

Week Beginning: 11<sup>th</sup> December 2016

Worship Series: #3 in series



living sharing growing

## Theme Verse

"I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled." Luke 1:38

## Remember This Week

As it was for Mary, so it is for you. The God who came in Jesus has great plans for your life. Will you take God at his Word and let his plans grow and show in you? Will you entrust yourself to imagine a future beyond your present, to embrace an identity over which you have little knowledge or understanding. Will you let God do the impossible and move you from whom you think you are to whom he has called you to be? God is faithful and his Word will never fail you.



**Let all the earth fear the Lord; let all the people of the world revere him. For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm. The Lord foils the plans of the nations; he thwarts the purposes of the peoples. But the plans of the Lord stand firm forever, the purposes of his heart through all generations. Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord, the people he chose for his inheritance.** Psalm 33:8-12

Dear Heavenly Father, when you speak, your word achieves its ends. When you put your plan into action, nothing can prevent it from coming to fruition. Let your Word come into our lives again with power as we study together the call of Mary and your call on our lives. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

1. *Highs and Lows for the week.*
2. *Accountability time. How did you go with your living purposefully from last time?*
3. *What do you most look forward to at Christmas time?*
4. *What is the biggest surprise you have had in your life that you didn't see coming?*
5. *Share a time when you were challenged and stretched to do something new. How did you respond?*

Talk seems to be so cheap these days. How many times have you wished that people would just say what they mean and mean what they say? It's what makes the angel's visit to Mary and her response to God's call to bear a miracle that would change the world, even more remarkable. It's a simple call - a call of faith, a call to trust, a call which takes God at his Word. It's a call that also dares us to take God at his Word and believe that the impossible is always possible with God.

Read Luke 1:26-38

6. *Are you a person who means what you say, and says what you mean, or do you find your words can change depending on the situation or who you are speaking to? Explain.*
7. *When it comes to believing what other's say, do you take them at their word, or do you take their words with a grain of salt or view them with suspicion? Explain.*
8. *What do you find challenging/confusing/confronting about this passage from Luke 1:26-38?*
9. *Compare this account with the call of Zechariah in Luke 1:5-25. What similarities and what differences do you find in these two calling accounts?*

God chooses to announce to Mary ahead of time what he is about to do. Again and again in Scripture this is the pattern: a word and then a deed. Events by themselves without words of explanation are ambiguous and make it easy for us as sinful humans to take credit for what happens. So we are left in no doubt as to who is at work, God gives us his Word. The word of God interprets the work of God, gives meaning to it and takes away the ambiguity.





10. *What is the significance for Mary of having found "favour with God"?*
11. *What reassurance does this give you when you consider what God is calling you to do as his disciple?*

The angel's greeting and response to Mary's confusion uses the word "favoured". It's a word that is used only one other time in the New Testament (in Ephesians 1:6) where it means the free bestowal of grace. So the very first thing Gabriel says to Mary is that she is about to receive a free bestowal of God's grace. The angel also tells Mary where the power to do what God has spoken will come from - the Holy Spirit will overshadow you. That word "overshadow" (Luke 1:35) is the same word used in the Old Testament to describe God's presence resting on the tabernacle in the pillar of cloud in the Sinai desert (Exodus 40:35). Just as the Spirit moved over the waters of creation, bringing forth life out of nothing, so God's Spirit will move again to bring about something new.

12. *You've probably heard this story many times before, but imagine if you were hearing it for the first time. What's the hardest part to believe?*
13. *Why do you think non-Christians find it so hard to believe in the virgin birth?*
14. *What does this passage teach us about God?*
15. *What does it teach us about discipleship, responding to the call of God in our own lives?*

In the midst of a very uncertain future, Mary places her trust in God. She places her trust in the word of God spoken to her by the angel in v. 37, "For no word from God will ever fail." This trust in God, this faith, results in her losing the love and respect of Joseph for a time. It makes her the butt of much gossip about her first born son and leads to her name being muddled throughout history by those who reject her son. Yet in faith, Mary responds to this simple call to let God fulfil his plan for the world through her.

Read Matthew 28:18-20 & Acts 1:8

16. *What is the call given to you as a follower of Jesus Christ?*
17. *How do you react to this call: joy-filled, fearful, impossible, want to dismiss it, other? Why?*
18. *Mary couldn't do what she was called to do without the Holy Spirit working in her; she trusted without knowing the details of how things would turn out. Where do you need to trust the Holy Spirit to work in your life with power?*
19. *Read Isaiah 55:11 - how does this Word from God give you confidence when you doubt or are confused or think God is asking you to do the impossible?*

*The Good News about Jesus is that we have a Saviour who remains faithful to his call to save the people of the world from their sin. Even when you fail in your call to follow him, Jesus remains true and faithful towards you. God has spoken a final and definitive word in your life in his Son, whose birth you celebrate again in a few weeks. He is the Word that will never fail you (Read Hebrews 11:1-2).*



Mary was a poor teenage girl in an out of the way town in the middle of nowhere when the angel came and offered her the chance to bear God's ultimate miracle to the world. The offer didn't include fame and fortune or a soft bed and silent nights. What God invited Mary to accept was a call that included ridicule as an unmarried pregnant girl, the pain of childbirth, and the agony of watching her son stagger up a hill to die on a cross. Mary was invited to bear a miracle that would change the world, and it would cost her everything. Her response: "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled."

20. *How is Jesus growing in you and showing through you at this present time?*
21. *In what area of your life do you need to take God at his Word?*
22. *What are some of the barriers that block you from trusting God and his call on your life?*
23. *How might you incorporate Mary's prayer into your daily life?*

- \* Read Luke 1:46-55. Which of the words in Mary's song best describes how you are feeling about your spiritual life? \_\_\_rejoicing \_\_\_humble \_\_\_blessed \_\_\_proud \_\_\_lifted up \_\_\_filled \_\_\_hungry \_\_\_empty. Pray for each other that God would move you to be who he thinks you are.
- \* Pray for a trust and willingness to respond to Jesus' call to be a bearer of God's good news.
- \* Pray that this Christmas, the joy of Christ might grow, show and shine through you.
- \* Pray for those places in the world where Christians are being targeted because they take God at this word and follow him, that God would protect them and grace them with his presence.
- \* Pray for the person that God is calling you to invite to join you in worshipping him this Christmas.



Turn to the person next to you and make the sign of the cross on the palm of their hand or forehead as you say:

*Name, may God's calling for you bring you joy. Amen.*