

Sermon 12-24-2017
Fourth Sunday of Advent – Luke 1
By
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Mary has a larger role in other Christian traditions than ours, primarily the Catholic church. You will see statues of Mary in the yards of Catholic homes, she's mentioned quite frequently during worship services, and she even has the Assumption, the belief that at the end of her life, Jesus came back to earth to take her, body and soul, to heaven. Because of the misuse of Mary, many Protestant churches hardly talk about her at all, allowing her to pop up mostly around this time of the year, and not very frequently otherwise. But Lutherans, big surprise, are different. We do not make her an equal with God or Christ, or even make her first among humans, but we do more than just consider her a vehicle for Christ.

Our perspective on Mary is found in this passage. We can miss it, though, because of all the amazing words that come pouring from Gabriel's mouth. You will conceive. Your son will be the Son of God. He will receive the throne of his father David, the very throne that was promised to David in our Old Testament reading this morning. And check this out, you're not the only one. Your cousin Elizabeth is way past childbearing age, and even she's going to have a child. And of course, we want to get to the child that Mary will

carry. We want to talk about Jesus. We want to talk about his birth and his work and his life and his death and his resurrection. It's no wonder that when you don't talk about Mary all the time, you end up talking about her rather infrequently.

But I want to focus this morning on her words, her responses to these proclamations from Gabriel. Her first response is in verse 34: "How will this be, since I am a virgin?" At first, you could look at that response as a response of skepticism. "Well, how's that gonna happen?" But to truly understand what she's saying, we need to look earlier in this chapter. Gabriel also announces to Zechariah that his wife Elizabeth is going to have a child. Zechariah's response is "How can I be sure of this?" Literally, it is "How shall I know this?" He's responding "Wait a minute. You're telling me something crazy. How's that going to work out?" He is unsure of the proclamation of Gabriel, and he won't be able to talk for the entire pregnancy because of his doubt.

That's where we more often find ourselves. We hear the clear word of God, and respond with a "Yeah, but." Yeah, but you don't really know my sin. Yeah, but what I really want to hear is about my best life now. Yeah, but tell me how bad that other guy is. What usually happens then is that it is not our mouths that are shut, but the ears of anyone we would proclaim the name of Christ to. So many hear that Word of God in our mouths and hear it ring hollow. They hear it ring hollow, because we hear it ring

hollow. In our sinful hearts, we don't believe God's going to do what God said he's going to do.

When you go to Mary, however, it's a different story. She responds, "How will this be?", and there is none of the doubt of Zechariah. The verb that is used is literally the future form of be. She has no doubt in her response.

"Gabriel told me; I'm going to believe it." She's definitely asking for more details. She's saying, "I'm a virgin, and birth doesn't usually happen for women like me, so I want to know more." But she's not letting a little thing like common biology get in the way of believing what Gabriel is telling her.

The same, more clearly, goes for her second statement to Gabriel: "I am the Lord's servant. May your word to me be fulfilled." There is amazing trust here. She believes that God is going to do what God has said he's going to do. It doesn't matter that it goes against everything she knows, everything she believes about how the world works. God has declared that this is going to happen, and she believes it. And the same can go for us, thanks to the work of the Holy Spirit. No matter how much it looks like things will go different than what you know, like how God says he will work things out for you when you follow his ways. No matter how crazy the promises might seem, like the promise that even your worst sins are forgiven because of Christ. No matter how against nature things seem, like when he promises to raise you from the dead. That's why Mary is important for us. Not because she can do

something for us, but because she has shows us what God does for us in Jesus Christ: he promises, and no matter what, he delivers. AMEN.