

The Faith of Mary Luke 1:26-38



Introduction – The Most Important Thing about Mary is her Faith

There is a nature clip on YouTube that plays out like this. In the middle of the frame, two male antelope are locked in battle, oblivious to everything around them. In the background a lion is stealthily approaching—but the antelope are completely unaware of the danger. In the foreground, deer are scattering all over the place!

Well you can guess what happens next: one of the fighting gazelles loses his life.

The most important thing, if you live in the wild is staying alive! But in the heat of the battle they lost sight of the most important thing.

Something like that has happened over the centuries with Mary, the mother of Jesus. People have fought over her status or standing. Some people say she is the “Queen of heaven,” and even “Co-Redeemer.” Others rightly protest, no, “Mary, as blessed as she is, is a sinner, like you and I, in need of salvation.” And the midst of this controversy some people have lost sight of the main thing. The main thing about Mary is not her rank, but her faith in God. When we read her story, we’re meant to ask ourselves, “Do we have faith like Mary had?” “She had genuine faith: Is my faith authentic?”

And this question — Do I have true faith? - is vital because there is such a thing as false faith. Jesus once talked about people who thought they had real faith but on the last day he’ll have to say to them, “*I never knew you, away from me, you evildoers!*” (Matt 7)

And the possibility of having a bogus faith is especially relevant in the so-called “Christian” West where it is easy for people to think that they have true faith simply because they were born or they live in a “Christian country.”

So this is an important issue: Do you and I have genuine faith? Well, this morning, through this familiar Christmas story of Mary, we’re going to discover four marks of true faith:

- True faith believes what God says
- True faith obeys, God commands
- True faith is always tested by trials &
- True faith keeps on going to the end

And as we run through them one by one, why don’t you ask yourself, “Do I have true faith?” Here’s first..

#1 True Faith believes what God says

Mary believed what the angel said, even though it was an impossible thing: that she would bear a son without the aid of a man! You remember the story: An angel by the name of Gabriel, appeared to Mary. He puts her at ease with his gentle words, “Greetings, you who are highly favoured! The Lord is with you.” “Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered why kind of greeting this might be.” Why has this messenger come to visit ordinary me? Have I done something wrong?

“But the angel said to her, ‘Do not be afraid Mary, you have found favour with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord will give him the throne of his father David (Messiah) and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.’” First a supernatural angel and then a supernatural conception!

What does Mary do with her doubts and fears? She doesn’t bottle them up inside but takes them to Gabriel “How will this be, since I am a virgin?” And the angel helps her through her doubts. He answers her questions. “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the most high will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God..” The conception is going

to happen supernaturally, mysteriously, miraculously, not in the normal way. Then he gives her the example of someone who has also experienced a miracle conception of a different kind—her relative Elizabeth was six months pregnant even though she is in old age! Her pregnancy came about in the normal way, but at a very unusual time—when she was very old. God helped her conceive. And then the angel reminds her of a wonderful truth: “For nothing is impossible with God.” Helped by the angel’s response, Mary believes the words of God; because true faith believes what God says.

Perhaps someone listening in this morning is full of doubts “An angel? I don’t believe in angels! A supernatural conception! I can’t believe that!” Or it could be some other question.

There’s a wonderful scene in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, where Peter and Susan are doubting Lucy’s account of the wonderful things she has seen in Narnia, you know when she went through the wardrobe? So they go to the Professor. (By the way, if you are looking for a film to watch this Christmas with the whole family, may I suggest this CS Lewis film.) The Professor says: “A charge of lying against someone whom you have always found truthful is a very serious thing.” “We were afraid it might not be lying” said Susan, “we thought there might be something wrong with Lucy.” “Madness, you mean?” said the professor quite coolly. “One has only to look at her and talk to her to see that she is not mad.” “Logic!” said the Professor, half to himself, “There are only three possibilities. Either your sister is telling lies, or she is mad or she is telling the truth. You know that she doesn’t tell lies and it is obvious she is not mad.... so we must assume that she is telling the truth... I wonder what they DO teach at these schools,”

Mary says she met a messenger from heaven, she’s not a liar, she’s not mad, she’s not an illiterate pre-scientific fool, and nor is Luke who did his research before including her story in his Gospel, so we should just believe Mary: an angel appeared to her with an impossible message.

It’s not wrong to express doubts about what God says, it’s normal to have questions about God or suffering or miracles or science or whatever. Mary had her doubts. If you have doubts, ask someone—email us at MPC and ask us your question and we’ll do our best to answer you. But once Mary had her

questions answered she believed what God said. And that's the first mark of true faith. True faith believes what God says!

For us, believing God may not be believing the words of an angel, but believing the Word of God, the Bible (hold up). Do you and I believe God's Word? First mark of true Faith.

