

In Mary's Sandals (*Humble Servanthood*)

Luke 1:26-56

December 24, 2017

Two weeks ago, I shared a message titled, "In Joseph's Sandals." In order to try to "walk a mile in Joseph's shoes," I put on sandals and together we pondered what it must have been like for him to realize that he was going to be the dad who would raise the Messiah in his home. Today, we're going to try to walk a mile, "In Mary's Sandals." But, I'm fairly certain that it will take a lot more than a pair of sandals for us to understand what it may have been like for Mary to receive the news that she was going to be pregnant with the Messiah!

When I think back to our pregnancy with our oldest daughter, Callie, I remember being pretty clueless as a guy. I was 23 years old, my wife was 22, and, whether we realized it or not at the time, we were on one of the greatest 9-month adventures of our lives! We were expecting to be expecting, but, as a I guy, I had no idea what to expect. Life has a way of teaching you quickly though! I should have read and learned more about pregnancy. We knew we wanted kids and we knew about the getting pregnant part. But, the whole BEING PREGNANT for 9 months long... well, we didn't really know enough about that. At least, I SURE DIDN'T.



I was clueless about how to be a good husband for my pregnant wife... I remember being really hungry one day and not wanting to get rid of my egg salad sandwich. The odor was really bothering Debbie's enhanced sense of smell during her pregnancy. She ended up throwing up from the smell. I got rid of the rest of the sandwich! I remember sleeping in her hospital room while she was in labor... because I was tired. I later learned that a pregnant woman at rest is working harder than a mountain climber. A mountain climber! And I thought that I was tired, please Johnson!?!¹ Before I embarrass myself any further, I wonder how many other guys reading this transcript would admit to making some poor decisions and being more than a little clueless during your wife's pregnancy? Anyone....?²

One of the first things we notice as we walk in Mary's sandals is that...

Mary humbly accepted something she wasn't expecting! Mary was not expecting to get pregnant. With her recent engagement to Joseph, she figured she had at least a year before she'd become pregnant. She hadn't planned on being be a mom yet. She faced an incredible challenge as a mom. For a little while anyhow, Mary probably assumed that she was going to be a single mom... Because, before Joseph heard from the angel, he was intending to leave Mary, to divorce her quietly. Imagine the stress and pressure she felt with no way to support herself or her child financially. Finances were not the only pressure she was facing though.

This week I spent some time skimming through the book, "What to Expect When You're Expecting." One of the reviews on the back calls it "The pregnant woman's bible. It's an indispensable road map to the mysterious, wonderful terrain of childbearing."³ If I could go back and give some advice to my 23-year-old self, I'd say, "Jerry, you need to read this book!"⁴ Apparently, women who are pregnant may experience fatigue, sleepiness, frequent need to go to the bathroom, nausea with or without vomiting, heartburn, indigestion, bloating, cankles, food aversions and food cravings. Debbie craved Taco Bell; Chili Cheese Burritos to be exact. But ONLY while she was pregnant; otherwise she hates Taco Bell. In fact, that's how we first realized that she was pregnant with Lydia. We drove past a Taco Bell one day and Debbie said, "yum, that looks good." The home pregnancy test later confirmed it, yep, we're pregnant! In addition to some of the physical effects of pregnancy, the book also adds some emotional effects like irritability, mood swings, irrationality, weepiness, misgivings, fear, and joy – any of these or all of these emotions. Debbie remembers having some

¹ I'm embarrassed to admit that after the birth of our first daughter, I invited the entire youth group over to our parsonage the first day after getting home from hospital. I didn't repeat that mistake again!

² One day Debbie wanted to go into labor so badly that she went out and started mowing the lawn, which prompted neighbors to call me out as a huge jerk because I was having my wife mow at 9 months pregnant! For the record, this one was NOT my ideal!

³ See Susanna Cooper's comments on back cover of the book by Heidi Murkoff, Arlene Eisenberg, & Sandee Hathaway, B.S.N., *What to Expect When You're Expecting*, 3rd ed., New York, NY, 2002.

⁴ *What to Expect When You're Expecting*, 3rd ed., p. 108.

pretty funky dreams during her pregnancies. One of the most memorable was when she dreamt that Callie was born with an alligator tail. She has a vivid memory of cutting openings in the back of all her little outfits so that there was room for her tail to fit through. In her dream, she couldn't understand why everyone thought that this was so strange!⁵ While I'm not suggesting that Mary ever had a dream about Jesus having an alligator tail, I would guess that Mary went through some of these same kinds of challenges.

