

Joke: Let me give you five things to think about pertaining to children on this special day.

1. You spend the first two years of their life teaching them to walk and talk. Then you spend the next sixteen telling them to sit down and shut up.

2. Grandchildren are God's rewards for not killing your own children.

3. Children seldom misquote you. In fact, they usually repeat word for word what you shouldn't have said.

4. The main purpose of holding children's parties is to remind yourself that there are children more awful than your own.

5. We child proofed our homes, but they are still getting in.

MOTHER'S DAY 2024

There are so many women in the Scriptures that we could look at on this day of celebration that is Mother's Day. I'm actually going to use one that is normally used on a different holiday.

Good afternoon Church. To those who are here or watching on-line, Happy Mother's Day. What an honor to celebrate all the

mothers, those who desire to be mothers, grandmothers, and women everywhere who give life to others.

Show skit guys video

Many great thinkers and leaders alike would agree that fortune favors those who prepare.

Benjamin Franklin once said, "By failing to prepare, you are preparing to fail."

Samuel Coleridge said, "He who is best prepared can best serve in his moment of inspiration."

And then there was Louis Pasteur who went on to say, "Fortune favors the prepared mind."

And maybe someone you would never suspect. . . Stephen King who famously said, "There is no harm in hoping for the best as long as you are prepared for the worst."

And I love what Earl Nightingale says, he said, "Luck is when preparedness meets opportunity."

Let's be honest preparedness can play a significant role in one's achievements.

However, having lived this thing called life, we know that there are some troubles, hardships, and experiences in which preparations

just don't seem to be adequate. After all we can only prepare for so much.

There are stories of some of the Biblical greats who could attribute their success to preparedness paired with faith – people like Deborah, Joshua, Solomon – but then there are others that could not.

Consider the Bible stories you know. If there was an award given for unpreparedness at the time of God's call, who would win the prize? Abraham, Moses, David, or Esther?

I think Mary might just take the prize. Take a moment and allow your mind and heart to ponder that absurd reality for a moment – a pregnant virgin. How can you possibly be prepared for news like that for the news she heard.

When we meet Mary, the mother of Jesus, she is a young Jewish woman, barely matured into marriageable years and newly engaged.

At this time, the Jewish people lived in a state of spiritual silence and darkness, called the Dark Ages. Historically, it is the time between the Old Testament and New Testament where God's communication through prophets came to a dismal halt.

Hebrew instruction was given through the priests' teachings at the Synagogue, much of which was distorted by the Hebrew teachers and lawmakers of the day – the Pharisees and Sadducees.

The Jewish people were desperate for a Savior, desperate for their long-awaited and promised Messiah. Their muddled understanding led them to believe the Messiah would be Jewish "royalty", from a well-to-do group, raised in a well-to-do society. No one imagined a Nazarite woman from a lower social status group to be the mother of *The* Messiah.

So, why Mary? What made Mary special? Why was she chosen to carry and raise the Light that would shatter the darkness?

When we read or hear the story of the Virgin Mary, a sense of detachment sometimes creeps in. We forget that Mary, mother of Jesus, was not always Mary, *the* mother of Jesus.

And although we learn of Mary through motherhood, her story stretches beyond motherhood to a life that men and women alike in all stages of life can relate to.

Let me give several points about Mary today as we celebrate our Mothers.

Point number one is this. . .Mary was unprepared

Think about what happened in our recent history, as a nation, we experienced a long season of unpreparedness ourselves.

History will be a reminder of the world's unpreparedness for the pandemic, Overrun hospitals and the lack of needed medical equipment and supplies, empty cleaning and paper product aisles, food shortages, the closing of public places and restaurants,

unprecedented job loss, racial inequity and its socio-economic tipping point, and the millions of children stuck at home due to school closings are all reminders of the pandemic's swift entry and our utter lack of preparedness.

Few parents were ready to school their kids at home. Had we known what was going to take place, we would have been prepared. We were as prepared for that pandemic as the Virgin Mary was to carry and raise the Savior of the world.

Let's look at the story. . .

