

In our Gospel for today from Luke chapter 1, Mary is a wonderful example of faith. And so my theme today is, “Receive Christmas like Mary Did.” Mary received the message of Christmas in two ways: she contemplated the message and she believed the message. So receive Christmas like Mary did: Contemplate and Believe.

First, contemplate the message of Christmas. The angel Gabriel came to Mary and said, **“Greetings you are highly favored. The Lord is with you.”** And it says that **“Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be” (Luke 1:29).** It says that Mary “wondered,” she thought about the meaning of the angel’s words. Mary seems like a rather contemplative person. She liked to think about things and ponder things. In Luke chapter 2, for example, after all the activity of Christmas Eve (Jesus is born, the shepherds come and report that they saw a multitude of angels in the sky), after all that activity, Luke says, **“But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart” (Luke 2:19).** And then later in Luke chapter 2, when Jesus is twelve years old and they lose Jesus and they find him in the Temple, and Jesus says to Mary, **“Didn’t you know I had to be in my Father’s house?” (Luke 2:49),** and again Luke says, **“But his mother treasured all these things in her heart” (Luke 2:51).** Mary was a very contemplative person. She liked to think about things and ponder things. And so we should receive Christmas like Mary did. We should contemplate the message. And there’s a couple of things about the message that we should contemplate.

First we should contemplate who this child is. This child is the Son of God, the second person of the Trinity who has become a human being. As the Son of God he has always existed but now he takes on human flesh in the womb of the virgin Mary. The angel says to Mary, **“The Holy Spirit will come on 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” (Luke 1:35).** “The Holy Spirit shall come upon you.” The other time that that phrase is used is when the Holy Spirit comes upon the disciples at Pentecost. “And the power of the Most High will overshadow you.” One time that the verb “overshadow” is used is in the Old Testament when God comes to the tabernacle in a cloud: **“Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. Moses could not enter the tent of meeting because the cloud overshadowed it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle.” (Exodus 40:34-35)** So the Holy Spirit came to Mary, not in a sexual way, of course. Rather the Holy Spirit came to her with his almighty power and conceived a baby in the womb of the virgin Mary. And this baby is both God, the second person of the Trinity, and a human, he’s a flesh and blood baby. **“The Holy Spirit will come on 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.” (Luke 1:35)**

But not only should we contemplate who this child is, we should also contemplate what this child will do. The angel says, **“You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob’s descendants forever; his kingdom will never end.” (Luke 1:31-33)** Jesus came to be our king. And that is significant when we consider that before Jesus became the king of our hearts, sin ruled over us. And had Jesus not come, we would have had to spend eternity in the kingdom of sin, with the devil as our only ruler. But Jesus came to drive away Satan. Remember during Jesus’ ministry demons came shrieking out of people shouting, “You’re the Son of God.” Jesus came to drive out sin and death and the devil and replace their rule with His good and gracious rule. Martin Luther put this well in his Large Catechism. Luther was explaining the second article of the Apostles’ Creed: “I believe Jesus Christ, his only Son our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary.” Luther writes this: **“Before Jesus became my Lord, I had no lord or king, but was captive under the power of the devil. I was condemned to death and entangled in sin and blindness. ... There was no counsel, no help, no comfort for us until this only and eternal Son of God, in his unfathomable goodness, had mercy on us because of our misery and distress and came from heaven to help us. Those tyrants and jailors have now been routed, and their place has**

been taken by Jesus Christ, the Lord of life.” Jesus has driven sin, death and the devil off the throne of our hearts and now Jesus rules there. Like the angel said, **“he will reign over Jacob’s descendants forever; his kingdom will never end” (Luke 1:33).**

And because Jesus rules over us, we, like Mary, have been greatly blessed by God. The angel said to Mary, **“Greetings, you who are highly favored!” (Luke 1:28)** Mary was greatly favored because she was chosen by God to have the privilege of being the mother of the Messiah. We also have been highly favored by God because God gave us this child to be our Savior from sin. The angel said to the shepherds: **“Today in the town of David a Savior has been born for you.” (Luke 2:11)** You are greatly favored!

So the first way we want to receive Christmas like Mary did is to contemplate the message of Christmas. Contemplate who this child is: both God and man. Contemplate what this child came to do: to drive out the devil and replace the reign of sin with his own gracious rule. Contemplate how highly favored you are because this child was born for you to be your Savior from sin. Receive Christmas like Mary did by contemplating. The second way we want to receive Christmas like Mary did is by believing the message of Christmas.

In the story right before this in Luke’s Gospel, the angel Gabriel appeared to somebody else. The angel Gabriel appeared to Zechariah in the temple. Zechariah was very old and his wife Elizabeth was very old. And, sadly, they were never able to have any children. But the angel Gabriel appears to Zechariah and says, “Your wife Elizabeth is going to have a baby.” That baby was John the Baptist. But Zechariah doesn’t believe the angel Gabriel’s message. He thinks, “Elizabeth and I are too old. It’s impossible for us to have a baby.” And the angel Gabriel says to Zechariah, **“You will not be able to speak until the day this happens, because you did not believe my words” (Luke 1:20).** Zechariah didn’t believe. And now in the very next story that Luke tells, the angel Gabriel goes to Mary and gives to her an impossible message. But she believes it. And that’s even more amazing because what Gabriel says to Mary seems even more impossible than what Gabriel said to Zechariah. You see Zechariah and Elizabeth were both old but there was at least a Biblical precedent for having a baby in old age. Abraham’s wife Sarah had a baby when she was very old. But never before had a virgin become pregnant. No man involved, just the power of God creating a baby in her womb. That had never happened before. And yet Mary believes it. She does ask one question “How is it going to happen?” But that’s not a question of unbelief. She just asking how it’s going to happen. She believed it because nothing is impossible with God. Gabriel said, **“Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. ³⁷ For no word from God will ever fail.”** **“I am the Lord’s servant,” Mary answered. “May your word to me be fulfilled.”** God said it and Mary believed it, because nothing is impossible with God.

Think about how many impossible things we believe as Christians. We believe that a virgin had a baby. And we believe that because God’s word says it and because God is all powerful. We believe that Jesus was dead in the tomb and then God made him alive again. And again we believe that because God’s word says it and because God is all powerful. We believe that in the Lord’s Supper, along with the bread and wine, in a mysterious and miraculous way Jesus also gives us his body and blood for the forgiveness of our sins. We believe that because Jesus said, “This is my body” “This is my blood” and because God is all powerful and nothing is impossible with God. We believe that one day God will raise our bodies from the dead in glorious splendor. We believe that because God’s word says it and because God is all powerful. You believe a lot of miraculous things as a Christian. But all those miraculous things are blessings that God gives to you and there all true because nothing is impossible with God.

So receive Christmas like Mary did. Contemplate the message. Ponder all these things in your heart. Receive Christmas like Mary did by believing the message. Like Elizabeth said to Mary later, **“Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her” (Luke 1:45).** God has given you miraculous promises and miraculous blessings. Receive them like Mary did. Amen.