



Series: Hope is Here

Message 2: God interrupted

Scripture: Luke 1.26-38

Intro

Alright we are in our advent season! Over the course of this week we will be releasing resources to you to help you follow along with our series. We are releasing an Advent calendar in digital format via email to you. And then we'll have hard copies next Sunday which is the day the calendar starts. I also want you to start praying right now about the Christmas Missions Offering. Ya'll I would love for us to go big on this. 100% of this goes outside the walls of Mercy. This offering funds our giving to local outreach in Charlotte and to church planting around the world. Just this week Derrick Delain, our Church Planter in Nashville, told me that an older church in the area has agreed to join them and gift their facility to this church plant called Proclamation church. Another revitalization work similar to what we got to do at providence Rd. Isn't that awesome? Your generosity to the CMO is helping to launch Proclamation church! Courtney and I think of the CMO this way – We look at our family Christmas budget. Which I encourage you to have a budget for Christmas gifts. And we say we want to try and give our best Christmas gift to God's mission. And we talk with our kids about it. We want them excited about getting to participate in God's mission to advance the gospel around the world! We will collect that offering online starting December 1.

Today is week 2 of our advent season and our theme this year is "Hope is Here." There is so much hope for us in the arrival of Jesus. This is so much more than a festive season. Christmas is the announcement of light that has broken into our lives and replaced the darkness of despair and brokenness with the hope of Christ. If you have your bible get to Luke 1. Today we look into a very holy, very powerful interruption God brings into the life of a teenager named Mary.

This little scene, taking up only 12 verses, is **SO** packed. The announcement of the virgin birth is here. The famous "Nothing is impossible with God" statement is in here. One of the most beautiful, most powerful expressions of faith ever recorded is in here. And that in particular...Mary's response to God's interruption...is going to be our focus. I think that's Luke's focus. That's why we get Mary's song that we'll look at in a couple of weeks. Luke wants us to see how Mary responds to God when he interrupts her life. Especially in contrast to Zechariah's who we saw last week when God interrupted his life. When God changes the direction of where Zechariah's life was heading...he pushes back in a kind of close-minded doubt. He refuses to believe God can do something he can't understand. But when God comes to Mary with a big interruption that is going to forever change the direction of her life...she offers a response that I believe will give you so much hope today. I think its accessible & relatable, and yet it inspires.



And as we prepare to open the bible and walk through this story I want you to think for a second...what are the interruptions in front of you right now? Or maybe they are in the rear view mirror. The situations, maybe the people...that changed your life trajectory. Like you were driving along, cruise control, you had your destination mapped out and then seemingly out of nowhere you are on a detour. Or maybe your destination changed entirely. And if its true that God is in control at all times then you have to allow that God allowed that interruption in your life.

- When someone you love lets you down.
- When you lose a job you love.
- When you lose somebody you love.
- When you don't get into the school you planned on
- When your family moves but you were happy where you were
- Unexpected pregnancy. Or unexpected infertility.
- House burns down cause you've never deep fried a turkey before and didn't know you needed to do that outside.

Whatever it is you find yourself saying. Excuse me GOD. THIS WAS NOT IN THE PLAN! We talked about this. I thought we had an understanding. WHAT IS THIS? This is changing everything.

The title of this sermon is **God Interrupted**. Because that's what happens to Mary. God interrupted. And if that HASN'T happened to you yet...it will. Because one thing anybody will

tell you is that life never goes according to plan. I stopped making 5 year plans 10 years ago because I would look back and those 5 year plans read like FICTION. Because God interrupted my life. "Gonna be CEO and retire when I'm 40 so I can be a philanthropist." Sorry 18 year old Spence. God interrupted. You are a pastor now. Good luck.

God interrupted. As I read this story keep that interruption right there mentally under your arm like a football. It's probably been there for a long time anyway. We will pull it out and talk about what to do with it in a minute. Let's first see this scene with Mary. THEN we'll see how we get to a place where we can respond like Mary.