Luke 1:26–38 (NLT): In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a village in Galilee, 27 to a virgin named Mary. She was engaged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of King David. 28 Gabriel appeared to her and said, "Greetings, favored woman! The Lord is with you!" 29 Confused and disturbed, Mary tried to think what the angel could mean. 30 "Don't be afraid, Mary," the angel told her, "for you have found favor with God! 31 You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. 32 He will be very great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David. 33 And he will reign over Israel forever; his Kingdom will never end!" 34 Mary asked the angel, "But how can this happen? I am a virgin." 35 The angel replied, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the baby to be born will be holy, and he will be called the Son of God. 36 What's more, your relative Elizabeth has become pregnant in her old age! People used to say she was barren, but she has conceived a son and is now in her sixth month.

37 For the word of God will never fail.” 38 Mary responded, “I am the Lord’s servant. May everything you have said about me come true.” And then the angel left her.

Mary was in no position for the circumstances she found herself in. As we just read, Mary was an unwed virgin from the small, obscure town called Nazareth, a city where those of lowly origin lived. Mary came from a poor family, a family who likely struggled to make ends meet. As we would phrase it today they lived paycheck to paycheck.

And so, when Gabriel appears to Mary and tells her she is *avored* to bear the Messiah, a natural response would be to second guess and be *troubled* by this calling and try to *discern* what it meant.

If we read Mary and Gabriel's story in real-time, the conversation would appear to have taken place in less than a minute. But we know there is much left unsaid between the lines. We know there had to have been more to the story, there was possibly a long pause to gather her thoughts and try to understand.

Maybe in her mind it went something like this, *What does this mean for my family and for me? No one will accept an unwed mother. My marriage will get called off. How will I raise a child without a husband? What will people say? Why would God give the Savior to a woman like me knowing she would have to raise him in shame?*

When we find ourselves unprepared for a daunting task or responsibility, there may be times when a vacuum of insecurities

arise, and when we think of the possible present and future outcomes those same insecurities take hold of our imaginations. At this moment, Mary had two options - she could either choose fear or choose faith. . .but she could not choose both.

There are some of us in the room today or watching on-line that can really relate to feeling like you don't have all the answers, like you are unprepared for what life throws at you or you are fearful of what may lie ahead. But know this you are in good company. The mother of the Savior of the world found herself in the same place and yet God was with her.

In times of insecurity, our natural inclination is to seek answers, to understand the *why*. In this space of a misaligned reality, we imagine the unimaginable. Fear relishes in this unpreparedness and misdirects us in our search for answers.

It is where conspiratorial thinking, irrational outcomes, and illogical solutions become normalized. Unimaginable circumstances draw us to consider unbelievable solutions to combat these unknowing times.

Which leads me to point two which is Mary was fearful and confused.

As Mary contemplated the angel's presence, I imagine her face must have said it all. And upon looking at her, Gabriel responded, *"Don't be afraid."*

When we slow this story down to real-time, we see Gabriel reading Mary's response to his presence. The angel could not know exactly what Mary's thoughts were or *feel* what she was feeling. Gabriel only knew what he was witnessing. And what he saw before him was a young woman who was fearful of his presence and no doubt the news she had just received.

As they began to converse and Gabriel explained why he was there, Mary could not escape the confusion around the physical *how? How was all of this even possible?*

And truth is church, we can't always see what God is doing behind the scenes when we surrender our lives to him.

Mary is not the first person in Scripture to ask this question when God gives what appears to be an impossible calling. Others before her – Abraham, Moses, Gideon, some of the Prophets - faced the same question: How?

Abraham, how can that be when I'm as old as I am. Moses, how can you use me when I'm not able to speak eloquently. Gideon surely God can't use me I'm from the least of the tribes.

Maybe you wonder how as well.

