**Finding Joy**

December 18th 2022 MBCC (Warren Payne)

**Luke 1: 26 – 38**

Self introduction and greetings

Japan Christmas - Cakes pilled up outside shops to be taken home and eaten by the family on Christmas eve. Carols and decorations in shops. No Christmas holidays and once Christmas is over a quick change to New Year decorations, preparations and a holiday period. Ancestor worship and millions to the temples.

For the Christian Church Christmas is a wonderful time to share the Gospel and many Japanese ask to be baptised at Christmas.

For us today one of the joys of Christmas is the joy on Children’s faces when they open their gifts on Christmas day. The surprise can bring great joy. Can you recall the first time you received a Christmas gift and you did not know what it was till you opened it? What about the excitement of the anticipation of a gift you knew you were to receive. There are times in life where out of the blue, we receive a gift we had no knowledge of or expectation it would be given to us.

This surprise element was for Mary a real challenge as to how she should respond. She was a young lady just going about her normal daily tasks, when suddenly an angel spoke to her and announced she was to be the mother of God's son, Jesus. A virgin to conceive a boy child!

Although the prophecies in the OT (Town, virgin and the qualities of this new king) are clear, Jesus coming to earth through Mary was a total surprise to her and an unexpected gift. The surprise was that Mary would be given this gift. The explanation of who the gift was, and many other details were told to her before she was even willing to receive the gift. Mary had to not only receive the gift but open it through her act of free will by say YES to the angel.

As we know our willingness to say “yes” to God is almost always based on our knowledge of how much God loves us in Christ. That Christ loved us first.

When a person already has knowledge of, and previous experience of a love that can be trusted it makes it easier to be willing to trust and obey. Mary was raised in a Jewish home where the words of God found in the OT would have been highly valued. I am sure Mary loved God and trusted His word as taught to her through the OT. From a child Mary would have known the teaching given **Deuteronomy chapter 6 verse 5 and possibly Joshua 1:8**

**5 “You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your strength.”**

**8Study this Book of Instruction continually. Meditate on it day and night so you will be sure to obey everything written in it. Only then will you prosper and succeed in all you do.**

Just as a child obeys their parents because of the relationship they have, so I believe Mary was able to come to the place of being able to say; OK God, I love you, I trust you and I believe you so let it happen.

Many Christians miss out on what God is wanting to say to them because they don’t read the Bible. If you want God to speak to you soak yourself in His word.

 Hudson Taylor: God is alive, God speaks through His word and God means what he says.

From the story we know Mary went through a process of questioning, listening, uncertainty and finally trust before the gift of a son was gifted by the Holy Spirit.

This Christmas we too need this kind of trust as we live in a world that is focused on pleasure and what “**I”** can get out of life. Our world is certainly not listening to God and even less willing to obey him or read the Bible. Sadly, trust is a big issue for many. They find it hard to trust anybody let alone God. Most people just want the holiday, the parties, the Christmas trees and presents but not Jesus the Saviour who can be trusted.

Let's look at the steps that lead to Mary being willing to trust and receive the greatest gift of all. The Son of God – Jesus Christ. I believe these steps also apply to you and I as we come to celebrate Christmas again this year.

If these steps become real to you, you like Mary will be able to say YES to God.

1. **v 26 – 27 The JOY of Knowing God enters MY world**

The world we live in today and the world Mary lived in are completely different. 2000 years have passed by and yet the Bible is clear that God is the same now as he was in Mary's time. Our God knows how to speak to us personally. God sent an Angel to a very small town called Nazareth in a region called Galilee. The angel was sent to a young girl, engaged to be married to a carpenter named Joseph who was a descendant of the famous Jewish King David. The Angel came to a virgin in fulfilment of the prophecy given in **Isaiah 7:14.** You and I may feel small and insignificant. We may not have a specific prophecy written about us or an Angel speaking to us, but yet we are also chosen by God for His purposes. God loves us all and has wonderful plan for our lives. In **John 15:16a** Jesus put it this way **“You didn't choose me I chose you. I appointed you to go and produce lasting fruit.........”** You are not here today by chance. God desires to break into your life. Mary had her Jewish upbringing and a short conversation with an angle. We have both the OT and NT combined with the wonderful testimony of Christians down through the ages. We have massive amount of words through the Bible. **Hebrews 1: 1-2** “**God has spoken to us through His son….”** The key is not the method of communication God uses to speak to us in our personal world. God speaks to us in many ways. The important thing is are we listening and willing to obey?

