

**Brackenhurst Methodist Church 21 Dec 08 am baptism**  
**The Annunciation to Mary**

**Welcome & Notices**

**Call to Worship**

**Scripture:**

1 Cor 1:26-31

Luke 1:26-38

**Message**

**INTRODUCTION**

- As we get to the end of one year and the beginning of another I think that for many of us this past year has been a difficult one
  - And so Christmas brings with it a mixture of emotions
- Perhaps on the one hand the joy and celebration that goes with the season
  - And a hope that things will be different
  - As we sing about in so many of our carols
    - \* The hope that the birth of the Christ-Child brings
    - \* The new dawn
- And yet on the other hand perhaps the cynicism of having celebrated Christmas for years and years
  - Sung the same songs
  - gone into the new year with new hope
    - \* And yet nothing has really changed
- And we may well wonder where is Jesus, God with us, who was supposed to have changed everything
  - Has Jesus really made a difference in our lives, our community, our world?
- Like the two little boys who were well known in town for causing all sorts of mischief.
  - In desperation their mother takes them to the local priest to sort them out
    - \* So the priest calls the elder one in, sits him down, and says, “Johnny, where is God?”
  - He stays dead silent, not quiet sure what this is all about.
    - \* The priest asks again, “Johnny, where is God?”
  - He just looks at this man in awe
    - \* The priest in desperation asks a third time, “Johnny, where is God?”

- Johnny jumps up, flees from the room and grabs his little brother on the way out.
  - \* He says, “We’ve got to get out of here — they’ve lost God, and now they think we’ve taken him”
- Many times, I think, we’ve lost Jesus, we don’t know what difference he makes, and we certainly don’t know how he is going to make a difference in the various crises that we face
  - In the world
  - and also in our own lives
- Yet we continue to seek — and this is important — we bring our children to be baptised, we go through the motions and ritual and the Christmas carols hoping to find that answer that we are convinced lies just below the surface
  - Hoping to find the new dawn that we sing about
- Now there was a new dawn about 2000 years ago at the birth of Jesus “fairy tale”
  - There was a time when everything changed
    - \* When the Old Covenant become the New
- When God who was seen up there and distant came down here and accessible
  - When God came to dwell among us and became someone we could relate to.
    - \* How are we going to experience that today?
- How in our many varied circumstances are we going to allow the presence of God as expressed in Jesus Christ to transform the way we live?
  - I believe that whatever change we need to see has to begin with us
- Our political leaders aren’t going to change anything
  - We need to be the change that we want to see
- Parents, you have brought your children here this morning to be baptised because you want them to be a part of this community and you want them to embrace the change that is offered in Jesus
  - As a church community we have promised that we will provide a place in which to raise children who will see things differently and be change agents in the world
- But none of that is going to happen unless we are intentional about what we are called to be and do
  - And I want to suggest this morning that if we want to see change, we need to be as Mary, we need to learn from her example
- See, as powerful as God is, the only way he could be born into a human life was through the willingness of a human woman, a girl.
  - So today I want to look at what we can learn from Mary, and will be doing that using the letters of her name

## (1) Maiden

- The M stands for maiden, and that has nothing to do with her status as a woman.
  - Rather, it has to do with her place in society
- Let's look at who she was
  - She was probably a peasant girl, some suggest as young as 13 years old
    - \* Engaged to be married to Joseph, a carpenter — and there is discussion about whether Joseph was a travelling woodworker or a more prosperous builder
- But clearly she had nothing to offer, a young girl of low station, little better than a slave
  - came only with a womb and husband to be who may well have broken off the engagement when he discovered that she was pregnant
- In those days, in that society, a maiden was someone with no status, with nothing to offer
  - And a pregnant maiden would only have been lower down the food chain
- Did you hear earlier what Paul said about being called by God?
  - “not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things — and the things that are not — to nullify the things that are.” 1 Cor 1:26-27
- Listen to this: When God chooses to come to earth, when God chooses to make himself known as a human, when God chooses to reveal himself as Jesus
  - He does not come born into the royal household, he does not come into the household of the most zealous Pharisee, he is not born into the household of the wisest Greek philosopher
    - \* He chooses the very lowest of positions — a pregnant Jewish maiden
- A new dawning our society and a tangible presence of Jesus in the world does not depend on our leaders, but depends on us who are willing to bear the Christ child
  - Not as a King or a queen
  - Not as a doctor or a lawyer
- But only when we come before God — not with answers — but as who we are
  - Sometimes we are reluctant to respond to God because of feeling worthless!
- And that's right — servants are worthless, and yet so often it is servants that God uses to bring about change in the world
  - We come to God empty with no pretences.
- And that's when we'll discover the angel saying, “you have found favour with God”