When Mary first heard the news of her pregnancy, she was a little taken aback. Luke 1:29-31 tells us: "Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus." Now, this surprised Mary because she knew that she was a virgin. But the angel explains that she will conceive through the Holy Spirit. Mary likely understood, at least to a large degree, what it might take to carry a baby for 9 months. At the very least, it must have been unsettling and more than likely, there must have been moments when she felt completely overwhelmed. Just a few verses later we witness Mary humbly accepting this unexpected news. In Luke 1:38 she says, "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled." That's a pretty amazing response for a young woman who was quite possibly still a young teenager! What Scripture reveals about Mary is that she humbly accepted God's inconvenient plan and timing.

The question this brings us to each of us is how do we handle the unexpected challenges that pop up in our lives? Do we complain and grumble and refuse to accept it? Or, do we humble ourselves and recognize that we don't need to be afraid. Because, as God's people, God's gracious favor and His mighty power rest on us as well. Wouldn't it be nice if we could read a "What to Expect" book for everything in life? "What to expect in Jerry Johnson's life..." "What to expect in Bemidji, MN" "What to expect in 2018..." As we consider the unexpected challenges that we will no doubt face in 2018, let's determine to approach them with the kind of humble acceptance that Mary has demonstrated for us.

As we try to put ourselves in Mary's sandals, we begin to understand just what an incredible young woman Mary truly was. Not only did Mary humbly accept what she was not expecting, but... Mary responded with availability as the Lord's servant. As we read earlier, this young virgin named Mary responds in Luke 1:38, "I am the Lord's servant." After this meeting with the angel, Mary then hurries off to visit her relative Elizabeth. And there's this beautiful exchange between the child in Mary's womb and the child in Elizabeth's womb. Luke 1:41-45 tells us, "When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. In a loud voice she exclaimed: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!" It's interesting to note that when Elizabeth said this, her husband Zechariah was still unable to speak. He lost his speech about six months earlier when he failed to believe that God could make him and his aged wife pregnant. But, Elizabeth notes Mary's faith, that even though she was a virgin, she believed God's promise to her. God can be trusted to keep His promises.

Deb often tells me how much she loved feeling our babies move in her womb. One time, Debbie was resting a coffee cup on her stomach, and our daughter Lydia, who was still in the womb, kicked the cup right off! We also remember the final week of Serena's pregnancy when she was breach, facing the wrong direction for delivery. We had been praying about it and the next thing we knew Serena suddenly decided to do a somersault and she flipped around on her own. At the time, we didn't know Serena had already reached 10#! As a guy, I just can't imagine what that must have felt like!

⁵ With our daughter, Tessa, Debbie once told me, "I'm moving to Portland, Oregon and changing my name. I'll mail you the baby." She was severely dehydrated from morning sickness which made her irrational at the time. We also remember the odd social phenomenon that the general public treated her as someone very special when she was pregnant, often total strangers would show concern and support. But, a few took it a little too far by touching Debbie's stomach; I'm talking TOTAL strangers in Target.

Well, Mary responds to Elizabeth's words with her beautiful Magnificat.⁶ It's a response of worship as she makes herself fully available to God's call on her life. Many Bibles call it, "Mary's Song." In Luke 1:46-55 Mary declares: "My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me—holy is his name. His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation. He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, just as he promised our ancestors."

As one Bible commentator explains: "A great deal was implied by Mary's words of meek acceptance... It was the humble acceptance of embarrassment, suspicion and misunderstanding which would undoubtedly follow, by this lowly, devout maiden."⁷ Another commentator further explains, "Mary was a mere Palestinian peasant girl, but God chose her as an agent through whom the divine promises would be fulfilled in the person of Jesus, the Son of God... She is blessed, not because she is pregnant, or because of any intrinsic holiness or merit but because God's salvific purposes are being accomplished through her."⁸

Oh that you and I would have faith like Mary; that we would respond with availability to whatever God calls us to do! Let's resolve today, that with the Lord's help, we'll respond this way when life throws challenging opportunities our way: "I am the Lord's servant." I will serve the Lord in this. God is God and I'm going to make myself available to whatever He sends my way. I choose to follow Him and do whatever it takes as He leads me through it...

