

Day 1

MARY - TRUSTING IN GOD'S BEST FOR YOU

"Gabriel appeared to her and said, 'Greetings, favored woman! The Lord is with you!' Confused and disturbed, Mary tried to think what the angel could mean. 'Don't be afraid, Mary,' the angel told her, 'for you have found favor with God! You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name Him Jesus. He will be very great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give Him the throne of his ancestor David. And He will reign over Israel forever; His Kingdom will never end!'"

Luke 1:28-33

How would you respond if someone told you that you were going to be responsible for raising the most important person to ever walk this earth? Excited? Nervous? Confused?

Mary was probably feeling all of those things - and more. Receiving the news that you would be the parent of Jesus, the promised Savior of the world, would understandably cause a mixture of emotions. After all, Mary was just a young girl from a small town called Bethlehem; she wasn't rich, powerful, or popular - maybe the most unlikely person to be the mother of Jesus. And yet, God chose her. Why?

God chose Mary because of her response: "Mary responded, 'I am the Lord's servant. May everything you have said about me come true.'" Regardless of her feelings in the moment, Mary trusted in God's best for her; she trusted that His plan for her was better than anything she would ever dream up for herself.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

- How would you have responded if you were in Mary's situation?
- What do you think it means that Jesus has a "best" for you?
- Is there anything in your life that makes it hard to trust that Jesus has a best for you?

Day 2

DAY 2: JOSEPH - OBEDIENCE, EVEN WHEN IT'S HARD

"As he considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. 'Joseph, son of David,' the angel said, 'do not be afraid take Mary as your wife. For the child within her was conceived by the Holy Spirit. And she will have a son, and you are to name Him Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.' ... When Joseph woke up, he did exactly as the angel of the Lord commanded and took Mary as his wife."

Matthew 1:20-21; 24

What comes to mind when you think of the word, "obedience?"

Joseph was obedient; he was asked to trust that Mary had indeed become pregnant through the power of the Holy Spirit. He was asked to care for and protect Mary and Jesus. On multiple occasions, Joseph was asked to get up and flee in order to protect his family. Each time more was requested of him, he responded immediately and did what was asked.

Obedience isn't just about following rules - it's about trust. Obedience means trusting in the moment because you know that someone wants the best for you. Joseph had lots of opportunities to walk away, but instead chose to stick by Mary and Jesus because he knew that what God had asked him to do was more important and more fulfilling than what he wanted.

God wants us to have the best life ever. But that means trusting Him enough to obey what He wants for us in the moment, even when it's hard or we want something different.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

- What does the word "obedience" mean to you?
- Is it easy or hard for you to obey Jesus?
- None of us will ever be perfect, but what do you think your life would look like if you obeyed Jesus 100% of the time?

Day 3

DAY 3: THE SHEPHERDS – GOOD NEWS TO THE LEAST OF THESE

“That night there were shepherds staying in the fields nearby, guarding their flocks of sheep. Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared among them, and the radiance of the Lord’s glory surrounded them. They were terrified, but the angel reassured them. “Don’t be afraid!” he said. “I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people. The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David!”

Luke 2:8-11

What’s the best news you’ve ever gotten?

The night of Jesus’ birth, the shepherds were the first to hear that Jesus, the Savior, had been born. We’ve heard this story so many times that sometimes we don’t pause to think about how strange this was. Normally, if a king arrived in a city, you would expect all of the nobles and important people to be the first to know and be ready to greet him – all of the people that were “insiders” would be expected to be there.

But the angels chose to tell the shepherds. The shepherds spent a lot of time outdoors with animals, which meant that they were probably dirty, a little smelly, and maybe even a little awkward. They were far from proper, put together, or clean. The shepherds were outsiders, which is exactly the reason why they were chosen to receive and spread the news that Jesus had been born!

Jesus came for the improper, messy, unclean, broken, and lost. He came to be the Savior of all mankind, not just the people who have it all together. The shepherds were chosen because they, like us, were accepted, valued, and loved as they were, not as they were supposed to be.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

- Why didn’t the news of Jesus’ birth reach the religious leaders first?
- How do you think you would have responded if a group of angels came to tell you that the Savior of the world had just been born?
- How do you think Jesus sees you? Is it different from the way you see yourself?

