

**A Mary Christmas:  
Four Life Lessons From The Christmas Story**  
Christmas In July Service      July 25, 2010  
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The Christmas story is very familiar to us. Every December we gather together and retell the wonderful story of how Jesus was born. It warms our heart. It fills us with joy and peace.

It's so familiar to us that we often forget that for Mary, Christmas was an unexpected, difficult journey. Through an angel, God announced that he was about to do something remarkable. God was about to save the whole world. All of the Old Testament prophecies were about to be fulfilled. How was God going to do it? Through a teenaged girl named Mary.

Mary was young. She was from a simple background. She was very ordinary in the eyes of the world. But she was extraordinary in God's eyes. Through the angel Gabriel, God tells Mary that he has a plan for her life. God invites her to join him in the journey of a lifetime. It's totally unexpected. It's completely out of the blue. It seems like God is calling her to the impossible.

Mary can't help but ask, "How can this be? I am a virgin." Her doubts must have been huge, but her faith was greater. Mary responds, "I am the Lord's servant. May everything you have said about me come true."

How would you have responded if you were in Mary's situation? How **do** we respond when the Lord surprises us with the unexpected? Ask yourself: What unexpected thing is God calling me to do right now?

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Imagine how Mary felt when Gabriel left. What would her family say? She must have been torn between two conflicting emotions: the excitement of being pregnant, and the fear of hardships she would encounter.

How would Joseph respond? There's a lot on the line. Joseph would be legally able to divorce Mary. And according to Jewish law, she could be stoned to death. Mary certainly had a lot to worry about. Losing her fiancé, losing her reputation, losing her life. Yes, Mary had a lot to worry about. But she chose not to. Instead, she worshipped.

"Oh, how my soul praises the Lord," she sang. "How my spirit rejoices in God my Savior! For God took notice of me, a lowly servant girl... His mercy extends from generation to generation..."

What about us? How do we respond when we are in a tough situation? Life with God is often harder and more confusing than we ever expected. Mary realized this and humbled herself before the Lord with songs of praise. When we make God the center of our lives, we can't help but worship, no matter what the circumstance. When we don't worship, we tend to worry. Worship or worry? Ask yourself: which one will I choose in tough situations?

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The Christmas story continues with Caesar Augustus issuing a decree that a census be taken over the entire Roman world. Because Joseph was a descendant of King David, he had to go to Bethlehem in Judea, David's ancient home. He took with him Mary, his fiancée. While they were there, the time came for her baby to be born. She gave birth to her first child, a son. She wrapped him snugly in strips of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no lodging available for them.

Perhaps you know I collect nativity sets. I have many different kinds from all parts of the world – each one unique in its own way. But one thing they all have in common is that they are way too sterile. The stables are all way too clean and they all have this angelic glow about them. Mary hasn't even broken a sweat, and all the animals stand in perfect formation.

Would you say that's a realistic representation of a teenager who has just given birth for the first time in a stable without a doctor or midwife, or even her mom to help coach her through?

Christmas tradition has romanticized the birth of Jesus by getting rid of the blood, dirt, the stench, and the tears. In some ways, it has created a false portrayal of the birth of God's Son. The truth is stables are dark. They are full of insects. And they stink. Mary has just traveled 70 miles on a donkey, and after a long, tiring, dusty journey, she discovers there is no room at the inn. She'll have to give birth in a stable.

Do you think that is how Mary dreamed it would turn out when she found out she would give birth to the Messiah? In our own lives, we often picture how God should use us. And often times it looks like a beautiful, angelic nativity scene. When things don't go according to our plans or expectations, we assume that it must not have been from God. But Mary's experience in that stable shows us that even in the most confusing, unfamiliar ways, God can be present and at work. Ask yourself: In what unpredicted way is God working in my life right now?

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Consider the Old Testament prophecies:

He would be born of a virgin.

He would be of the house of David.

He would be born in Bethlehem.

He would be preceded by a messenger.

He would perform miracles.

He would preach the Good News.

He would be anointed by the Holy Spirit.

He would enter Jerusalem on a donkey.

He would be betrayed by a friend.

He would be forsaken by his disciples.

He would be rejected by the Jews.

He would be accused by false witnesses.

He would be spit upon and beaten.

His hands and feet would be pierced.

He would cry out, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?"

He would be executed with thieves.

He would be laid in a borrowed tomb.

It was an incredible honor for Mary to be chosen to be the mother of the Messiah. But along with that honor came great pain and sorrow. While she celebrated what we now call Christmas, she mourned the thought of what we call Good Friday. This same woman who gave birth to the Son of God in a lowly manger ends up at the foot of a wooden cross watching his brutal execution. Can we even begin to imagine the sorrow and the pain Mary felt watching her firstborn sacrifice his life so that she and the rest of humanity might experience salvation. God used the obedience of a teenaged girl to fulfill Old Testament prophesy.

He would rise from the dead.

He would ascend into heaven.

He would sit at the right hand of God – the place of greatest honor.

Ask yourself: What will God accomplish through my obedience? What part of God's plan will become realized because of my devotion to him? Who will I lead to Christ? To sell ourselves short is to sell God short, because as the Scriptures say, nothing is impossible with God. And God's impossibilities become a reality through our obedient hearts.

**Four Life Lessons From The Christmas Story:**

1. God Calls Us To Do Unexpected Things
2. God Invites Us To Worship During Tough Times
3. God Can Be Present And At Work In The Most Dire Of Circumstances
4. God Will Accomplish Great Things Through Our Obedience

Let it be so. Amen.