Let's consider one other intriguing question: At what point do you suppose that Mary realized that the events of Jesus' cradle would lead to His cross? There's an interesting little phrase that occurs 2 times in Luke. We first see it first right after Jesus' birth. Luke 2:19 tells us, "But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart." We see it again when Jesus is 12 years old in Luke 2:49-51, "'Why were you searching for me?' he asked. 'Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?' But they did not understand what he was saying to them. Then he went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. But his mother treasured all these things in her heart."⁹ Mary treasured the events from the cradle to the cross. This is revealed throughout the progression of the Gospels. Mary was watching, and pondering, and she was treasuring up all these things about her son. As a Jew, Mary likely expected her son, as the Messiah, to become a great king. In fact, even when the angel Gabriel delivers the news to Mary, he says this about her son in Luke 1:32-33, "He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end." So, at some point, another unexpected surprise for Mary was that her son, Jesus, was on a journey not directly to a throne, but from the cradle to the cross... But, I wonder at what point this dawned on her? Frankly, I wonder if she may not have fully understood this, until she actually stood at the foot of His cross... Luke 19:25-27 tells us that, "Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to her, "Woman, here is your son," and to the disciple, "Here is your mother." From that time on, this disciple took her into his home."¹⁰

Now, Mary was given a rather foreboding hint of the cross when Jesus was only about 6 weeks old. Luke 2:34-35 tells us, "Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too." "A

⁶ A Latin word pronounced "mag NIF ih cat." The full phrase is "Magnificat anima mea Dominum" or "my soul magnifies the Lord." (See *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, ed. by Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight, and I. Howard Marshall, IVP, Downers Grove, IL, 1992, p. 525.) Also compare with Hannah's prayer in 1 Samuel 2:1-10.

⁷ *The Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, vol. 4, ed. by Merrill C. Tenney, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 1976, p. 107.

⁸ *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, ed. by Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight, and I. Howard Marshall, IVP, Downers Grove, IL, 1992, pp. 525-526.

⁹ Also note Luke 2:33.

¹⁰ Acts 1:14 seems to be the last time Scripture mentions Mary the mother of Jesus.

sword will pierce my soul? What in the world does he mean? What is Simeon even talking about?" You and I have the advantage of hindsight. We now know looking back that this was Jesus 1st advent, and that there will be a 2nd advent in the future where Jesus will return as a Conquering King. But Mary likely had no idea that Jesus, at His first advent, was a Messiah who had come to be a suffering servant.¹¹

She may have begun to suspect something though when Jesus was about 30 years old and she heard Him make statements like the one in Matthew 20:28, "...the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."¹² There's an interesting irony here. If you remember back, Mary's response to the angel was "I am the Lord's servant." When Jesus was first born into this world, little did she know, that her Lord would be born to become her servant. At some point, Mary's importance as the mother of Jesus' switched to something far more important; she became a follower of Jesus. Jonathon Edwards once said, "'Tis more blessed to have Christ in the heart than in the womb."¹³ As precious and important as Mary's role was as the mother of Jesus,¹⁴ her decision to be a disciple was at least equally as important.¹⁵ Mary understood something crucial: We ought NOT to make too much of Mary because Jesus is exceedingly more important. I think that if Mary were here today, her advice would be this: "This Christmas, let's treasure Jesus in our hearts. Joseph and I named Him Jesus, because He came to save us from our sins. So now, let's worship Him, as fellow servants of the Lord."

This sermon was preached at the Evangelical Free Church of Bemidji
on December 24, 2017 by Pastor Jerry R. A. Johnson

¹¹ Consider the entire book of Isaiah, particularly 52:13 through 53:12.

¹² Consider also John 13:1-17.

¹³ Jonathan Edwards, "To Be More Blessed Than Mary," excerpt from *Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus*, ed. by Nancy Guthrie, Crossway, Wheaton, IL, 2008, p. 58.

¹⁴ As Jesus was teaching one day, Luke 11:27-28 tell us that "...a woman in the crowd called out, "Blessed is the mother who gave you birth and nursed you." He replied, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it." (Also consider Matthew 12:46-50.)

¹⁵ See discussion on p. 883 of *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*.