26 In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth,

- 6th month – This is the 6th month of her cousin Elizabeth's pregnancy. We saw her last week. Elizabeth is advanced in years. The bible doesn't tell us how old and its impolite to speculate. But she been around. She's kept her pregnancy a secret for 5 months.
- Gabriel is our angel from last week. He was sent by God to Zechariah in the temple. That's the place where if an angel is going to show up...you would suspect it. Holy place. But this time he goes to Nazareth. A somewhat remote, insignificant town to a remote insignificant girl who will outshine the old priest. Which is great for us.



HOPE IS HERE

27 to a virgin engaged to a man named Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary.

- Mary & Joseph. If you are at all familiar with Christianity you probably know these two. They are at the center of the nativity scene. But not yet. As we look in on the story we find Mary who is most likely the age of a high school freshman or maybe younger. She is young. And she's a virgin. That is clearly what Luke wants to drive home in this. He says it twice in a verse.
- Joseph is of the house of David. Why does Luke bring that up? Like when someone writes the story of Courtney and I...and it is lauded inevitably by critics as the greatest modern love story ever...I don't think the author will introduce me as Spence of the house of my grandfather Alvis. Why does this matter? Because the story of Jesus is the story of God keeping his promises. Which is huge when talking about God interrupting us. God isn't deviating from HIS plan when he interrupts your plan. God said 1000 years ago in 2 Samuel 7 that he would send someone from the house of David to be the messiah. And Isaiah 7.14 says a virgin will conceive this messiah. God interrupting their plan but not changing his.

28 And the angel came to her and said, "Greetings, favored woman! The Lord is with you."

First instance in bible where an Angel shows reverence to a human.

¹ (Pss 48:2; 86:10; 135:5; 145:3)

29 But she was deeply troubled by this statement, wondering what kind of greeting this could be.

Of course she's deeply troubled. IT'S AN ANGEL. Again I can't stress how crazy that is. And he's showing her honor. That "wondering" word has the meaning of making an audit. Like she's wondering if she's hallucinating....how can this be real? But God interrupted her train of thought.

30 Then the angel told her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. 31 Now listen: You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus.

This is getting stranger. If you are a Christian do NOT let the familiarity of this cause you to miss the absurdity of it. A 15 year old virgin is being told by an Angel that she will conceive and have a SON and btw – I've already picked out his name. Jesus. meaning God saves. And then he keeps going. And here is the announcement that makes Christmas what it is.

32 He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David.

33 He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and his kingdom will have no end."

Gabriel says Jesus...this baby born to a virgin from Nazereth. is God's promised Messiah. He says it 5 different ways

- He will be great – greatness without a qualifier is an attribute of God alone¹
- He will be Son of the Most High – Gen 14.18. The Most High refers exclusively to God alone²

² Genesis 14.18



- Throne of his father David – That’s a reference to second Samuel 7. A long time ago it was promised that a son of David would be the messiah who would reign over Israel forever. In fact 2 Samuel 7 says that one will have a great name, messianic sonship, divine throne, and an eternal kingdom.
- Reign over house of Jacob forever – That’s Micah 4.7. That the messiah would rule over Zion
- A kingdom with no end - in the OT only God’s kingdom is eternal³

All five divine declarations of Gabriel, four of which alone characterize God, are applied expressly to Jesus.⁴ The messiah wasn’t just a savior sent by God. I mean that alone would be incredible. BUT he was in fact going to be God himself! He will be the God-man! and MARY, you are gonna be his mom.

34 Mary asked the angel, “How can this be, since I have not had sexual relations with a man?”

This is honest doubt from a rational mind. Her logical mind can’t get around this physical impossibility. And listen – honest doubt asks the kinds of questions that puts you in a humble, vulnerable position. Because what if God answers you? What if his answer shatters the way you’ve

³ (Isa 9:7; Dan 7:14; Ps 145:13; Heb 7:24; etc.)

always viewed the world? And what if it demands something from you that you don’t feel ready to give?

See Honest doubts are open to belief. Mary’s question actually asks for information and leaves her open to the possibility of a good answer that would cause her to shift her views on this interruption. Which is exactly what God gives her.

35 The angel replied to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore, the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.”

