

Trust and Obey

Matt. 1:18-25, Luke 1:26-38

Series “The Christmas Calling”

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I’ve been preaching now for over twenty-five years. And I’ve got to tell you that preaching Easter and Christmas NEVER gets old to me. When you think about it, on these two holidays or seasons of the church – the message is the same – EVERY YEAR!

On Easter, Jesus has risen! On Christmas, Jesus is born. The message doesn’t change, but certainly as a pastor, I look for different ways to communicate an old truth...or at a minimum look for a different angle to take regarding these messages this time of the year, and I am especially excited about the Christmas series we’re starting today.

We’re calling it, *The Christmas Calling*. You know, it’s interesting to me how people respond to Christmas. For some, you are ALL IN! You are the Clark Griswold of your home – the lights go up, the decorations are out, and you just add to it every year!

Others are the exact opposite. You put up a tree, but you never have the energy to pull of what your neighbors do.

It reminds me of this picture I saw on the internet a few years ago.

I realize for some, Christmas is full of joy and laughter, but for others because of loss there is a deep sense of grief and overwhelming darkness. Christmas doesn’t seem so merry this year!

In fact, if you were honest, maybe there is something inside you that wishes you could just fast-forward past the holiday.

Illus. Day of Comfort– This is why we do a “Day of Comfort”, and I want to invite you on Monday IF you have lost a loved one in the past year or just having a tough time with Christmas approaching to come by our Chapel for a time of prayer.

It’s “come and go” and you can sit and just have some time to yourself. We will have our ministry staff here to pray with you and speak with you should you desire it, and you can light a candle in your loved one’s honor...it’s a way for us to minister to you in this time.

We all respond differently to Christmas. For the world, for the most part it’s about commercialization and the accumulation of more toys...more stuff! For Christians, we try to focus on and celebrate the birth of our Savior.

It’s amazing to look through the eyes of those the Christmas story centers on and see how they responded to Christmas – that’s what this series is all about. We’re going to look at how:

- How the angels responded...
- How the shepherds responded...

- How the wisemen responded...

And today, we're going to turn our attention to how Mary and Joseph responded to that first Christmas.12.

The title of the message is: **Trust and Obey**

Matt. 1:18-25 – “Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly.²⁰ But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” ²² All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: ²³ “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel” (which means, God with us). ²⁴ When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, ²⁵ but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.”

Joseph DID as the angel of the Lord commanded him – that’s key! Let’s look now at how Mary dealt with and responded to the news of Christmas.

Luke 1:26-38 – “In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, ²⁷ to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸ And he came to her and said, “Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!” ²⁹ But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰ And the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹ And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. ³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, ³³ and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.” ³⁴ And Mary said to the angel, “How will this be, since I am a virgin?” ³⁵ And the angel answered her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God. ³⁶ And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. ³⁷ For nothing will be impossible with God.” ³⁸ And Mary said, “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.” And the angel departed from her.”

Joseph DID as the angel of the Lord commanded him. And Mary said, “I am a servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.” – a statement of faith AND trusting in...doing what the Lord commands.

Mary and Joseph’s response to Christmas? Trust and obey.

Now, there is A LOT to unpack here because I assure you it was not a simple or easy thing for Mary and Joseph to “trust and obey” during this time of their life. Like it is so much easier to say it than it was to live it...no doubt!

I’m always so cautious when someone is sick or going through a tough time to interject life lessons or just tell someone, “It’s going to be okay...you’re going to be fine!” I’m always hesitant to give some pithy statement or trite words.

You know sometimes, people just want you to listen...NOT say a word! It’s the ministry of presence. Whenever I do say something in these moments of counseling, I’ll usually couch it with, “Now, what I’m about to say is a lot easier for me to say sitting in this chair instead of the one you are in!”

In other words, I want to acknowledge what I am saying may be a hard pill to swallow now, but it’s truth. I want to acknowledge that the situation they are in is NOT easy and that I realize that what I am about to say may not seem helpful or true or even want to be heard in the moment.