1 Corinthians 1:26–31 (TPT): Brothers and sisters, consider who you were when God called you to salvation. Not many of you were wise scholars by human standards, nor were many of you in positions of power. Not many of you were considered the elite when you answered God's call. 27 But God chose those whom the

world considers foolish to shame those who think they are wise, and God chose the puny and powerless to shame the high and mighty. 28 He chose the lowly, the laughable in the world's eyes—nobodies—so that he would shame the somebodies. For he chose what is regarded as insignificant in order to supersede what is regarded as prominent, 29 so that there would be no place for prideful boasting in God's presence. 30 For it is not from man that we draw our life but from God as we are being joined to Jesus, the Anointed One. And now he is our God-given wisdom, our virtue, our holiness, and our redemption. 31 And this fulfills what is written: If anyone boasts, let him only boast in all that the Lord has done!

And Mary, at this moment, made her decision. If she lingered in the *how* she did not stay long. Our text tells us that with all the uncertainty before her, she chose to live by faith and accept what God was offering over living in fear ultimately rejecting what God was offering.

A few years ago Joy and I had gone to a conference and someone spoke over us and told us things that have not yet fully come in to being and there are times I need to go replay what I heard because there are times I still ask how. But I trust still that God can work it out. He never has asked us to understand everything, just believe everything He has spoken to us.

And in Mary's case and ours the only way this happens, is if Mary partners with God in this incredible call, and through humble submission to a faithful God see it all come to pass.

The same is true for us today. If we want to see God use us to do something incredible, we must remain humble and trust in God's faithfulness.

Let's pick up more of our story. . .

Luke 1:39–55 (NLT): 39 A few days later Mary hurried to the hill country of Judea, to the town 40 where Zechariah lived. She entered the house and greeted Elizabeth. 41 At the sound of Mary's greeting, Elizabeth's child leaped within her, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. 42 Elizabeth gave a glad cry and exclaimed to Mary, "God has blessed you above all women, and your child is blessed. 43 Why am I so honored, that the mother of my Lord should visit me? 44 When I heard your greeting, the baby in my womb jumped for joy. 45 You are blessed because you believed that the Lord would do what he said." 46 Mary responded, "Oh, how my soul praises the Lord. 47 How my spirit rejoices in God my Savior! 48 For he took notice of his lowly servant girl, and from now on all generations will call me blessed. 49 For the Mighty One is holy, and he has done great things for me. 50 He shows mercy from generation to generation to all who fear him. 51 His mighty arm has done tremendous things! He has scattered the proud and haughty ones. 52 He has brought down princes from their thrones and exalted the humble. 53 He has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away with empty hands. 54 He has helped his servant Israel and remembered to be merciful. 55 For he made this promise to our ancestors, to Abraham and his children forever."

Mary goes to visit her cousin, Elizabeth, not long after finding out about this big thing God was calling her to do.

Which brings me to point three Elizabeth declares and in so doing confirms that Mary is highly favored.

What did it mean for Mary to be favored? What was it about this particular young woman? Genealogies would tell us that Mary was chosen because of her bloodline, her heritage. She was the right distant relative at the right time. As a woman from the tribe of Judah from David's line, Mary fit perfectly, for we were told that the promised Messiah would come from this line.

However, Mary was more than the right genealogical cousin at the right time. She was a woman whose heart could handle the joys and the sorrows of mothering the Savior of the world. She was a woman who God favored.

In its original Greek context, *favored* is a derivative from the word *grace (charis)*. Mary was not chosen because she was God's favorite out of all the Jewish women. Nor was his favor given because of her merit. Like other great men and women of the Bible called to live beyond their abilities, God's grace was extended to Mary so that she could faithfully carry out the calling and raise the Son of God.

This grace, this favor on Mary, would be her driving force and a source of strength. Let's face it Mary would face many challenges as Jesus' mother.

At times, life would be far from easy for her.

It's possible that had she been able to see into the future, she might have chosen differently. Think about it as Jesus' mother, Mary would. . .

- Flee from a murderer (Matthew 2:13-15)
- Become a refugee (Matthew 2:13-15)
- Witness her child suffer (John 19)
- Witness her child die the most shameful of deaths (John 19)
- Face the realization she would outlive her child
- Fearing for his life, knowing how his teachings and miracles were upsetting the socio-religious powers of the day (Matthew 12:14)
- Possibly, live in shame because of the nature of his death. Because crucifixion was the lowest form of death. It was reserved for thieves and murderers. The crucifixion disgraced a family name.