This is Gabriel’s description of how the virgin became pregnant. See that wording “overshadow” you? That’s actually the very same language of how God came to dwell with Israel. In exodus 40.35 the tabernacle (God’s dwelling place) is finished and then the cloud that represented the presence of God “overshadowed” the tabernacle. And when it did...Exodus says the presence of the Lord filled the temple. The same language is used in Luke 9 when God’s presence descends onto the mountain where Jesus is with 3 disciples. Luke says a cloud overshadowed them and then GOD SPOKE...this is my beloved son. Listen to him.

⁴ Edwards, J. R. (2015). The Gospel according to Luke. (D. A. Carson, Ed.) (pp. 47–48). Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; Apollos.



What I want you to see is God is not just being randomly creative here. He's doing what he's always done when he breaks into the world he created. He's overshadowing the place where his presence will dwell. And in this case, the place is in a person. The womb of Mary.

And that seems impossible. So Gabriel gives her some news to help her belief...

36 And consider your relative Elizabeth — even she has conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month for her who was called childless.

And then Gabriel says something that sums it all up. Mary took her honest question to God and God gives her in response one of the greatest truths in scripture. A statement that Christians have clung to for thousands of years. When faced with the impossible. When told there is no way THAT guy or THAT girl will ever come to Jesus. When told there is NO HOPE for that Marriage. When told there is NO CHANCE you will recover. When TOLD that mission will never work. When told that church will never survive. For thousands of years Christians facing impossible circumstances have been carried by the hope that God spoke to Mary when Mary said how can this be. Gabriel said:

37 For nothing will be impossible with God."

Nothing. Nothing. Nothing. Will be impossible with God. That is Gabriel saying that if God says he will do it...he will do it.

And the one who created the laws of physics can bend them to his will as he pleases.

And I know people in this church who should be dead and aren't and the only reason is because nothing is impossible with God. I know marriages that should be dead and aren't. I know lives that should be wrecked and aren't. And you go around getting to know Mercy Church and you will hear about the God of the impossible. And that's a message to you who carry around a suitcase full of skepticism about God actually changing your life in any real and tangible way. I'm talking to Christian and non. I want you to hear Mary's response.

38 "See, I am the Lord's servant," said Mary. "May it happen to me as you have said." Then the angel left her. -- Luke 1:26-38

God interrupted Mary's life. And when God interrupted, Mary trusted. Not with all the answers. Not with a clear understanding of how things would work out. Lots of uncertainty ahead of her. Yet she trusted. When God interrupts...how can you and I trust God like Mary? How can we follow in her footsteps when God interrupts our life?

Try practicing honest doubt

For you skeptics who find the whole story just silly because scientifically how could a virgin have a child? Yet you see a religion birthed out of nobodies from nowhere whose followers ask nothing and give everything they have to the world and it has endured for 2000 years. And those seem to



be colliding against each other. Look at what Gabriel said to Mary and meditate on it. "Nothing will be impossible with God."

- Consider who Christians say God is. His size, his power to create and sustain, his grace and love...look to THAT God and in wonder and awe of his majesty...present your doubts there. That's honest doubt. It's a doubt that says I want to know what is true. So God if you are who you say you are, confirm it to me.
- Leave room for a God who may be far above your understanding or intellect. Search the scriptures and as you do, be willing to doubt your doubts. If you want someone to read the bible with you come talk to one of us, one of your pastors. We'd love to do that with you.

Recognize that as you commit yourself to God, he commits himself to you⁵

One of the beautiful truths Luke shares a little later in chapter 11 is that God is such a far better father than any earthly father. He gives WAY better gifts. The chief of which is the Holy Spirit. This does not mean life will go well for Christians – in fact history says quite the opposite. When Gabriel calls Mary "favored" ...think about what this favor is bringing her.

She's being told she is going to be pregnant before being married. That's not just frowned upon in her culture, it's a crime punishable by death.

Joseph is probably going to leave her over this. Which means she will probably never get married. Which isn't just an unfulfilled hope, it's a big financial problem.

AT THE MOMENT OF THIS ANNOUNCEMENT: She's already poor and as a result of what Gabriel is saying: no future prospects to make money & a ruined reputation.

