**St Martins C3 – December 17, 2023**

**Jesus is unexpected.**

**Sermon Summary:**

Are you open to God doing something unexpected in your life? None of us expect the unexpected, however, Mary, the mother of Jesus responded well to the unexpected announcement from Gabriel.

**Read: Luke 1:26-38**

Mary willingly cooperated with God’s unexpected disruption, even though she had no idea what all the implications would be of being the Mum to the Messiah of the world.

Mary was an ordinary person like you and I, who was doing her best to work out what God was revealing and how to best respond to these unfolding, unexpected revelations. There will be times where we will be aware of what God is revealing and respond appropriately and other times where we completely miss what God is doing. Hopefully, over time, our awareness increases and our lack of awareness decreases. - *So, what can we learn from Mary’s responsiveness to God’s unexpected disruption?*

1. **Mary humbly responds to Gabriel, giving him her full attention.**

This is in contrast with how Zechariah responds to the announcement concerning John the Baptist. Mary asks, “how can this be?” Not with an attitude of doubt, but simply seeking clarification.

Notice also how little information Mary had to go on, but Mary worked with the little information she had. When God reveals something unexpected to us, there is unlikely to be all the information we want, but there will be enough we need to take the next step of obedience in what He has revealed.

1. **Mary obeys, seeking greater revelation as she goes (39-45)**

It is unlikely Mary would have known Elizabeth was pregnant before Gabriel’s announcement and unlikely, Elizabeth knew about Mary’s pregnancy. However, the Holy Spirit confirms to Elizabeth and Mary what Gabriel had spoken about. This brings reassurance and confirmation to Mary.

It is good to seek out what the next step looks like and receive clarification or reassurance from God as to what is going on. God will often do this, as we take those first faith steps.

1. **We, like Mary, need to let God change our perspective as He reveals His unexpected things to us. (46-56)**

Faith is changing our thinking and actions to be in line with what God has revealed. This new perspective will often be in contrast to the reactions we will get from others, who can’t see what we can now see. There will be unexpected things that God will reveal to you this summer and in 2024. Are you prepared to willingly receive the unexpected from God? Our awareness and response won’t be ideal every time, but if we are open and obedient like Mary was, then we will see God’s Kingdom revealed.

**Suggested questions to discuss or ponder:**

*How do you think you would have reacted if you were Mary and Gabriel appeared to you?*

*What did you learn from Mary’s response?*

*What is something God has taught (or revealed to) you in 2023?*

*What attitude may help you receive what God wants to reveal to you in 2024?*

*What practical things could you do to increase your awareness of what God is doing, in and around your life?*

**Monday’s Devotion – Grateful**

**Luke 1:47-48**

*“Oh, how my soul praises the Lord. How my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour! For he took notice of his lowly servant girl, and from now on all generations will call me blessed.”*

This week we are going to explore Mary’s reactions to the events of Jesus life, from His birth to His ascension.

One of the first responses we see from Mary, is gratitude. Mary is humbled by the realisation that God chose her for this great privilege. In response, Mary sings a song of praise and thanksgiving to God.

Let us keep in mind that God choosing us, relating to us and leading our lives is a privilege, not a right. God didn’t have to create a way for us to relate to Him. God doesn’t have to continue to work in and around our lives. All that we ever receive from God is an act of grace.

Our western culture is becoming increasingly self-centred and entitled. It is easy for us to adopt these same attitudes and orientate everything around us, rather than God’s plans and purposes. Taking time to be thankful, helps break that entitled mindset and reset ourselves on living in His grace.

Take some time now to consider what God has done in your life and express your gratitude to Him.

**Tuesday’s Devotion – Reflective**

**Luke 2:18-19 & 51**

*All who heard the shepherds’ story were astonished, but Mary kept all these things in her heart and thought about them often.*

*Then he returned to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. And his mother stored all these things in her heart.*

I love the way Luke describes Mary’s ponderings and reflections. She, “stored all these things in her heart.”

Mary didn’t go around announcing that she was the mother of the Messiah. Of course it would have been on her mind from the time she had the encounter with Gabriel, but she was wise enough to be discrete with others regarding what God had revealed.

