

12-1-24 Christmas Together

Week 1

Text: Luke 1:26–36, 39–45; 2:4–7; Proverbs 17:17

Topics: Family, Travel, Shared Experiences, Community, Support

Big Idea of the Message: Christmas brings family together. The first announcement of Christ's imminent birth brought cousins Elizabeth and Mary together to support each other through unexpected and miraculous pregnancies.

Application Point: We find strength, support, and encouragement when we gather in community with close friends and family to share our common experiences and struggles.

We live in uncertain times, don't we?

What are some things we are often uncertain about?

The question might be better asked, what can we be certain about? (sun will come up, taxes, death)

Here are some tips for dealing with uncertainty:

- Acknowledge your feelings and accept the reality of the situation.
- Focus your energy and control what you can.
- Stay in the present and avoid trying to predict the future.
- Reflect on past experiences and learn from them.
- Practice self-care routines.

The example of Mary and Elizabeth in the Christmas story should encourage us to surround ourselves in community—especially with our family and like-minded Christians—to lean on when we face difficult circumstances.

It may feel scary to ask for help or to open up about our fears and struggles to those we're closest to. However, when we do, we find that it is these connections that spur us on to acts of love and good deeds.

Is there someone in your family or friendship circle who has gone through a similar struggle to what you are currently facing? Or is there someone you know who is going through a struggle that you have previously overcome? What would it look like to reach out to that person to ask for help, or to offer help to them?

We have all lived in times of uncertainty or will at some time. Looking back on the Christmas story we can see how God was working. We can see how all the pieces fell into place. I am sure that at the time this was all unfolding, those caught in it were scared and uncertain of what to make of it all.

So, what can we learn?

- I. **Look to God in times of uncertainty.**

- In the Christmas story we see this in the lives of Zacharias, Elizabeth, Mary, Joseph, the shepherds and Magi. In every one of these circumstances, we see them looking to heaven for answers.
- **Read Luke 1:26-33.**
- I think it would be safe to say that Mary would feel a little uncertain after the announcement the angel (Gabriel) gave her.
- Look at verse 29, “... she was troubled at his saying and considered (confused and disturbed) what manner of greeting this was.”
- It’s ok in moments of uncertainty, when things are unscripted to have a time of trouble, confusion, disturbance and being afraid.
- The bible says she “**considered**” (matured by extended deliberate thought) what the message meant. She pondered and discerned what was being told to her.
- I love that God isn’t afraid to reassure us all the time to “**not be afraid.**” The phrases, “**Fear not**” or “**Be not afraid**”, occur 103 times in the KJV. The word “**fear**” itself is mentioned over 500 times.
- Guess what, if you are a believer here today, you too have found favor in God’s eyes. **IF** you are here and you are not a believer, guess what? You too **CAN** find favor in God. Become a follower of His.
- Mary had no where else to go, but to God. She was about to become an unwed pregnant teenager, who was engaged to a man that was not the father. Sounds like a situation fit for Maury Povich or Dr. Phil.
- Look at the five predictions Gabriel told Mary about her future son. **Verses 32-33.**
 1. **He will be great.**
 2. **He will be called Son of the Highest.**
 3. **He will be given the throne of His father David.**
 4. **He will reign over the house of Jacob forever.**
 5. **His kingdom will never end.**
 - There are lots of places to get advice from when you are desperate, but there is only one that is 100% correct, with a proven track record. That is God’s Word.
 - When I am in a place of uncertainty, my first go to is God. I pray and ask God for His wisdom. I ask Him to search and reveal my heart. In what ways can I surrender. What is His desire for me. Then I search His word. I ask the Holy Spirit to show me.
 - But sometimes the answers might be, either or, so what do I do next? I go to people that will give me honest answers, that will give me both sides. Why? Because I need to see it from all sides. If I am still struggling, I will widen my search, I will reach out to those who I have witnessed who are spiritually mature and get their insight. Then I take all the information and pray more about it. I am in constant prayer and pondering. Then I decide and don’t look back.

