

Discipleship Moment

Sermon Text: Luke 1:26-38

What a surprise it would have been: to wake up one morning and find out you are pregnant. Not only unexpectedly pregnant, but almost assuredly an unwanted pregnancy. This is exactly what happens to virgin Mary in this text. In the midst of getting ready for a wedding and getting ready for the large census about to take place, some surprising news comes: you're pregnant. Many of us won't be able to understand just how shocking this must have been. Especially with the backdrop of potential legal retribution. She must have been worried and stressed to say the least.

But she did not respond like you and I would have. The best way to explain Mary's response is *openness*. She does not respond with fear or anxiety, she does not try to control or argue the situation, and she does not need proof to believe what she is hearing. Rather she *receives* the news and surrenders to God's work in her life and trusts that he will take care of her. When Zechariah is told his wife is pregnant his response is best described as *closed off*. Where Zechariah asked the angel to "prove it," Mary accepted the news with wonder.

Mary accepted this news of her baby, the Christ child, as a gift from God.

What would it look like for us to receive our holiday season as a gift? What if we treated it as an opportunity to explore what God is doing in our lives and in the lives of our loved ones, and not a long list of to-dos? What if we treated our holiday as a new, fresh work of God who wants us to know him through Jesus better?

I imagine if we changed our hearts to be receptive and open rather than cynical and closed off, we would discover a lot of joy where there used to be stress. We would discover a lot more grace and a lot less arguing.

But this attitude isn't a silver bullet: it doesn't solve our problems. But it gives us a way to experience even hard things well. We may not have a perfect life, but we can have a gracious life.

Let us pray for the Holy Spirit's presence and grace to receive this holiday season as a gift.

Going Deeper

Use this resource to start conversations about this week's sermon for your personal devotions, with your family, or with your Life Group. You can use one question per day or all at once.

1. Do you enjoy the holiday season? Why or why not?
2. Do you experience stress during the holiday season? Why? And in what situations do you get stressed?
3. Make a list of the things that are stressful to you this holiday season: how can you receive these things as gifts instead of stresses?
4. Are the particular people in your family you find stressful? How can you receive these people as gifts from God? What would interaction with them be like?
5. Pray everyday for God to change your heart and take your stress away this holiday season.