It is interesting to note that Luke would not have known Mary until the ministry end of Jesus’ life. So, how did Luke glean this level of detail? Most likely Mary would have told Luke about her journey of faith, including how she reflected on the events that unfolded in her life.

The point here, is that Mary developed an appreciation of who Jesus really was and the Kingdom He was bringing through her time in reflection. Likewise, for us to deeply internalise the truth of who Jesus is and all the implications our relationship with Him will have on our lives, we need to take some time and reflect.

**Wednesday’s Devotion – Confident**

**John 2:3-5**

*The wine supply ran out during the festivities, so Jesus’ mother told him, “They have no more wine.”* *“Dear woman, that’s not our problem,” Jesus replied. “My time has not yet come.” But his mother told the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.”*

By this point in Jesus’ life, Mary is confident that Jesus is the Son of God. She would not have fully realised all the implications of Jesus’ identity, but she knew the power of God was on Him. Had Mary already seen Jesus do a miracle? That we don’t know. Either way, Mary is very confident that Jesus had the power in that moment to resolve the predicament the wedding hosts were in.

The other fascinating thing in this interaction is the pushback from Jesus. Jesus knows who He is now and what His Father was calling Him to do, but He is also aware of when to disclose that. However, Mary disregards Jesus’ pushback and confidently instructs the servants to obey Him, knowing that Jesus had the ability to do what was required.

Like Mary, our life is a journey of increasing trust in God. We start with some awareness of who Jesus is and what He has done for us. We then respond with gratitude and reflection, however, we need to come to a point (or multiple points) where we take a step of faith and put our full confidence in Christ.

Where in your life are you confidently putting your faith in Christ? What might increasing confidence in Christ look like for you?

**Thursday’s Devotion – Grieving**

**John 19:25-27**

*Standing near the cross were Jesus’ mother, and his mother’s sister, Mary (the wife of Clopas), and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother standing there beside the disciple he loved, he said to her, “Dear woman, here is your son.”**And he said to this disciple, “Here is your mother.” And from then on this disciple took her into his home.*

Following through on what God reveals to us isn’t always easy. Mary’s journey with Jesus took her from an encounter with an angel in Nazareth to the torment of Golgotha. Consider how horrendous this would have been for Mary, watching her much loved eldest son being crucified for no just reason.

Mary would have been grieving and confused. I am sure she would have had many questions of God at this point. She may have been thinking, “how is Jesus going to be the forever King of Israel when He is dead?”

Trusting God in the midst of our confusion, pain and grief might be one of the hardest things we are called to do in our lives. What makes it hard, is that we can’t see any reason or purpose to our pain. We are thinking, “how can this be part of God’s plan?”

What Mary inspires us to do is to hold on to faith through the whole journey. We need to hold an eternal, not a temporal, perspective. We need to hold our confidence in the One who holds all of life in His hands. It is only when Mary, and us, persevere that we witness God’s salvation and unfolding purpose.

**Friday’s Devotion – Kingdom Building**

**Acts 1:14**

*They all met together and were constantly united in prayer, along with Mary the mother of Jesus, several other women, and the brothers of Jesus.*

We don’t hear about Mary being present around the time of Jesus resurrection, but obviously she was because she gathers with the first disciples to pray soon after the ascension. So Mary would have met Jesus at least once after His resurrection. Just pause for a moment and consider witnessing that moment!

The point here is not about the reaction of a mother, seeing her son after witnessing His death, it is the fact that Mary was not only fully aware of who Jesus was, she was fully committed to what Jesus came to do.

The last we hear of Mary is her being a founding member of the first church, which God would use to bring His Kingdom to the whole world. This then is a beautiful conclusion to the story that started with an angelic encounter around 33 years prior. Mary’s openness to what God had revealed, led her to be a partner in His Kingdom.

As we looked at on Sunday, may we respond with open hearts to what God reveals, just like Mary did. There will be ups and downs on that journey, but it will ultimately lead us to a place of deep connection and partnership with God.