

**What's Essential? The Willing**  
**By Senior Pastor Tom Harrison**  
**Luke 1:26-38**  
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Mary is one of the greatest people in the Bible. We don't worship her, but let's not dismiss or ignore her, either. This young woman did not volunteer for such a major disruption to her life. The angelic announcement was shocking. She was not prepared to be the mother of the Messiah. She was *"greatly troubled."* She *"tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be."* The angel reassured her with what angels always tell people, *"Do not be afraid."* The angel's kind and favorable greeting helped her remain calm. Mary listened and asked, *"How can this be?"* After all, she was a virgin. The angel comforted her with the "Comforter," the Holy Spirit, "one called alongside to help." Becoming a parent is disruptive. Having a baby, a calling, or a major life-change causes us to enter a discernment process. We must evaluate our choices. What used to be important may be less so now. Mary's relative, Elizabeth, experienced this too. Elizabeth's son, who became "John the Baptist," was Jesus' forerunner. Mary and Elizabeth became mothers for the first time, but even more so, they became vital to God's magnificent story.

An essentialist asks, *"Where should I put my limited resources today?"* Mary's response to the unbelievable news was one of faith. Verse 38 says it so well, *"And Mary said, 'Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.'"* The Lord used a host of people to make it possible for Jesus to become flesh and blood and move into the neighborhood. He needed a family to birth, nurture, teach, and provide for Him. As such, Mary had a unique relationship with Him, and an essential role in Jesus' life. Mothers are to do that for their children. Mary is an amazing model. Because she was willing to be used by God, she answered with her own unique response. The kingdom of God is made of people willing to serve and follow Him.

APPLICATION: What do you think God saw in Mary that He chose her to be the mother of Jesus? What can we learn from her willingness to serve God in such a radical way? What is God calling you to do? Are you willing to be used by God? What is your essential role to help others follow Jesus?

Our sermon series is on "What's Essential." (It can come with a question mark or an exclamation mark. Jesus' Essential was the inauguration of the kingdom of God. It was like D-Day and Normandy when He came. The war wasn't over, but the message was delivered: God's kingdom reigns.

In many ways, the Bible is one long story of "**DISRUPTIVE MOMENTS.**" Life is headed in a normal way, when suddenly, God shows up in a significant way. Today, we look at someone who had a disruptive moment that clarified what her essential was to be. Mary, the mother of

Jesus, had an essential: She was to birth and nurture the Messiah. Mary was working on her bridal registry at Target when she had disruptive moment. The Angel said, *"I wouldn't start picking out curtains just yet, you're going to be moving around a little bit."* Mary was completely unprepared for such an encounter.

Our text today is **Luke 1:26-38** (pg. 1016)

Adam Grant's book Think Again identifies 2 types of people: "**The ARMCHAIR QB**" + "**The IMPOSTER.**" An armchair QB knows little about the game but constantly criticizes & berates the coach. (Maybe a team doesn't actually need a coach & everyone in the stands could shout out the play they think the team should run) Jonah & the Pharisees were armchair QB's. The imposter is skilled but plays it safe, hides, and won't risk because they have no confidence. Moses was an imposter. Both the Armchair QB and the Imposter find excuses not to participate. We need another way.

Think Again uses a term that is actually Asbury's staff #1 core behavior: **CONFIDENT HUMILITY.** This trait opens new possibilities. Mary showed that. Even though initially afraid, she was not proud, nor did she say she wasn't good enough. She responded in faith. People with confident humility work well with others and ask for help. Luke 1 says the first thing Mary did when she found she was pregnant was to go live with an older relative for 3 months. Elizabeth seemed to be past her childbearing years. She and her older husband, like Abraham and Sarah, were disappointed that things had not gone in their favor. This is an intergenerational story: an older, married, childless woman with a young, engaged woman who shouldn't be having a baby. Jesus grew up with the love and support of a close-knit family.

Marty Morris sent this note: *"I use the sermon journal. I enjoy its insights. I thought about Mary quoting scripture in her response to the angel's message. Since she was a woman, she didn't have access to places in the Temple, and the study of the scriptures like men. It makes me wonder, did her parents teach her these scriptures, was this a song they sang in the Temple? Did her grandparents tell her the stories of her people? This is a good lesson for us as we share our faith with our grandchildren, as we tell them about His mighty deeds in our lives, the miracles we've experienced, the everyday wonders of life as well as the Bible stories."* Marty sends her grandchildren texts every day except for Sunday with a scripture and they often text back in return.

Mary was **WILLING** to be used by God. Luke 1:38 *And Mary said, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word."* I think of those who were willing in the Bible: Genesis 24:5 *The servant said to him, "Perhaps the woman may not be **willing to follow** me to this land. Must I then take your son back to the land from which you came?"* (Rebekah WAS willing to draw water for thirsty camels for Abraham's servant and, like Abraham, willing to leave her home and go to a new country)

Exodus 35:20-22 *Then all the congregation of the people of Israel departed from the presence of Moses. And they came, everyone whose heart stirred him, and everyone whose spirit moved*

him, and brought the Lord's contribution to be used for the tent of meeting, and for all its service, and for the holy garments. So they came, both men and women. All who were of a **willing heart** brought brooches and earrings and signet rings and armlets, all sorts of gold objects, every man dedicating an offering of gold to the Lord. They brought so much stuff for furnishing the tent of meeting; Moses had to tell them to stop. Imagine a pastor saying, "Listen folks, stop giving! We've got too much money."

