

“Unexpected Expectations”
Luke 1:26-38

A child would be born to you, a child that was conceived by the Holy Spirit, who will become the King of kings and Lord of all. These are very similar words that we read today, words that Mary heard from the angel Gabriel that she would bear a child, a child that was conceived not by man but of God and that this child would be the great Savior of mankind. It's quite the shock and I'm sure that Mary was stunned beyond all recognition that something was going to happen.

In our lives we do face situations where we face the unexpected and we are unsure of what we are to do. I think of many times in my life as a student, while it may seem trivial, assignments would be sprung upon us instantly without warning, assignments that could very easily shake up our grades. As a person who would like to pursue doctoral work, grades are important, so these would be ground shaking moments. I'm sure you could think of some moments in your life, with things that came up unexpectedly and they rocked your world so to speak.

But we do not have to face the uncertainty of life's situations alone. For example, Mary was told by Gabriel that she had found favor with God. I take this statement that she had the complete support of God in the joyful burden that she had received. Likewise, when life throws us burdens that truly cause us to wonder what has gone wrong, we can move forward in life knowing that God is truly on our side, and willing to be our advocate in the difficulties we face.

If there was one certainty in life, it is the uncertainty that we face in our life experience. Life is full of moments where things turn upside down and when things turn out well, and when they turn out not so well. God never promised us a bowl of cherries when we became Christians, but God promised to be with us no matter what, through the hard times and through

the good times both.

When I think of my own life, I think of uncertainties that I face and I think of how God has pulled me through. I think the biggest moment of uncertainty came when I decided to go into the ministry. I was a college sophomore at McPherson College who had been studying accounting. At the moment my life goal was to finish my accounting degree and then go on to law school so that I could become a tax lawyer. It was going to be a life that was to serve me, giving me things that I never had before and giving me things that were for my benefit alone.

Yet I had this feeling that this was not the path for me. I began to feel more and more uncomfortable. I had a call to ministry since high school, but I was running away from it. Eventually, during that sophomore year, I surrendered to the call. I felt free, like I was doing what I was suppose to do, yet there was great uncertainty. I was turning over control of my life over to God, no longer would Travis K. Walker have ultimate control over my life. The ball was in God's court.

I think the biggest fear I had was whether people would accept my call. Some people did, some didn't. I learned that those who supported my call were the ones who really mattered in my life, where as those who didn't care about my call didn't matter. I faced some people who were totally turned off by my call. Yet I didn't give in. I continued following God and by following God I am here with you wonderful people. I could not have asked for a better group of people to serve, and I am glad that God has blessed me richly by bringing me here.

I think Mary could have related to this experience though. Now, I am not equating myself with Mary, but I think we can relate to this story of Mary through our own life experiences. She faced great uncertainty in her life by being the chosen one to bear Jesus Christ. She was an unwed mother to be who while intended to Joseph, was really on her own. When the angel told

her, she probably didn't know if Joseph would stay with her or what. She wouldn't have known what the future would have brought with the coming of the Christ child. But she stayed the course.

I think the greatest thing she faced was the uncertainty of whether people would accept her or not. We really don't have much in the scriptures that tell us that people rebuffed her or told her that she was condemned because of her bearing Jesus. The gospel writers are pretty mute on this matter, but we can imagine what this might have been. How would you tell people that you were bearing Jesus Christ? How would you tell people that God had chosen her to bear the Savior of mankind? Yet in the face of this uncertainty, she stayed the course.

Mary also didn't know where she would bear this child. Since it had been decreed by the the Roman government that a census would be taken, it meant that Joseph and Mary would have to go to Bethlehem in order to pay their taxes and be counted for the government. This meant some serious travel in the late stages of pregnancy. Then upon their arrival to Bethlehem, it was time for Mary to bear Jesus. There was no room for them anywhere, except for a manger. It was in the this difficult environment that Mary bore Jesus. In the midst of all this difficulty in finding a place to bear a child, she stayed the course.

I think we can see that indeed in our hardships it can be absolutely vital to stay the course. In our life we face moments where we are faced with unexpected expectations. Mary did not plan on bearing Jesus, yet she had the unexpected expectation of bearing a child placed upon her by God. She did not allow the difficulties she faced in get in the way of her birthing experience. She stayed the course by her staying the course she gave us the Son of Man who would live and die for us so that we might have life eternal, now and forever.

Another inspiring thing we can take away from the uncertainty of Mary's experience, is

in the thanksgiving she gives to God in her experience. Here these words from Luke 1:46-55

“My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of the his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever.”

This passage is often called the Magnificat, or Mary's song. It's the song of praise Mary gives when visiting her cousin Elizabeth. She is reflecting on the greatness that God has bestowed upon her, the great honor of bearing a son. In the midst of the uncertainty, there is joy present. There is assurance that God is with her and that God would be with her in the hardship and be a source of strength for her. Mary is praising God and recognizing early on the good things that her son Jesus Christ would do for the world in God's name for God's people.

Again, we have another lesson from Mary's experience. While I don't believe that bad things happening to us are inherently good, I do believe that it is good for us to be thankful that God is with us. God was with Mary and Mary recognized that God was with her. Mary hoped that one day people would see that she was truly blessed to have this burden, and I believe that we are blessed to know her, because she gives us an inspiration to push forward and stay the course in the hard times.

Mary could have given up, Joseph could have given up on this situation and raised the child in such a way that the child would have never been exposed to true nature of who he was.

Instead, they took on this burden for they knew that God was with them.

I believe the lesson for us today in the reading of Mary's story with the angel Gabriel is that in our unexpected expectations of future events, God is with us. God is always with us and will always be with us. One major component to our faith story is that in the midst of difficulty God never abandons his people. God hears the cries of the people and acts. Likewise, in our difficulties, God listens to us and gives us strength to push forward in life and move forward. God is great indeed.

I encourage us in this season of preparation, of advent, to stand in the promise that God is with us. God came to be with us in Jesus Christ, so that we would never be alone and that we would be granted eternal life. The prophets of old spoke that Christ would be God with us, and Christ truly is just that. May we always stand in the promise that no matter what may come our way, God is with us. Amen.