

“Don’t Overthink”

Luke 1:39-45

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What was Mary doing there? Why did Mary go to visit her cousin Elizabeth? She left the small safe burg of Nazareth to make the 3 day journey on a dangerous road with thieves, to the outskirts of Jerusalem where Elizabeth and Zechariah lived, close to the temple so Zechariah could fulfill his priestly duties. Why does she make such a trip? We are given no answer to this question. We can only speculate and make educated guesses as to the reason for Mary’s departure for her cousin. Could she be checking up on the information given by the angel that her cousin, long barren, was pregnant? Could it be that she was trying to escape some of the stigma that comes with being a pregnant unwed mother? Was she afraid, excited, anxious, curious? Maybe she was all of these or none of these, the Scripture is not concerned with those questions.

We are not given all of the information about this story that we would like and I think that is sometimes frustrating, especially for us people living in this time. We want all the answers, we want the motivations for everything, we want to know why. We want to know why things happen in our world. Why did I am certainly not saying that this is a wrong request. But we do get distracted by overthinking some of the events that happen in our lives. We often times ask questions for some of the greatest things that happen to us.

When I was just a freshmen in high school, I attended an all school dance. What you have to understand about me in high school is that I was a bit of a beanpole and a little nerdy. My how things change, I’m certainly not a beanpole anymore. It may come as a surprise to you but I was a little shy around girls and I had trouble asking them to dance. Partway through the dance, I was feeling a little down on myself when the smartest, prettiest, most popular senior girl in school came over to me at the beginning of a slow song and asked me to dance. ME!!! What do you think I said, yes, of course! I don’t think I had ever said a word to this girl ever. But she asked me to dance, boy was that a confidence booster. All the time after, I was left wondering, why? I didn’t really care because she had asked me. That seemingly insignificant 4 minutes meant a lot to a nerdy little kid.

In the nativity of our Lord we see tremendous things happening to people and we see different reactions to those situations, sometimes questioning “how” or “why” this thing was happening to them. Zechariah is the first in this line. Zechariah was a priest of the Lord and served in his temple. He was probably disappointed that he didn’t have children and probably spent long hours in prayer asking for one. Maybe he had even exhausted every medical treatment of the day in order to have children, but he didn’t. Now an angel stood before him saying that he and Elizabeth would have a child, he responded with “I am too old”. His rational brain said that he was no longer physically able to have children. His response is rewarded with muteness. But really Zechariah should have known better after all the Scriptures contain at least 5 times. Sarah, the mother of Isaac, Rebecca the mother of Jacob, Rachel the mother of Joseph, the mother of Samson, and Hannah the mother of Samuel. God gave children to barren women before and he could certainly do it now.

Mary too questioned the angel asking how she could become pregnant without having a husband. She was a young woman who had just pledged to marry a man, how can she now have a child. Apparently Gabriel gave her a little more slack than that bum Zechariah because he doesn’t make her mute. But she does wonder how this is going to happen since she is a virgin and rightfully so. This was entirely different than the barren women who had been given a child who had waited a long time for this blessing. She was receiving the blessing of a child in a new way. The difference is that Mary responds in faith, “behold I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word”.

Now we arrive at our text for this morning. Mary arrives at Zechariah and Elizabeth’s house. For all we know, Elizabeth wasn’t told anything about Mary’s pregnancy and especially the nature of the pregnancy. It only takes a word of greeting from Mary’s lips to rouse both mother and child to respond. John leaps in Elizabeth’s womb causing us to wonder with our rational minds, how is this possible?

Elizabeth doesn't overthink the situation but says what she is given to say, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! 43 And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? 44 For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. 45 And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord." What an insightful and under normal circumstances, weird response for hello. But neither she nor John were overthinking the situation instead they both encountered the Christ through his mother and were filled with the Holy Spirit to respond to Jesus. To the word becoming flesh, the savior who is Christ the Lord, who will save his people from their sins. Jesus the son of David the one who Israel was waiting for.

So early on, before Jesus' life and during the early part of his life, angels were appearing all over the place and people were responding in faith, come on Zechariah. Okay, Okay after 9 months of reflecting, he responds in faith, "his name is John". The point is that we had spectacular messages from angels, telling exactly what was happening, that the Son of God, the savior of the world was coming into the world. Some overthought the situation but each of them eventually responded in faith to the promises of God.

However as time went on, what the purpose of the Messiah was becoming obscure. It was easy to acknowledge the Christ before he had done anything because at this point people still weren't sure exactly how he would establish his kingdom. This was shown in the Gospel reading from last week in the words of John the Baptist, "Are you the one who is to come or should we wait for another". John was beginning to overthink things and to put his ideas of how God should work in place of the way God was working. John was languishing in prison waiting for the Kingdom of God as he thought it should be. Maybe John wanted Jesus to just get on with his mission and restore the kingdom of Israel now. After all, that would mean that John would be out of prison. John was probably tired and wanted restoration now. John was overthinking and distracted by his own circumstances. I don't think that John spoke in unbelief but he was certainly curious about what the Messiah was up to.

Restoration and the coming of the Kingdom are definitely a part of God's plan but the timing was not right. Jesus' response points to the fact that he is the Messiah, the chosen one of God because he was doing the things of God. Healing, raising the dead, preaching good news. Perhaps John thought things should be going differently. Maybe he was expecting Jesus to conquer and expel the Romans, but Jesus continued on his course which led to the cross and the empty tomb on Easter morning.

We are in a similar situation as John but different. John asked if Jesus was the one to come or should we wait for another. We ask Jesus are you really going to come soon like you promised or will we have to wait. As in the scenario with John we want to know what God is up to. We want to know why his plan of fulfillment is not brought to light yet. We want God to reveal his plans to us in mighty and powerful ways. We tend to overthink everything when it comes to our lives as Christians. How can God forgive us through the words of the pastor? How can simple bread and wine be the living Christ for us, giving forgiveness to us? How can simple waters mark us as the redeemed of Christ?

I wish I could give an elaborate answer that 100% solved every question that we have but the simple answer for all of these "How" questions is that God has given his solemn word and God always fulfills his promises. We know that our sins are absolved because God has promised to do so through his servants. We know that the true Body and Blood of Christ are present because Jesus the Christ has promised to be there. We know for certain that baptism clothes us with Christ's righteousness because he has promised that this is so. We know that Christ is returning because He promised that he would.

Just as God promised the Messiah the first times, so also the promise continues that he will come again for us in his Second Advent when he will restore all creation and he will restore you to a resurrected life that will have no ending. It is difficult for us because the promises are not here but I encourage you to cling to the promises of God because we have seen him fulfill promises before and we know he will again.