#2 True Faith obeys God's Commands

Here's the second mark: True faith obeys God's commands. God gives a command to Mary and she obeys! "I am the Lord's servant. May it be to me as you have said." She allowed herself to become the obedient bearer of God's Son—with the joys and privileges and the difficulties and sorrows that would entail. The angel did not make a suggestion to Mary, he brought her a command: "You will be with child..." And she obeyed for she had true faith.

And so it is with us, true faith obeys God's commands. For example, God commands us to repent of our sins, to turn away from our sins (Acts 17). And repentance is a life-long exercise. For example, God commands every believer to be baptised: "Repent and be baptised." (Acts 2) For example, God commands us to meet with other Christians, "Let us not give up meeting with one another." (Hebrews 10) True faith always results in a changed life, and especially, a new life of love for God and love for our fellow man, "A new command I give to you. Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another." (John 13)

Is our faith marked by obedience to God's commands, whatever the cost?

#3 True Faith is Always tested by trials

In the third place, all true faith is always tested by trials, through difficulties, problems. Mary's first big test was her relationship with Joseph: She must have thought and perhaps worried about how her obedience to God would affect Joseph and their engagement. How could he understand a supernatural conception? Might he be suspicious? Might he end the relationship? (And even if Joseph believed her, what about the local village folk? She would have to bear suspicions all her life.)

Trials, difficulties, problems! All true faith is tested with trials!

The test with Joseph was only the first of many tests. One day, Mary would have to stand by while her son was accused of things he had never done, condemned for words he had never committed, and then crucified on a bitter Roman cross. True faith is always tested!

And so it will be with true faith today. All true faith is tested in the furnace of trials. Do you know why? To make it purer! We may think to ourselves, "I have got here a pound of faith", but actually, that pound of "faith" is probably made up of, an ounce of trust in our health, another couple ounces of trust in our family, an ounce of trust in our money, three ounces of trust in our abilities, and so on. Not 16 ounces of pure trust in God alone, but a lot of trust in earthly things mixed in with gold trust in God!

So God turns up the heat and places our faith in the crucible of suffering and perhaps he removes our good health, or places strains in our family, or diminishes our store of money, or takes away an ability, not to harm us, but to purify faith; so that what remains is smaller, but purer gold trust in God. All true faith will be tested.

Perhaps as a young Christian you have been surprised and discouraged at the troubles you've faced since coming to faith! Today let me remind you that trials are normal and they are for your ultimate good. Jesus called the Christian path "the narrow way" (Matthew 7) and Paul said "We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God." (Acts 14) So don't be discouraged!

Perhaps you are an older believer facing a relationship test or health problems, or family tensions, or satanic temptation. You need to hear these three comforting words from 1 Peter 1: God will shield you by his power, in this trial; trials are only for "a little time" and they have come, I quote, "so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed."

If you have been on the road for many decades, let me remind you, that some of our greatest tests will come in old age. Abraham's greatest test came when

he was a very old man! Mary's greatest trial when she was around 50 years old – old for those days.

- True faith believes what God says
- True faith obeys what God commands
- True faith is tested through trials, and finally

#4 True Faith keeps going to the end

About 34 years later we find Mary in Acts chapter 1, still meeting and praying with fellow believers. She hasn't given up! Through all the joys and storms of life, she has kept going. Because true faith perseveres.

I came across this sign in a shop window a few days ago: "We must keep on protecting each other." We're all learning what perseverance means, these days aren't we? It's been a long trial, a long test. And who knows when it will end? But we have to keep going!

And so it is with true Christian faith, true faith keeps going, because it's a divine thing, a supernatural thing. We must keep on reading our Bibles. We must keep on praying—someone said to me recently that they had begun writing down their prayers, because just speaking them in their head had just become a jumble of words—great idea. We must keep on meeting with one another, however that may be. We must keep on serving one another, picking up that phone, making that meal, writing that card or text or email. "Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him." (James 1:12)

Have you and I got true faith? Do we believe what God says and obey what God commands? Has your faith been tested by affliction and are we persevering to the end?

Many of us will be saying "Yes! And Praise God!" Let's thank God for the precious gift of true faith!

Some will say, “No but how can I get this faith?!” Faith comes by listening to God’s Word, by reading God’s Word. Read the Bible, if you don’t have any part, email in and we’ll send you Luke's Gospel.

Other will say, “No, I don’t have this faith, and nor do I need it! My life ticks along just fine without faith! Why do I need this ‘faith?’” Well, faith connects us to God and to all the rich spiritual blessings God wants to shower upon us. Faith in Christ brings us the forgiveness of all our sins, through his sacrifice on the cross. Faith brings the joy and the presence and the power of the Lord Jesus into our lives every day. And faith fills our hearts with hope for life beyond the grave!

May the Lord give this most wonderful gift to us if we do not have it, and may he strengthen and purify it if we already possess it, to his praise and glory and honour.