God, if you are real and love me, please speak to me today.

1. **V 28 The JOY of Knowing God is with ME**

One of the greatest joys in life is to know you are not alone. God had been silent for 400 years and for Mary hearing God's voice was a real surprise.(400 years between the OT and NT)

However, what she heard from the angel was amazing **“The Lord is with you”**

This is often all we hear from God. I am with you, and that is all you need to know for now. Know this first and then all else will fall into place.

There are many lonely people at Christmas, yet we have the greatest message they could hear. God is with them. He has come to all peoples as Jesus Christ the Saviour of the world. You too, can experience the joy of knowing God is with you. You too, can love others so they know God is with them. This Christmas let us ask God who is lonely and bless them by going to them with the love of Jesus and maybe some practical gift. (# Story of a father who each Christmas was told by his children they were too busy to visit. So each Christmas he was alone and very sad. Then one Christmas the family were contacted by a lawyer to say their father had died. They all rushed to the family home to prepare for the funeral at this very busy time of the year only to find a beautiful meal all prepared by their father. Very much alive and well waiting for them all!)

1. **V29 – 30 The JOY of Knowing I am Special**

From the Bible it is easy to see how special Mary was.

**V30** **“You have found favour with God”** Mary you are special.

When Mary heard this she was confused and rewilded.

The Bible tells us she was not only confused but disturbed and afraid. I think I would be too!

Here is the God of creation speaking to me through an angel and telling me I am special. Special for what reason? Mary may have thought - Why tell me now when I am very happy and engaged to a great man named Joseph?

God always has a reason when he tells us we are special to him.

Firstly, to encourage us and secondly to move us on to greater blessing.

The healing we receive when we realise how special we are to God, is always a building block for greater joy and progress in our lives. This Christmas please know how special you are to God. God loves you.

1. **V31 – 33 The JOY of Future Potential**

'It's a boy! Call him Jesus. He will be great, the Son of the Most High (God), in the line of King David and this is an eternal kingdom!'

 Mothers how would you have felt if you knew all that about your child’s future before they were born. In all our lives there is wonderful potential to do great things for God. The potential for good is in all our lives. God knows the plans he has for us. God knows when and where he wants to lead us into greater blessing than we have ever experienced. Our lives are like a seed that needs to be planted in the soil of God's love and plan for us. A seed planted in blessing and sometimes suffering will grow and blossom into a life that we cannot imagine. When, we trust God, what we are now, is not what we will be. Let's allow God to do his wonderful work in all our lives. Let's blossom where we are planted.

In mission we are always looking for people who are doing stuff for God now. (Interview – have you won someone to Christ lately?)

1. **V 34** **The JOY of being able to ask Questions**

Just like we do, Mary saw the reality of what this would mean. She wondered how it was possible for God to use her.

For you and I the question is more likely to be: Lord, I am not perfect how can you use me? I am weak and need help too often. God surely you can't use me! As a young man, I asked this kind of question before going to Japan.

This Christmas bring God your unanswered questions, struggles and doubts. Ask friends and family to help. but also ask God in prayer. (Language study challenges)

Prayer is how we ask God. Tell God what you honestly think and He will answer you. Be happy and this Christmas give all your questions to God.

When I was a young person, I had many questions and not many answers, but in trusting God, He led me into a life journey that was so exciting and joyful, even when things seemed to go wrong. Today I can testify that God's ways are always best because the Holy Spirit is our help.

