

**Rev. George Miller**  
**Dec 22, 2024**  
**Luke 1:26-38**

At last month's Pre-School Book Fair, there was the book "You're So Brave." How fitting, as it's one of the themes we've been talking about.

It featured Biblical characters like Daniel, Deborah, and Mary.

According to the author "One day, an angel came to Mary and said 'God is giving you a special job- something only you will do. You will have a baby who will be the Son of God....'"

"Mary didn't say, 'That's crazy!' or 'I can't do that!' or 'How hard will this be?'"

"No, Mary was brave enough to trust God. She wanted to obey Him. Right away she said, 'I'm ready to serve God.'"

The story reads well with good illustrations, but there is a major error- Mary did **not** respond right away with "I'm ready." Mary actually did question and ponder.

This does not change the fact that Mary was still brave or alter the news that she answered the call.

The author of this kids-book creates an image of Mary as someone who right away said "Yes" and acted with blind faith.

But Luke tells us that Mary was much perplexed, she asked "How can this be?" and only after some time, conversation, and further information, did Mary say "Here I am; let it be."

Luke's version does not make Mary any less brave, any less a hero, any less a person of faith.

In some ways Luke's version makes Mary more....human.

For 2,000 years Mary has played a special role in people's faith. As the mother of Jesus, we see how people try to portray her as so perfect, so demure, so gentle.

In the children's book, the image of Mary is someone who doesn't take a moment to think, question, or seek clarity, but immediately says "I'm ready."

In my opinion, how unfair this image is to present to children, especially little girls. This notion that faith does not involve conscious decision making, that there is no room to wonder.

Mary does these things, and it doesn't make her any less brave.

As Luke tells us, an angelic messenger comes to Mary, saying "Greetings favored one!" Mary is perplexed. As well as she should be.

Who in a healthy mindset expects to have an unexpected encounter with a celestial being?

Mary then begins to ponder what kind of salutation this might be.

Theologian Thomas Moore states that the word “ponder” indicated that Mary was confused, and this leads her to wonder.

Someone At Monday’s Bible Study used the word “curiosity” and how being curious allows us to think about potential.

In many ways, if Mary pondered, felt confused and was curious, there is a good chance that part of her did say “That’s crazy!” and “How hard will this be?”

When the angel says “do not be afraid,” it indicates that Mary was indeed feeling something, some sort of emotion, and that she needed calming validation.

I wonder how many people can relate to this moment?

The experience of having an unexpected opportunity or situation come your way, in which there is a decision to be made, one that can forever change the direction of your life, and how scary this can be.

Gabriel must have sensed this, because the angel goes on with information, signs of proof, and the Biblical reminder that “Nothing will be impossible with the Lord.”

Who knows how long this conversation took place?

Do you think this sequence of events between Gabriel and Mary was within minutes, as written?

Could it have taken an hour or more, with Mary really pondering and thinking hard?

Is it possible this may have taken days of discussion and reflection and the author shortened it to speed things up?

Because how we view this narrative arc can shape how we see our own faith and our own religious experience.

Is our faith and relationship with God about immediate actions that involve blind trust only?

Or does our faith and relationship with God allow space to take our time, to think things through, to discern, question, ponder, to ask,

to wonder, to feel a whole sort of ways from fear to joy to sadness to fearlessness?

I think Mary is more human than people portray her; that she was someone who was astute, aware, and incredibly brave.

Which leads us to another component of today's reading, one that I'm not sure many of us have thought about before.

Luke tells us that Mary has this experience with Gabriel that she ponders, she accepts, she says "Let it be."

Then the angel departs.

From there Mary sets out to visit her cousin Elizabeth. She sings her song of praise. She stays 3 months then returns to Nazareth.

Then, when she is 9 months pregnant, she and Joseph make their journey to Bethlehem.

Mary gives birth to the promised child, wraps him in swaddling cloth and places him in a manger.

And as far as we know...there is no angel present. As far as we know, Gabriel did not visit her again; there were no additional words from the heavens.

Angelic news come to shepherds in the field, but we're not told angels were at the manger.

As far as we know, after the angel departs, it is just Mary, Elizabeth, Joseph, baby Jesus, with no mention of an angel or heavenly advice afterwards.

Which may indicate that while Mary's calling began with a heavenly interlude, everything else she accomplished, she did through her own inner strength, her own faith, her own belief and trust in God.

THAT was certainly an act of trust; and act of belief.

It is one thing to say "Let it be" when an angel is in front of you; it is a totally other thing to say "Let it be done" when it's just you, your day-to-day existence, and life is moving around you.

Maybe the bravery we see in Mary is not so much that she said "Here am I, servant of the Lord, let it be with me according to your word,"

BUT maybe the bravery is that-Mary was perplexed, afraid, she pondered, she needed reassurance, she said "yes,"

and that even without the angelic presence there afterwards, Mary saw it through- she did it, she lived it, she faced the opportunity in front of her.

That's bravery- to participate in God's story and the Kingdom of Heaven even when things seem a mystery, even when we feel confused or curious.

As we move closer to Christmas, may we continue to find ways to be inspired by the people who shaped Jesus's life and play a role in the Family of God.

Mary is indeed a wonderful role model for us to glean wisdom from and learn about.

And to be reminded of what it is like to be brave and what it is like to be present, even when the mystery of the season surrounds us.

Amen and amen.