TRUSTS**

- In her QUESTIONING...
- she still TRUSTS God.
 - Zechariah distrusts...
 - Mary trusts.

APPLICATION

So, which kind of QUESTIONS do you have?

Would you say you are honestly questioning...

- or are you just using your questions as, sort of, a shield...
- to keep you from trusting God?

See, when you ask an honest question of God, it puts you in a position...

- of HUMILITY and VULNERABILITY.

First: HUMILITY:

- You're admitting there's something you don't know,
 - or don't understand,
- and that's why you're asking the question.

It's humble.

But also, it's VULNERABILITY:

- You see, if you ask a question,
 - you might just get an answer.
- And what if that answer contradicts you?
 - Or shatters your categories?
 - Or demands things from you...
 - that you feel like you are not ready to give yet?

- What if God says no?
- What if God doesn't give you clarity?
- What if God doesn't reveal what's behind something?

That's a vulnerable position to be in!

But will you still TRUST him?

TRANSITION

So, Mary QUESTIONS from a posture of TRUST.

And the Angel answers her in verse 35:

LUKE 1:35-37

[35] And the angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God. [36] And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. [37] For nothing will be impossible with God."

EXPLAIN: HEART

And there's the real difference between Zechariah and Mary.

- Mary trusts that line:
 - nothing will be impossible with God.
- Whereas Zechariah did not.

Hey, listen, the problem isn't that people have QUESTIONS.

The problem is the HEART behind those questions.

- Is it a trusting heart or not.

Many of you have questions:

- *“God, why would you do this?”*
- *“God, why is this happening?”*
- *“God, why is the world like this?”*

And my questions for you is:

- Are your questions humble?
- Are they open to the possibility of a God...
 - who might give you uncomfortable answers?
- Or are they proud...
 - Have you already made up your mind...
 - about how God should act!

Here’s a way of saying it:

You have questions.

- **Are you willing to question your questions?**
- **Are you willing to look at what’s under the questions?**
- **Are you trusting in the goodness of God in your questions?**
 - **Or are they so firmly fixed in your mind...**
 - **that you are closed off to a God...**
 - **who might contradict them?**

And, I’ll say this from almost 20 years of pastoral ministry experience:

- the top reason people walk away from their faith is this:
 - Questions about pain.
- They have gone through something...
- and they never trust God with it.

It’s their inability to accept that a good God could allow it to happen.

And so, they walk...

TRANSITION

Hey, church...do you trust him?

- Even if you can't figure it out?
- Even if you've got QUESTIONS?

Have you ever trusted him with your QUESTIONS?

Look at Mary's response in verse 38:

LUKE 1:38

[38] And Mary said, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.

POINT 3: SURRENDERS

What an astounding response from Middle-School Mary!

And it's my third point.

- Mary QUESTIONS.
- Mary TRUSTS.
- And finally, Mary **SLIDE SURRENDERS**
 - She surrenders!

EXPLAIN: MARY'S PLAN

Now, do you realize...

- that not all of this would've seemed like good news...
- to Middle-School Mary at that moment?

We think, "*she gets to be a player in the most incredible moment in history!*"

But, you think this is how Mary planned things to go? No!

She had a script for her life.

- She was going to marry Joseph.
 - She was going to make him shave...
 - that nasty mustache for the wedding.
- But she was gonna marry him!
- She was gonna have a NORMAL family.
 - She knows how the birds and the bees work...
- They were gonna have babies the NORMAL way!
- They were going to raise them in Nazareth.

She was going to be NORMAL!

But she SURRENDERS all of that.

I mean, think about Mary's reputation from here on out.

- God doesn't make it known to anyone else...
- who Jesus' biological father is. Right?
 - "Hey, Gabriel, how about announcing this...
 - to all of Nazareth so I can save face!?!"

But she SURRENDERS.

And I know we sing songs like Silent Night...

- but this isn't how she expected to start her family...
 - on the road...
 - in the stable...
 - no room for them in the inn.

I mean, it wasn't a silent night!

- Have you ever seen a birth?
 - It's not calm.
 - It's not tender and mild.
 - There's no heavenly peace!

- Giving birth is like the end of a UFC fight.
 - There're fluids everywhere...
 - people are passed out...
 - people are crying and screaming.
- And that's how it goes in the hospital...
- imagine how it went in a stable!

But Mary SURRENDERS. **Let it be to me according to your word.**

CONCLUSION

Oh church, this Christmas I want **SLIDE W/PADS JOSEPH & MARY** to be examples for us.

If you have QUESTIONS...

- even hard ones...
 - about what God is doing...
 - or why he's doing it...
 - or how he's doing it.
- You're in good company!

BUT, you need to do a diagnostic of your heart:

- Are you questioning from a place of TRUST?
 - What if it doesn't go the way you want?
- Will you still TRUST him?

And finally, are you willing to SURRENDER everything to him?

Church, this is the Jesus we are preparing to welcome on Christmas Day.

He demands your complete surrender!

- And this is what Christmas is all about.
- This is the real aroma of Christmas,
 - not some dog food knockoff.

It's surrendering all to him.

If you haven't surrendered all...

- and you want to...
- may I suggest you pray Mary's simple prayer from verse 38:

"Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word."

Can you think of a better prayer to pray this season?

Let's pray together.

RESPONSES:

Well, every week at Fathom we respond in 4 ways:

- COMMUNION – THE LORD’S SUPPER
- GIVING TITHES & OFFERINGS – fathomchurch.org/give
- PRAYER - fathomchurch.org/prayer
- SINGING

So, I’m going to read the Words of Institution from the Apostle Paul, we’ll take communion, and then we’ll sing:

1 CORINTHIANS 11:23–26 – WORDS OF INSTITUTION

[23] For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, [24] and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, “This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” **TAKE**

[25] In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” **TAKE**

[26] For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.

Love you church, let’s stand and sing together.

RESOURCES CONSULTED:

- Bock, Darrell L. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Luke 1:1-9:50.
- Greear, J.D. *The Fear of Hopelessness*.
- Hughes, R. Kent. Preaching the Word. Luke.
- Keller, Tim. *The First Christian*.