

CORE COMPETENCIES

Core Beliefs

- Trinity
- Salvation by Grace
- Authority of Bible
- Personal God
- Identity in Christ
- Church
- Humanity
- Compassion
- Eternity
- Stewardship

Core Practices

- Worship
- Prayer
- Bible Study
- Single-Mindedness
- Biblical Community
- Spiritual Gifts
- Giving Away My Time
- Giving Away My Money
- Giving Away My Faith
- Giving Away My Life

Core Virtues

- Love
- Joy
- Peace

"I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself and others."

- Patience
- Kindness/Goodness
- Faithfulness
- Gentleness
- Self-Control
- Hope
- Humility

Here we are ready for the second week of Advent already—wow! And we come on our series to God's dramatic encounter with Mary through the angel Gabriel. Mary is a person that has been written of, speculated about and debated over for centuries. In all of the discussion, however, it's easy to lose sight of a simple fact. Mary, though remarkably blessed by God, was a real, ordinary person...a young, working-class, regular young woman that was given a privilege—and responsibility—that we can hardly comprehend. Her response in the biblical text tells us a great deal about her character and perhaps why God selected her. As you look at Mary in this week's study, remember that she was real—just like you. Invite God to teach you through Mary's response to Him.

In His Grace,

Richard Gotthardt, Pastor of Spiritual Formation

Christmas Series: Week 2

As Mary stares at the cross, it blurs in a teary mist. It is something every mother fears – losing a child. Deep down inside, Mary has always known that Jesus was a child born to die. He would not grow up to carry on the family name. She has known this for a long time now.

In pools of tears, swim a few tender memories.

His birth in a cold, dark stable in Bethlehem. How he shivered as she held him for the first time, so tiny and helpless.

When he was twelve and already about His Father's business at the temple in Jerusalem, she distinctly remembers thinking then, "*He's not my little boy anymore.*"

A mother's love, that's why she stands at the cross.

A Savior's love, that's why He is there.

Adapted from: Intimate Moments with the Savior by Ken Gire, pp.113-114

From the time Gabriel visited Mary to tell her of the news of this child; she knew it would be a journey of obedience marked with both intense joy and pain. This week we will focus in on the beginning of Mary's journey of obedience and learn from her example. Throughout the week we will focus in on different aspects of this account to learn more about God, His power and our response to Him.

Day 1: Astounding News

Mary was most likely in her teens when she is told the news of Jesus' birth. As you read the verses below try to "put yourself in Mary's shoes." Imagine the thoughts that would have run through her mind and the emotions she would have felt.

Read Luke 1:26-38.

What do you think might have been some of Mary's thoughts and emotions as she learns of the news of Jesus?

Think of a time that you have received astounding news that would drastically affect your life. What were some of your thoughts and emotions?

Day 2: Mary

Out of all of the women on the earth, God chose Mary to bear the Son of God. Let's take a look again at this passage to see what made Mary stand out.

Read Luke 1:26-38.

In the space below, note all of the descriptions given of Mary in this passage:

In the space below, write a description of yourself—what's true about you—as you just did for Mary.

Some faith traditions choose to raise Mary to a special status because she bore the Son of God. However, this passage shows us that she is an ordinary woman who is obedient to God's calling on her life. God chose her and then it was He who empowered her to take on the tremendous task of being the mother of Jesus. God also chooses you to obey Him every day and invites you to be empowered by Him to fulfill the calling He has given you.

Write out a prayer in the space below, offering to God your ordinary life. Ask Him to empower you to hear His voice and obey the calling He is inviting you to follow.

Day 3: God

Today we will zoom in on God's role in this account. Pay close attention as you read this passage to see what it has to say about God.

Reread Luke 1:26-38.

In the space below, write down all of the actions that are attributed to God in this passage.

What role did the Holy Spirit have?

The angel Gabriel speaks a phrase that is the key to understanding this passage: *"For nothing is impossible with God"* (vs. 37). Gabriel is affirming to Mary that God's ways are perfect. God is in control of all creation and therefore it is His power that will bring about the birth of His Son.

Think about this truth. "For nothing is impossible with God." Therefore, all creation is under His control. What implications does this have for your life today?

Day 4: Mary's Response

Today we will focus on Mary's response to God at the end of this passage. Reread Luke 1:26-38, noting how Mary responded to the news that she would bear the Son of God.

Describe Mary's initial response to the news. (vs. 34)

Think of a time when you sensed God asking you to do something and you responded similarly to Mary in vs. 34. Describe your thoughts in the space below.

Mary initially responds to God with a question which demonstrates that her focus is on the physical impossibility of pregnancy for her since she is a virgin. The angel responds by describing how with God all things are possible.

What is Mary's second response in verse 38?

What might have made it difficult for her to respond in such a way?

Day 5: Invitation to Obedience

Today we will use this passage to focus on our own hearts' response to God's calling in our own life.

Reread Luke 1:26-38.

Think of an area in your life in which you sense God is calling you to fulfill a purpose of His that seems impossible.

God sent Gabriel to speak to Mary. How have you sensed God's leading in this area of your life?

What has been your response to God?

What beliefs about God does your response reveal that you have?

What steps would be necessary to step out in obedience in this area?

Who will you talk to about this area in order that they might support you and pray for you?

Close out your time this week by praying Mary's words to God concerning this area of your life.

"Father - I am Your servant. May it be to me as You have said."