II. Listen for God in times of uncertainty.

- **Read Luke 1:34-38.**
- Don't be too afraid to ask God how and why. Now understand that He is under no obligation to answer you, but you can ask away.
- In Mary's case Gabriel directly gave her the answers. In our case we might have to search a little more, like; read God's word, seek counsel from God fearing people, pray, fast and listen closely. Be careful of your heart, because it can mislead you. Be very careful.
- **Read Luke 1:24-25.**
- **Read Luke 2:8-14.**
- Mary, Joseph, shepherds, Elizabeth all listened for God's leading in times of uncertainty in their lives.
- Listen for God in times of uncertainty. There have been times in my life of great uncertainty, and I diligently sought out God's face and He eventually revealed things to me. Most of the time my faithfulness to Him, His people, His calling on my life was being tested.
- When living in times of uncertainty let us be found in our faithfulness to Him.

III. Trust and respond to God in times of uncertainty.

- How did Zacharias respond to God's announcement of his wife being pregnant?
- **Read Luke 1:18-20. (He doubted God)**
- How did Mary respond? **Read Luke 1:38.** She too questioned but from a different place. Zacharias was from a place of disbelief. Mary was from a place of confusion.
- How did Joseph respond? **Matthew 1:22-25. "... did as the angel of the Lord commanded him..." (v.24)**
- How did the shepherds respond? **Luke 2:15-20. "Let us NOW go... see." "Now when they had seen Him, they made widely know the sayin which was told them concerning this Child." (v.17)**
- How have you responded? How will you respond?
- Many times, we just try to do it our way. We want to believe God will come through, but deep down we doubt just like Zacharias.
- How should we respond? Or better yet, how does God want us to respond?

And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him. Hebrews 11:6 ESV

- Complete trust and obedience to Him. That is how God wants us to respond.

IV. Be ready for God to use you in times of uncertainty.

- How did God use Elizabeth? **Read Luke 1:39-45.**
- We already know, according to her husband, that she is too old to have a baby. But God gave her one and it healed something inside of her. **"...He has taken away by disgrace of having no children." (Luke 1:25)**
- Even the most of uncertain times God can use you and heal you.

- God used her to be an encouragement, a testimony, a place of comfort in Mary's time of uncertainty. Elizabeth tells Mary she is blessed three times. And exalts her faith, "**Blessed is she who believed...**" (Luke 1:45) "**You are blessed because you believed that the Lord would do what he said.**" NLT
- Zacharias' when naming his son John, **Luke 1:59-66.**
- God used Joseph to be the earthly father of Jesus, to raise Him and train Him.
- The shepherds being the first witnesses of God's salvation plan for all mankind.
- Simeon, a devout and just man, who the Holy Spirit revealed would not die before he would see Jesus the Christ. **(Luke 2:25-35)**
- Or Anna, the 84-year-old widow prophetess, who never left the temple. She was there day and night, fasting and praying, waiting for the Messiah to come. **(Luke 2:36-36)**
- The Magi, coming to Jerusalem seeking the baby, and disobeying Herod's instruction after it is revealed what his true intentions were by the Holy Spirit.
- God's Word is full of everyday people, like you and me being used of God in times of uncertainty.
- What if we change the way we look at uncertainty, troubles, struggles and adversity differently?
- What if instead of looking at them as obstacles, what if we looked at them as opportunities? Opportunities to grow, to be stretched to trust into the Holy Spirit's leading of overcoming.
- What if our uncertainty was looked at as a God given opportunity for something bigger, better for God's glory.

Conclusion

Will you:

Look to God in uncertain times?

Listen to God in these uncertain times? Even if it puts you on the outside with relationships, or family? What if it makes you unpopular?

Trust and respond with obedience to God in these uncertain times?

Be ready for God to use in uncertain times?

Be ready, willing and available to be used of God in these uncertain days? This will interfere with your plans, desires and wants.

When we take an honest assessment of what the people in the first Christmas did compare to what we are asked, we aren't asked of much. Yet, we often ignore, disobey or choose to go the other way.

Look at how differently they handled uncertainty, struggle and adversity compared to how we do. Did they have a different God than we do? Or could it possibly be we depend too much on ourselves?

Most people like to believe in the gospel of Jesus for fire insurance, but they don't want the Lordship part of it. Can I say that it is inseparable? Jesus doesn't just save us from our sins and punishment,

and we return to our ways and only obey the things we want to. Jesus saves us, we repent (turn away) from our ways, our old life and He becomes the Lord of your life. He demands and deserves first place in our lives. He deserves to be the Lord and ruler of every aspect of your life. (finances, family, work, hobbies)

When we try to separate Savior from the Lord we are creating a false religion. A man-made religion. Jesus changes everything about you. Don't get me wrong it is a process, and everyone develops at a different pace, but He certainly changes everything.