1 Chronicles 28:9 (David's advising his son) *"And you, Solomon my son, know the God of your father and serve him with a whole heart and with a **willing mind**, for the Lord searches all hearts and understands every plan and thought."*

Isaiah 6:8 *And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Then I said, "Here am I! Send me."*

Matthew 14:28-30 *Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." He said, "Come." So, Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus. Miracles happen when we are willing to follow Jesus.*

Luke 8:1-3 *Soon afterward he went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. And the twelve were with him, and also some women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's household manager, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their means. To have a "willing spirit" means we aren't forced into it. The people in the Bible found the essential to give their lives to. We will give our lives to something – and that's basically the question – will we give it to what is essential.*

These disruptive moments prove to be unexpected watershed events. A "watershed" is a ridge of land that separates waters flowing in different directions. When a snowflake melts at a certain location in the Rocky Mountains, if it heads east, the water goes to the Atlantic Ocean but if it flows west it ends up in the Pacific. This is "The Continental Divide" (the divide is from the Bering Sea north of Alaska to the tip of South America. Every continent has a watershed.) A millimeter makes all the difference in the final direction and outcome. A watershed is a crossroads or a turning point.

The 3 greats of the Old Testament all had watershed moments. Abraham's = when God called him to leave his family in what is now Iraq and go to a land that God would give him. Moses = when he saw the burning bush. David's = his triumph over Goliath. All had other significant events, too, but a watershed moment was the beginning of their stories.

John Wesley's = when he heard someone read Martin Luther's preface to the Book of Romans: *"I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ alone for salvation. And an assurance was given me that he had saved me from the law of sin and death."* C.S. Lewis had a similar experience without the feeling. This former atheist Oxford University professor was shocked when another atheist professor said the historicity of the New Testament documents were not in doubt. That undercut Lewis' objection to Christianity. A friend told Lewis that Jesus

was either a liar, a lunatic or the truth. When Lewis got into the sidecar of his brother's motorcycle for a trip to the zoo, he was not a Christian. 30 minutes later when he arrived, he was. My moment was my conversion experience at Rose Hill Methodist in April of 1969. It may be a voice, an emotion, or an intellectual leap, but while faith may have an event, it is always a process. God works in us in many ways. Whether it's a watershed moment or not is not the big deal; it is our response. When Abraham was told to "Go," he went to the Promised Land. When Moses had the burning bush experience, he returned to Egypt. When David went to the rock concert with Goliath, that was the first of many experiences with God over his lifetime. I've heard it takes 4,000 years before the snow melts on Mt. Hermon to percolate and finally reach the Sea of Galilee. But there must be a time when we make that decision. I think communion can be a watershed moment. When we pray that prayer together at the very end of our communion liturgy: *"Pour out your Holy Spirit on us gathered here and on these gifts of bread and wine, make them be for us the body and blood of Christ, redeemed by your blood. By your Spirit, make us one with Christ, one with each other, and one in ministry to all the world until Christ comes in final glory and we feast at His heavenly banquet."* I hope you memorize this prayer and that when we have communion, this becomes your time to connect with Christ.

Mary, the mother of Jesus, was an ordinary person with an extraordinary opportunity. She was humble. She placed complete confidence in the Lord. She was willing to do whatever the Lord desired. This was her essential: she was willing to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. And all these other things were added to her. Mary was in the company of "the willing" even though she didn't know what she was doing or where she was going. It's like "Advent" – her watershed willingness led to an adventure for her. Mary essential was to be the mother of the messiah.

As such, I thought about our mom's. Think about what goes through a woman's mind when she hears those two words: "You're pregnant." An adventure is about to begin. ("Adventures are never fun when your having them." C.S. Lewis Voyage of the Dawn Treader) I thought on the day that we talk about Mary, it could also be an opportunity to give thanks for our moms. Let me lead you in the prayer we use on Mother's Day. For many women, like Mary, being a mother is their essential way to contribute to the kingdom of God.

### **Mother's Day Prayer**

For our mothers, who have given us life and love, that we may show them reverence and love, **WE PRAY TO THE LORD...**For mothers who have lost a child through death; that their faith may give them hope, and their family and friends support and console them, **WE PRAY TO THE LORD...**For women, though without children of their own, who like mothers have nurtured and cared for us, **WE PRAY TO THE LORD...**For mothers, who have not been able to be a source of strength, who have not responded to their children and have not sustained their families, **WE PRAY TO THE LORD...Loving God, as a mother gives life and nourishment to her children, so You watch over Your Church. Bless these women, that they may be strengthened as**

**Christian mothers. Let the example of their faith and love shine forth. Grant that we, their sons and daughters, may honor them always with a spirit of profound respect. Grant this through Christ our Lord. Amen.**