Day 4

DAY 4: THE ANGELS - JOY TO THE WORLD

“Don’t be afraid!” he said. ‘I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people. The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David! And you will recognize him by this sign: You will find a baby wrapped snugly in strips of cloth, lying in a manger.’ Suddenly, the angel was joined by a vast host of others—the armies of heaven—praising God and saying, ‘Glory to God in highest heaven, and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased.’”

Luke 2:10-14

The angels were overjoyed on the day of Jesus’ birth. This was the day they had been waiting for. This was the history-separating day that they had looked forward to for what must have felt like an eternity. This was the day that all of history had been pointing towards and that all of history would point back to from there on out.

To the angels, Jesus’ birthday was a day of joy and excitement. Anyone they came into contact with, like the shepherds, would have been able to hear the joy in their voices and see it in their actions. But they didn’t want to keep this joy to themselves – they set out to share it. They had news that was going to bring joy to all people.

Like the angels, we have a joy that we can share with others. When we have a relationship with Jesus, He gives us a joy that not even the hardest circumstances can extinguish. Christmas is an opportunity to share that joy with the people we know!

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

- Do you think that joy and happiness are different? How so?
- Do you feel joy right now?
- How can being close with Jesus bring us joy?

Day 5

DAY 5: THE WISEMEN - HAVING HOPE IN GOD'S PROMISES

"After this interview the wise men went their way. And the star they had seen in the east guided them to Bethlehem. It went ahead of them and stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were filled with joy! They entered the house and saw the child with his mother, Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasure chests and gave him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh."

Matthew 2:9-11

Have you ever made a promise to someone? Did you keep or break that promise?

For us, promises can sometimes be hard to keep. But God follows through on every single one of His promises. In fact, God makes over 8,000 promises in the Bible. A lot of these promises pointed towards the idea that one day a Savior would come to rescue the world from sin and make a way for all people to know God and be in a relationship with Him.

The wisemen were experts in God's promises, as they were well trained and knowledgeable in the Scriptures. The promise of the coming Savior, or Messiah, was the promise that they had been waiting and hoping for. This was the promise that they could come back to when they felt like the world around them was chaotic, or when things felt hopeless. This was the promise that gave them hope.

God's promises to us can be a source of hope as well. These promises can act like anchors, so that even when life around us feels stormy, we can stand firm in His promises to us.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

- What are some promises that God has made to you from the Bible?
- Are there promises that give you hope?
- What promises do you hold onto when things are hard?

Day 6

DAY 6: THE INNKEEPER – DO YOU HAVE ROOM FOR JESUS?

“And while they were there, the time came for her baby to be born. She gave birth to her first child, a son. She wrapped Him snugly in strips of cloth and laid Him in a manger, because there was no lodging available for them.”

Luke 2:6-7

Fun fact: there is actually no record of an innkeeper as a character in the Christmas story. Surprised?

The Bible doesn't talk about the innkeeper. However, we do know that when Joseph and a very pregnant Mary went to Bethlehem, there was no room available for them to stay in. Instead, they had to stay in a stable with the animals.

Hospitality was an important trait in those days, so taking care of guests was a top priority. To reject a pregnant woman and her husband would have been inconsiderate and rude – it still would be today! Refusing to allow them to stay would have been communicating that the homeowner or innkeeper's time, money, space, and resources were more important than Mary, Joseph, or Jesus. It meant that they were not a priority.

Did you know that we sometimes do the same thing to Jesus? Jesus wants to be in a relationship with us, and that means making Him our number one priority. He isn't just one of many aspects in our lives, He is the core part of our lives that influences every other part. But sometimes we make our sports, friends, boyfriend or girlfriend, or other things a higher priority than Jesus. When we push Jesus down in our priority list, we push His influence out of our lives as well.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

- Do you feel like Jesus is your top priority in your life, or just one of many?
- Why do you think making Jesus low in our priority list limits His influence in our life?
- How do you think you can make more room for Jesus in your life?

Day 7

DAY 7: KING HEROD - REFUSING TO HAND OVER THE CROWN

"Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We saw his star as it rose, and we have come to worship him." King Herod was deeply disturbed when he heard this, as was everyone in Jerusalem. He called a meeting of the leading priests and teachers of religious law and asked, 'Where is the Messiah supposed to be born?'"

