



[Rev. Steven S. Billings](#)

Sermon for LWML Sunday

October 13, 2024

Ready to Serve

Luke 1:26-38

²⁶ In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, ²⁷ to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸ And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" ²⁹ But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰ And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹ And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. ³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, ³³ and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

³⁴ And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?"

³⁵ And the angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God. ³⁶ And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. ³⁷ For nothing will be impossible with God." ³⁸ And Mary said, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.

The Selective Training and Service Act was passed by Congress on September 16, 1940. It required all men between the ages of 21 and 64 to register with the Selective Service. On December 7, 1941, the Japanese military launched a surprise attack on the United States Naval Base at Pearl Harbor. Following that attack, Congress amended the Act to require all able-bodied men ages 18 to 64 to register with their local draft board for military service for the duration of World War II. Within thirty days 134,000 Americans enlisted in the military. More than 16 million served in the military in World War II, and over 6 million of those were volunteers.

To help the recruiting process there was a famous poster. It was designed for World War I but resurrected for use during World War II. The poster pictured "Uncle Sam" pointing directly at the viewer, and the caption read: "I Want You for the U.S. Army."

In today's pericope, God points His finger at the Virgin Mary and says, "I want you!" Mary responds in faith, trusting her Lord as a servant – ready to serve – ready for the enormous task of being the mother of the ultimate servant – God's Son, her son – who would give His life as a ransom for many. May we be ready to serve as baptized children of God in gladness.

Every time we confess our faith in the Nicene and Apostles' Creeds, we remember



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that our Lord was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. At the time of today's Gospel, Mary may have been as young as 15 years old. She was a virgin, living in Nazareth, and betrothed to Joseph.

The angel Gabriel was sent to bring Mary a message that would change her life. "Greetings, O favored one," he said. "The Lord is with you!" But Mary was troubled, so he spoke words of comfort, too: "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God." So, not only did he say what angels always say when they appear to human beings — "don't be afraid" — but he added: "you have found favor with God." Mary was not worthy of God's favor, of course; she was a sinner, just like are we. But Mary had been chosen. "Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus." God had chosen Mary to be the mother of Jesus.

You see, God was about to fulfill His promise to send the Messiah. He was going to send His Son on a mission to save the world, to save mankind from sin. Now, He didn't merely *recruit* His Son, like you might ask for a volunteer; He was going to *send* His Son to pay the debt of sin for you and me and for all people. After literally thousands of years of waiting — since the days of Adam and Eve in the Garden — God was going to make it happen. And Mary, out of all the women who had ever lived, was about to become the mother of the Messiah.

Needless to say, she was perplexed. Can you imagine what thoughts must have been racing through her mind? So, she did what all intelligent people do: she asked a question. Her question was not challenging, like Zechariah's, the father of John the Baptist, when he asked the angel for a sign. Or like you and I do when we read what God has clearly stated in His Word. "How am I supposed to love my neighbor when he's a jerk? You can't expect me to be in church *every* week, can you? What's wrong with spreading gossip about my neighbor; he would do the same to me. Come on, cheating on my taxes isn't *really* stealing, is it?" No, Mary didn't challenge God like that; she merely asked for an explanation. How was this thing going to happen? She was still a virgin, after all. Her confusion is understandable, wouldn't you say? So, in faith and trust, she simply asked: "How will this be, since I am a virgin?"

Gabriel's answer was that her child would not have a human father. "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you." This child was not to be conceived and born in the natural way. The child Mary would conceive would be God's own Son. Perfect in every way. No sin in Him at all. "How will this be?"

There was about to be a birth without a human father and the mother was a virgin. Yes, the impossible was about to happen, for, as the angel said, "Nothing will be impossible with God."

So, what was Mary's response? When God sent Moses on a mission to deliver the Children of Israel from slavery, Moses tried every excuse he could think of to get out of it.



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When the angel told Gideon that he was to lead the attack against the Midianites, Gideon wanted not one, but two miraculous signs before he would believe. We already mentioned Zechariah's challenge when the angel appeared to him to announce the birth of John the Baptist.

But what was Mary's response? In a word: faith. "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord," she said. "Let it be to me according to your word." She was a woman of faith. And it was faith that enabled her to accept the angel's message and place herself in a position to serve her Lord. She was ready to go. She was ready to serve.

Now, on what did she base this faith? What did she say? "Let it be to me according to your *word*." The basis of her trust, the basis for her being ready to serve was God's *Word*. She believed the word that Gabriel delivered to her from God, that it was God telling her that she would be the mother of His Son, and she believed Him; she believed God's Word. She believed *God*. It was this faith and trust in God that made her ready to serve.

Jesus, the Son she would bear, also came ready to serve, but for a bigger task than merely being born, albeit miraculously. As He explained it to His disciples, His task was "to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). The Son of God became man and came to serve by dying. Along the way, He taught and healed people, but then He went the way of cross and death, ultimately rising from the grave to bring us salvation. He was a true servant, the *suffering* servant, as Isaiah calls Him. Paul says in his letter to the Philippians: "Christ Jesus . . . emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross (Php. 2:6-8).

As the true servant, He made the impossible possible. God incarnate, He was able to accomplish what no other human being could: He opened up eternal life to all who believe in Him. He came to earth on a rescue mission, a mission that caused Him to suffer and die for all the sins of the world and then vanquish death by His glorious resurrection. On that first Good Friday, Jesus completed His mission. On the first Easter morning, He confirmed it by standing before His disciples alive and well, the marks of His crucifixion permanently embedded in His hands and side. He came ready to serve, and serve us He did, like no one before or since.

So, what about us? (You knew I'd 'round to this, didn't you.) Mary was ready to serve. Jesus served. What about us? If you're looking for someone to inspire you, look to Mary. Do you want to know how to make yourself ready to serve our Lord? Look to Mary and her response. Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness. Mary believed God and the Savior came into the world.

My friends, you have experienced God's grace through the service of His Son. God has given you His Word, which you hear proclaimed, telling you that He has redeemed you through Jesus, the Messiah. Because of that redemption, you, like Mary, have been



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chosen, not only to be God’s child, but to be His servant. You’ve been granted the privilege – the *blessing* – of being His servant, just like Mary. St. Paul put it this way: “(Jesus) died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised” (2 Cor. 5:15). He died for you, dear friends, and was raised for you. Now He wants to carry that blessing further. Are you ready?

Today, we celebrate the Lutheran Women’s Missionary League. Their motto – Serve the LORD with gladness! (Psalm 100:2) – is all about serving joyfully. Since 1942, Lutheran Women in Mission have focused on affirming each woman’s oneness with Christ, encouraging and equipping women to live out their Christian lives in active support of global missions. They have a history of being ready to serve their Lord. Their goal for this biennium (2023–2025) is to raise, through their Mite Boxes and offerings, \$2.3 million to fund mission projects here at home and throughout the world. They take inspiration from Mary, who was ready to answer the Lord’s call to service, as she told the angel Gabriel, “I am the servant of the Lord.”

Mary was the vehicle through whom God sent His Son, Jesus, who said to His disciples, “The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Matt. 20:28). May God enable each of you, having been served by Christ your Savior, to be ready to serve, that your response as His baptized children may be as Luther expressed it: “That I may be His own and live under Him in His kingdom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness.” To God be the glory. Amen