Yes, Mary was favored to be Jesus' birth mother. He was to be her greatest joy but would also bring her greatest sorrow. Mary, was not favored for just the initial term of her pregnancy, but was also given God's grace to withstand all that her future would hold.

The truth is that the grace of God is on you today as well. His grace for us is sufficient. You have been chosen by Him to help bring hope into a world that is in need. You may not know what that means right now. In fact, if you did know, you may choose to say “no” to his invitation to trust Him.

You may not feel prepared right now, that is ok. You may not feel qualified, that is ok because you are favored by God. All God is looking for is someone who will trust him and humbly see themselves as a servant for the Kingdom of God.

We can learn much from Mary based upon how she responded to what she knew and witnessed. As Jesus grew and began to assert his independence, Mary didn't resist him.

As parents we learn that as our kids grow we need to allow space for them to do so. No longer do we need to do everything for them they learn how to do it on their own. You teach your child how to ride a bike by putting on some training wheels. But eventually if you let them the wheels come off and you just start to balance the bike as they ride and eventually you just running to keep up as they learn to take off on their own.

Now, Imagine if as your child grew into his adolescence, you also had to consider what it meant for him as God's son.

As Gabriel showered her with God's grace, Mary paid attention and listened closely to what he had to say. When an angel came to Joseph and told him to flee Herod and take refuge in Egypt, Mary graciously humbled herself, left her homeland, and became a refugee on foreign soil for the sake of her son, God's son. As Jesus grew, she paid attention to how others responded to him and his wisdom. Think about Jesus in the temple at the ripe old age of 12 people marveled at what He taught.

And that story always fascinated me. Mary and Joseph left without Jesus. They lost the Son of God. Can you imagine the panic.

Which brings me to another thing when faced with the unknowns, Mary pressed into her faith and paid attention, Mary's heart remained tender toward her circumstances.

She could have been angry, frustrated, offered up "why me" complaints, or even become immune to God's work around her and through her. But instead, Mary remained teachable and took notice. She contemplated what God was doing with her son.

She stored up her experiences with Jesus and treasured them in her heart. Pondering them allowed them to infiltrate her *mind and will*. As Jesus grew, she paid attention to his words, his responses to what he witnessed, and how he understood the world around him. As he began to assert his independence, Mary remembered. She made a conscious decision not to forget but to tuck away the reality that transpired before eyes and ears.

And she just believed. Her belief was her most incredible form of worship. Instead of looking for answers, Mary chose to trust and obey. Even in her greatest sorrow and when in doubt, she made the conscious decision to turn her heart forward and upward.

Let me try to wrap up today.

Mary's response to life's unpreparedness and uncertainties is a testimony for all of us here today. Life can be hard, but it doesn't have to be hopeless.

Maybe you have been blindsided and knocked off of your feet and left wondering, "How do I overcome this? How do I do *things* well?"

On this side of the cross, favor is not bestowed upon certain people at certain times. It is offered for all who believe, freely given to those who trust and obey. We live through this favor and experience it when we lean into what God is doing and hold onto Him for support and guidance.

Simply put when we walk by faith and not by sight.

Withstanding is more than the utterance of "I believe". You can believe and still fall greatly. To withstand, we must pay attention to what God is doing in and around us. We must choose awareness and remain teachable. We must flee from hardness and allow God to lead us.

Favor looks like God's grace through it all if only we choose to live in it and through it.

Prayer: *"Father, today we pray especially for all the mothers today. Give them strength in the difficult times, patience in times of testing, peace in all the chaos, and joy in the midst of their responsibilities. May they find their rest and assurance in you, knowing that you are their source of wisdom and peace. Right now we lift up all those who find this day difficult, whatever the reason whether it be due to loss, broken relationships, or unfulfilled hopes. Comfort them with your presence and remind them of your unfailing love. In Jesus name we pray."*