God is not looking for your ability, but your availability as a child of God who is willing to obey and follow the knowledge you have now. If we had all the answers, we would not be able to have the faith that pleases God and the faith he loves to reward. Mary had to have true faith as described to us in **Hebrews 11: 6 6And it is impossible to please God without faith. Anyone who wants to come to him must believe that God exists and that he rewards those who sincerely seek him.**

1. **V 35 The JOY of the Holy Spirit**

The reason Jesus is called the Son of God is because that is what He is. Invisible God became visible as a human being.

 The Holy Spirit came upon Mary and she conceived Jesus.

The joy of the Holy Spirit today is just the same today. You and I become children of God through the same Holy Spirit. That is why Jesus said in **John 3:3** “**You must be born again”.** The joy of being a Christian is to know that the Holy Spirit is in our hearts and has given us the gift of eternal life.

One of the fruits of the Holy Spirit is Joy. If you do not know that Joy you need to receive the gift that God freely offers. God is speaking to you today. He wants you to know his presence and love. Sometimes I think some Christians are – Father ,Son and Holy Word Christians with very little experience of the Holy Spirit. (Iron levels low and we get weak – HS levels low and we become spiritually weak. We need an infusion of God’s Love to be filled with the HS.)

 You are special to God and He can give you victory over whatever impossible circumstance you may have in your life. Do we really believe and experience the power of God in the impossible? **Hudson Taylor: Impossible, difficult then done!**

Like Mary you too may say - But God that is impossible. To that question God says just look to me and be surprised. **Acts 1: 8** **8But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”**

1. **V 36 The JOY of God's Blessing in Others**

When Mary looked – there was an example of God's miracle blessing in her auntie’s life. Elizabeth was a lady too old to normally have a baby but was pregnant. When you see what God can do in the lives of others then there is no reason to doubt.

If you have questions, please ask someone how God changed their life.

Ask your Christian friends what it is like to know God and have His Holy Spirit in their heart.

Ask what it is like to live life confident that God has everything under control and I to have eternal life, experienced now in the 21st century. Jesus said **“My purpose is to give a rich and satisfying life” John 10:10**

1. **V37 The JOY of Trusting God's Promises**

Mary heard a promise from God that would result in her being able to obey God's request. **“Nothing is impossible with God”**

You and I have the same promise and many more in the Bible. God always keeps His promises so what a joy to follow Him with that sure knowledge.

Mary was able to trust the promise of God because she had faith and God had shown her what he can do through her aunt, Elizabeth.

Faith that said yes to God and allowed God to do his special work in her life.

It is not your strength of faith that is most important, but God's faithfulness that makes all His promises come true. When things depend only on my faith then it becomes centred on me and that is a burden I don’t need to carry. But when our faith is firmly trusting that God will do what he says then God is central our life’s and we experience the joy of being free from the burden and limitations of our own strength. This Christmas let's reconfirm our belief that we trust the promises of God. **Proverbs 3: 5 “Trust in the Lord with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding.”**

1. **V38 The JOY of Saying YES.**

Lastly, when we say YES to God the future opens like you wouldn't believe. For Mary, life would become complicated and full of more unanswerable questions. However, she knew who her son was, and in the end saw him killed by the cruellest of methods by being nailed to a cross. But, then out of the pain and suffering came the Joy of the resurrection of Jesus and His promise of the Holy Spirit for all people.

Mary could only see a short distance ahead when she said yes.

Mary trusted God for the Joy that was to come. Mary was able to say “May everything you say about me come true”

God led Mary through the same process he leads us today.

God placed a surprise gift before Mary. A gift that needed to be opened. But as we have seen, before this wonderful gift was opened the contents and the conditions were explained. And still Mary said, YES.

The joy of receiving the greatest Christmas gift, Jesus Christ the Son of God, is all ours when we trust and in faith accept the Saviours will for our lives. **Saviour and Lord – Resident and President.**

* Willing to accept Jesus as our saviour. (My salvation Testimony)
* Willing to go anywhere.
* Willing to do anything.
* Willing to sacrifice everything. (Jesus in the garden – Your will be done)

Offer to pray for folks.

I have decided to follow Jesus;
I have decided to follow Jesus;
I have decided to follow Jesus;
No turning back, no turning back.