This is how I feel sharing these words “trust and obey” when it comes to the life of Mary and Joseph. It sounds so easy...so simple, but there is NO WAY it was easy or simple in the moment.

Let’s just think about their situation and we’ll start with Joseph first. Here was a man who was probably in his late teens, very early 20’s at the most! He’s betrothed to Mary which means they were engaged to be married.

A betrothal would typically go into effect a year before the actual marriage. Most marriages were arranged, and the betrothal was a contract between the two families involved.

The couple lived separately...they didn’t have sexual relations with one another, but in their eyes...the eyes of their family, and in the eyes of their community they were together. It was an engagement!

Once the betrothal was in place the woman was seen as the lawful wife of the man she was betrothed to.

Now, you have to remember that in this time...and it’s still like this in A LOT of places in the east, it was what is called an “honor-shame” culture.

We are very individualistic here in the West. The thought is, “I am responsible for my actions. What I do doesn’t reflect you, doesn’t affect you, doesn’t have anything to do with you.” - NOT SO in the east. It’s way more communal.

In honor-shame cultures, individuals live in a way that ensures their speech and actions bring honor NOT just to them, but to the communities in which they live AND avoids at all costs bringing shame or reproach upon the community.

There is a DEEP sense of belonging in these cultures and you don't do anything to bring shame or embarrassment upon your people – reputation is everything! You “save face” no matter the cost...avoiding public shame and keeping your honor is paramount.

- It's why those caught in the act of adultery were stoned. The sin was bad, but the shame that came with it was what was grave...
- It's why lepers were forced to live outside the gates of the city isolated and alone. Of course, no one wanted to get the diseases, but the thought was leprosy was punishment for sin and that person is forced out of their community because of it...
- It's why the sin of the young man in Luke 15 who asked for his father's inheritance was so shocking (you didn't do that!). It's also why the father's action of running and receiving him back was equally shocking (you didn't do that either!) ...

Honor-shame culture runs through the pages of scripture and we can't read the Christmas story without funneling what we read through this kind of culture.

Imagine being Joseph and hearing the words from Mary, “I'm pregnant!” ...and he knows he's NOT the father! Can you imagine the conversation? “Who is the father?” Mary's response? “God is!”

That's A LOT to take in! AND this is why – you get a glimpse into the character of Joseph, but also understand in the honor-shame culture in which they are living why he was going to “divorce her quietly (Matt. 1:19).

He didn't want to bring shame on his family nor to her. This was an act of compassion on his part...just think of the devastation he was feeling in the moment.

Sure, it was an arraigned marriage, but I bet he was broken-hearted. He had plans for a family...he was excited about their future and what was to come. He was a responsible young man doing what was expected of him – taking a wife, building a family, making a living and now this curveball?!

Talk about disappointed...and look, he knew the penalty for adultery. He was going to divorce her and leave her quietly, but once the community found out about Mary's indiscretion, Mosaic Law was death by stoning. This type of shame brought on the community was only removed via death.

I can't imagine all that Joseph was dealing with, thinking about, and feeling walking through this situation that from his side of things was unfair and not making any sense at all!

Illus. Engaged to Debbie – Monte Cristo at Bennigan's – just the sense of responsibility...excitement – door closing! Can't imagine!

This is just looking at it from Joseph's side of things...let's consider what Mary was going through!

Most scholars put Mary at no older than 16 years of age at the time. It is very realistic that she could be 13, 14, 15 years of age. She is visited in the night by an angel...and not just any angel, this is Gabriel.

There are only three angels named in scripture. Satan is a fallen angel. And the only other two mentioned are Michael – we read about him in Daniel and in Revelation and he appears to be the “archangel” ...the leader over all the angelic beings in the heavenlies.

Gabriel is mentioned in Daniel as well and is most known for bringing this message of the birth of Jesus to Mary. Gabriel is active in the Christmas story appearing to Zechariah in the temple telling him about the birth of his son to come, John the Baptist, and many believe the angel of the Lord that announced the birth of Christ to the shepherds in the field was Gabriel although the scripture doesn't name him there.