Matthew 2:2-4

King Herod - one of the "bad guys" in the Christmas story. At the time, Herod was the King of Judea, so when He heard rumors that a child had just been born who was supposed to be the new King, he became fearful and jealous. He became so obsessed with keeping his throne that he even tells the wisemen to report back when they discover who the new king is so that he can have him killed.

Herod liked having the crown. Having the crown meant that he was in charge and he had the power to make whatever decisions he wanted. In the same way, a lot of us like to have the crown in our own lives -to make our own choices, do whatever we want, and follow our own direction throughout life.

But when we invite Jesus to become a part of our lives, we invite Him to take our crown as the King of our heart. When we choose to follow Him, we follow His lead and make choices based on what He wants for us, rather than what we want for ourselves.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

- Do you ever feel like you have trouble handing over your "crown" to Jesus?
- What is the hardest thing to let Jesus take control of in your life?
- Why do you think it can be difficult to choose Jesus' way over our own way sometimes?

Day 8

DAY 8: JESUS, IMMANUEL

"Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet: 'Behold, the virgin shall be with child and shall bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,' which translated means, 'God with us.'"

Matthew 1:22-23

Some of the most significant words in the Bible: God with us.

In every other religion in the world, god or gods are far away, distant, and removed. Humans have to try hard to become good enough to reach them. Those gods are gods away from us.

But Jesus is God with us. Jesus came to earth and experienced everything that we experience. He felt pain, heartbreak, loneliness, and betrayal. Jesus felt everything we feel. God with us means that we can always turn to Jesus for help, and He will always be there. It means that Jesus goes through everything with us, that He feels what we feel, and that we never have to go through anything alone.

This also means that at any point, no matter how far away from Jesus we may feel, we can always turn back to him and walk back into His arms. Jesus is as close as the air that we breath.

Jesus is God with us.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

- Have you ever felt far away from Jesus?
- What do you think it says about how Jesus feels about you that He is willing to experience everything alongside you?
- If you feel far from Jesus today, spend some time praying and connecting with Him.

Day 9

DAY 9: JESUS, MESSIAH

"Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared among them, and the radiance of the Lord's glory surrounded them. They were terrified, but the angel reassured them. 'Don't be afraid!' he said. 'I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people. The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David!'"

Luke 2:9-11

If you've grown up around the Church, you've probably heard the word "Messiah," or Savior. Ever since the first act of sin was committed by Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, people had been waiting for their Messiah - the one who would come to save humanity from itself and remove the poison of sin and death forever. The angels were excited because Jesus was that Messiah. He came to set the world right and fix everything that was broken.

We are broken people - we make mistakes and say things we shouldn't, think things we shouldn't, and do things we shouldn't. That's why it's such good news that Jesus is our Messiah. He came to save you. He came to erase your sin so that you could have a relationship with Him.

We are free because Jesus is our Messiah.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

- Do you feel like you need a Savior - why or why not?
- Is it hard for you to remember that Jesus didn't just come to save the world, but He came to save you, specifically?
- What do you think it means that we're "free" when we invite Jesus into our life?

Day 10

DAY 10: JESUS, KING

"For a child is born to us, a son is given to us. The government will rest on his shoulders. And he will be called: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace. His government and its peace will never end. He will rule with fairness and justice from the throne of his ancestor David for all eternity."

Isaiah 9:6-7

Jesus is a different kind of king. Kings are sort of a foreign concept for us in America, but normally when someone becomes king, it's a very regal and fancy circumstance. There are huge parties, the king might receive a crown and a scepter, and he probably lives in a large palace. But Jesus didn't have any of that.

Jesus wasn't born in a palace or wrapped in fine robes. He wasn't greeted by rich and powerful people. Jesus was born in a stable, surrounded by livestock. He was wrapped in strips of cloth - the only thing available. His birth was the ultimate symbol for who He is and what His purpose is.

Jesus didn't come to earth to gain earthly power and riches. He didn't come to be served by Man. He came to serve - to give His life so that even the most broken people would be able to experience a new life in His kingdom; a kingdom defined by love, purpose, and healing.

Jesus is the King.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

- What do you think of when you think of a king?
- What does it mean that Jesus is the King of Kings?
- How do you think it affects your life to acknowledge that Jesus is King?