Yet she welcomes this "*favor*" of God toward her. That's because the one who trusts God wholeheartedly has nowhere to go but deeper into the arms of God when interruptions come. She will make God more and more their meaning, satisfaction, identity, and hope. And it's in the time when God is all you have that you discover in full he is all you've ever needed.

Instead of being bitter about the interruption...are you willing to draw closer to God himself? Are you willing to welcome what God may want to do in and through you on the other side of it? Are you willing to say ok God I don't fully understand this but I'm your servant...

Remember God interrupted history for us

⁵ from Tim Keller's book *Hidden Christmas* (Penguin House NY, NY 2016) 95.



Mary is told she will give birth to a son that already has a name because he already has a calling to fulfill. Her son will be Jesus, the savior, the one who will **save his people from their sins!**

- Mary's greatest problem, just like everyone else's, was her relationship with God was severed and in need of restoring. And her son was coming to restore her to God. He would be God's promise fulfilled.
- How incredible is this: Mary was now under the penalty of death. That's there to be a picture of all of us. Jesus is born to a woman under the curse of death. We, the whole human race, were under the curse of death and Jesus was born to us and would grow up to take that curse in their place.⁶

That's the announcement to you today. Christmas isn't some empty expression of warm fuzzies... It's saying YOU can be saved from your sin and reconciled to God. The SAVIOR IS HERE. HOPE IS HERE!

He will not only save them from their sins, Gabriel says he will rule on the throne of David. Mary would know what that meant. The forever king on David's throne meant peace. It meant an age of rest & blessing in the world the jews called shalom. And now that king is arriving!

⁶ Love this insight from J.D. Greear in his sermon "The Fear of Hopelessness" preached on this passage during the 2014 series called *Do Not Be Afraid* at the Summit Church.

This is the king we all want! The king who is going to reverse the curse sin has brought on the world. The bible has this way....throughout Old and New Testament...of pointing to this future day when the decay and darkness and danger of this world will be no more.

- Isaiah 11 says a day will come where the infant will play beside the cobra's pit
- Isaiah 60 says Sons & Daughters lost by their parents will be given back to them
- Revelation says there will be a restoration of bodies that have been destroyed by disease.

God interrupted to send a king who will reverse the pain & disappointment of this world

See Mary's pregnancy is one of two pregnancies in this story meant to point us to the work of God to come one day. The other pregnancy is Elizabeth. Who has been disappointed her whole life because she was never able to conceive. And yet here she is with child. Luke tying these pregnancies together shows that this Baby of Mary's will one day erase every disappointment we have in this life. Where the king will sit on David's throne and every injustice will be made right.

This is where hope comes from and this is the news you can't miss. **Hope is the confident expectation that Christ has already**



won, and will bring us into, his forever victory over sin and death. In short – **Hope is certainty that the best really is yet to come.** So for you who are disappointed and maybe even a little jaded by God’s interruption. Let me encourage you with the words of Hebrews 12. Fix your eyes on Jesus. The author and perfecter of your faith. He is your savior and king and in the announcement of his coming, Mary rejoiced.

Have you opened your heart to this news? This is the news of Christmas. The favor of God has come to you in Christ. If you have received *him* then I want to call you to a celebratory rest in the promises of God that are all yours today. Maybe you are in that space where you say you believe all this but you don’t FEEL it. You feel far from God. OK, then again follow mary. In luke 2 after Jesus is born there is this little closing statement where Luke says mary pondered all these things in her heart. Take a cue from her and PONDER it. Consider it.

Pray “God help me to *know* what I already know until it reshapes my emotions.”

- God help me to *know* this hope in a way that my disappointment and pain gets swallowed up in the hope of the day to come.
- God help me to *know* this hope in a way that lets me say “I can let go of all I have because in Christ I have all I need.”
- God help me *know* this hope in the hour where my life crumbles around me so that instead of despair and anger my soul bursts into SONG and says MY SOUL WILL MAGNIFY THE LORD! I will not fear, I will not

despair, I have the favor of God on me and every one of his promises are YES to me in Christ Jesus.

That’s found in a very simple prayer:

Mary’s Prayer:

“Behold, I am your servant; let it be to me according to your word.”