Either way, Gabriel appears to be the angel of the Lord that is sent to deliver divine messages to human beings. And just think about this...angels are not like your mom or aunt's little precious moment's figurines.

Angels – we'll talk more about them in next week's message, but they are warrior like. They are sent to watch, guide, protect, and serve us – the scripture calls them “ministering spirits” (Heb. 1:14) – they are the ones waging war in the heavenlies (Rev. 12) – these angelic beings are nothing to mess around with!

When Zechariah questions Gabriel in Luke 1 about how he and Elizabeth are going to have a child in their old age, Gabriel puts him in a “time out” and doesn't allow him to speak for nine months!

They are powerful. Mighty. They keep themselves disclosed from humans. The scripture does teach that its possible we've entertained angels and not even been aware of it at the time (Heb. 13:3).

Think about Mary though...she is visited by NOT just an angel, but Gabriel. She's terrified out of her mind which makes sense...everyone is when they see an angel!

In fact, the common words spoken by an angel when visiting humans – be it Zechariah, the shepherds, or Mary is, “Fear not!”

You know why? Because they were scared out of their mind...angels showing up didn't just happen! And then for the angel to tell Mary that she is the chosen one!

Luke 1:30-33 – “And the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹ And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. ³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High.

And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, ³³ and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.”

What? You know she’s thinking this is crazy! In the words of comedian, Mark Lowery, He said she had to be thinking and wanting to say to Gabriel, “Do you think you can make one more stop and just go tell my parents...I think this is something they would like to know!”

Talk about a curveball in life! Talk about the unexpected! So many questions to consider. One of them is how?

Luke 1:34-35 – “And Mary said to the angel, “How will this be, since I am a virgin?”³⁵ And the angel answered her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God.”

Now, do you think that suffices in the moment? Impregnated by God?! Who is going to believe this?

Again, the honor-shame culture...she is going to have to have this conversation with Joseph. With her parents. She knows what the community is going to think!

This is some DEEP water for a young, teenage girl. So, let’s just look at their situation and give some brief descriptors of what Joseph and Mary had to be feeling in the moment:

There was fear...there were uncertainties and unknowns...life had just thrown them a situation and circumstance that was overwhelming...no question their view clouded and distorted – what in the world is going on?

In a matter of a moment, their entire life...changed forever!

They had all sorts of questions they had to start working through and emotions they had to start dealing with. How do they respond to the message of Christmas?

Mary and Joseph respond in obedience and trust. They make the decision to “trust and obey”.

Joseph awakes from his dream and the interaction he had with an angel and in **Matt. 1:24 – “When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him.”**

Mary...look at her response: **Luke 1:38 – “And Mary said, “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.”**

Here we see the SECRET, if you will, to obeying and trusting the Lord especially in times and seasons of life where it’s not easy and things aren’t making sense.

I wonder is there anyone here today that the situation you are in is NOT like Mary and Joseph of course, but still...the situation you are in today is causing some fear.

- Perhaps it's the doctor's appointment coming up...you have some tests that have been done and there is the fear of the unknown. Isn't it true that sometimes it's the unknowns that can often drive us to insanity. Our mind wanders and typically it wanders to worst-case scenario. How do we obey God in those times?
- Or maybe it's the uncertainty of a relationship you are in. You want it to work, but something has happened that has it on shaky ground. How do you move forward and continue to obey God when something you desperately want may not be in God's will?
- Or maybe you're confused. Something has happened that on the surface it just doesn't make sense. The untimely death of a loved one...the loss of a job right here at Thanksgiving and Christmas...that deal falling through after you put in all that hard work. How do you respond to God in this time?

When there is fear...uncertainty...loneliness...anxiety...
questions...doubts...confusion...humiliation...all these unknowns...

How can you and I in these times respond to God in obedience and trust just like Mary and Joseph did? Here's the secret!

- 1. We must hear from the Lord**
- 2. We must walk with the Lord**

Joseph and Mary heard from God via an angel. For Joseph it was in a dream. For Mary it was a personal visit.

Listen to this: You and I have in God's Word today something MORE sure than a visit from an angel. We have God's final and full word! In fact, I would tell you that if an angel did decide to visit you and tell you something, before you just go off and do it, you better funnel it through his word first.

The word of God...the Bible is HOW we hear from God today! And if you want to "trust and obey" in light of the situation you find yourself in, the only way to do it is by giving yourself to God's Word!

This is what is going to give you the fortitude and confidence to "trust and obey" when everything around you is screaming the opposite.

Mary said, "Be it to me according to your word!"

- It was the "word of the Lord" that gave her confidence in the midst of her confusion...
- It was the "word of the Lord" that gave her strength when she felt most weak!

- It was the “word of the Lord” that helped her move forward when anyone seeing her situation would have understood if she decided to give up and take steps backwards!

What you and I need MORE than anything when we are having a tough time or in a circumstance or situation that is beyond our control is to hear from the Lord! And the way we hear from the Lord today is through his word!

It’s why time alone with God is so very important! It’s why we need to get alone with the Lord every day and spend time with him in silence and solitude – this is where we hear from him! This is where his presence ministers to us...it’s where he whispers his word to us!

Illus. Bonhoeffer move – “God doesn’t always give answers, but does give us himself.”

Jesus said in **John 14:15** – “**If you love me, you will keep my commandments.**”

Obedience to the Lord is the ultimate act of worship. More than the sacrifices we make and the offerings we give...what God desires is obedience out of a heart that loves him.

1 Sam. 15:22a – “**And Samuel said, “Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice...”**

How do we obey when our backs are against the wall? When it doesn’t make sense what God is calling us to do or asking of us?

We get alone with his word and we ask him to speak! It’s why church is so important...having biblical community in your life...wise counsel. If we want to “trust and obey” we must hear from the Lord.

And then secondly: **We must walk with the Lord**

Joseph (Matt. 1:24) did as he was commanded. Mary, (Luke 1:38) – I’m a servant of the Lord, let it be to me according to your word”.

In other words,...let’s do this. It’s one foot in front of the other. We walk with God – this is HOW we get through and do whatever it is he is asking us to do. We by faith put one foot in front of the other.

“Trusting and obeying” means an active faith.

Illus. Wheelbarrow – to trust the Lord is to get in the wheelbarrow! It’s active!

What is it you’re facing? What is it you’re up against? I want to encourage you that whatever it is, it’s NOT bigger than God! And if you desire, which I believe you do – “to trust and obey” – you must hear from God and you must walk with God.

Illus. Discipleship (Genesis) –

Gen. 5:24 – “Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him.”

Every day is a day to “trust and obey”. I couldn’t preach this message without sharing the words of the hymn many of us grew up on. It was written in 1886:

**When we walk with the Lord
In the light of His Word,
What a glory He sheds on our way;
While we do His good will,
He abides with us still,
And with all who will trust and obey.**

**Not a shadow can rise,
Not a cloud in the skies,
But His smile quickly drives it away;
Not a doubt or a fear, Not a sigh or a tear,
Can abide while we trust and obey.**

**Not a burden we bear,
Not a sorrow we share,
But our toil He doth richly repay;
Not a grief or a loss,
Not a frown or a cross,
But is blest if we trust and obey.**

**But we never can prove
The delights of His love,
Until all on the altar we lay;
For the favor He shows,
And the joy He bestows,
Are for them who will trust and obey.**

**Then in fellowship sweet
We will sit at His feet,
Or we’ll walk by His side in the way;
What He says we will do;
Where He sends, we will go,
Never fear, only trust and obey.**

**Trust and obey,
For there's no other way
To be happy in Jesus,
But to trust and obey.**

As we enter the Christmas season, every time you look at a manger scene – we KNOW that Jesus is the focus. But when you see Mary and Joseph looking on, let it remind you that no matter what you are experiencing or going through, Christmas is a time to respond to the Lord just like they did – in obedience and trust.

Will you pray with me?

Please Note: This document is not meant to be a published, cited, annotated research paper. It is simply a transcript of a spoken message, provided as a resource. Many commentaries, articles, and other sermon helps were likely studied and contributed to the forming of this message.