- And that's when Jesus begins to manifest through us

## (2) A vailable

- When we go back to the story and as we immerse ourselves in the dialogue and the conversation that happens we discover something that is so important in building a transformed world, a transformed nation, a transformed family
  - Mary was available
    - \* When God asked, she was there and available to be used by God
- This is how she responded to God's request through the angel Gabriel:  
"I am the Lord's servant. May it be to me as you have said."
- One of the things that I do as a minister is weddings, and these women start planning their weddings years before
  - I think girls start planning their weddings from the day they understand the concept of marriage
    - \* But when there is actually a man, and a date has been set then everything goes into overdrive and no one — with possible exception of her mother dares interfere!
- Mary could have said, "I'm sorry — I have other stuff to do."
  - "I'm too busy. I'm engaged to Joseph, I have a wedding to plan."
- But she chose to be available
  - And not just available to slot in an extra hour a week, but available for a task that could well have — probably did — totally mess up all her wedding plans
    - \* There's a commitment in that that we need to recover
- A commitment to the worthwhile stuff in life, rather than the fluff — the stuff that keeps us busy for the sake of busyness
  - And it seems to me that it is this other stuff, very often, that makes the world a messy place
    - \* We got so busy with the wrong stuff, and miss out on the important stuff
    - \* Wrong priorities
- Parents — don't allow yourselves to get so caught up in many other things that you miss your children growing up
  - The most important thing that you can do is be available for them
    - \* Don't allow the urgent to crowd out the important
- Mary was willing to say, "Here I am, let it be as you have said"
  - She was available

## (3) R eady

- And she wasn't just available to do as God wanted, but she was ready to do what God required of her as well
  - And I think that there's a difference
- Think for a moment of an army.
  - There are many people who are willing, there are many people who are available to serve in the defence force of a country
    - \* But it is only once their training has been completed that the soldiers will be described as being battle-ready
- We are often available to God, often we'll say here I am. Send me!
  - Until we discover exactly where it is that God wants to send us to!
    - \* Until we are asked to do something that takes us out of our comfort zone.
- Then suddenly we're not so ready any more
  - Lord, I'm not up to it!
  - Send someone else!
    - \* There must be someone who is better qualified
- We doubt ourselves, yet to go back to what Paul wrote to the Corinthian Christ followers:
  - “Not many were wise or influential or of noble birth...”
- The people Paul was writing to were not ready in terms of the world's standards of readiness
  - But they were ready in their spirits to do what God wanted them to do
- Must have been tempting for Mary to want to do her own thing, and not to set herself up for this very challenging role in history as the mother of God.
  - Imagine what she was setting herself up for
    - \* at the very best a very, very difficult and challenging life
    - \* at the worst perhaps even being stoned for adultery
- Yet even as she makes herself available, she is also ready to be obedient, regardless of the cost to herself
  - she doesn't try to put it off for another time
  - And remember the words Gabriel: “Nothing is impossible for God” (Lk1:37)
- Mary was ready

#### **(4) Yearning**

- Then, finally, Mary had a yearning to do what God wanted
  - She had an earnestness and a desire to do the task which God had called her to properly - even seeing her son to the cross
- Kipling, in his poem *IF*, writes this:

If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster  
And treat those two impostors just the same;  
If you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken  
Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools,  
Or watch the things you gave your life to, broken,  
And stoop and build 'em up with worn-out tools

- Man, I don't know, can't even begin to imagine what it must have like for Mary raising a son like Jesus
  - Raising God
- Watching him grow up, watching him begin to minister, listening to him speak and seeing the miracles
  - And then watching as he goes to the cross
- This child, that she had given her life for (wasn't a six week commitment)
  - Given up a normal existence for, wrecked her wedding plans for
    - \* broken on the cross
  - I don't know what she thought or what she felt — probably anger
- I don't know if she knew what it was going to be like from the beginning, or if every step on the journey was new and unexpected
  - But I do believe that she had a desire to do the task that God had called her to to the absolute best of her ability
    - \* We read in 2:19, after Jesus had been born, "Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart."
    - \* And in 2:51, after the boy was found teaching in the temple, "But his mother treasured all these things in her heart"
  - There was a yearning to see the calling that God had placed on her life fulfilled in the life of her son
- If we want to see the new dawn brought about by the incarnation of God in the person of Jesus
- If we want to see a new dawn in our country, in our homes, in our world
  - It's not enough to pray for it
  - It's not enough to hope for it
  - It's not enough to expect somebody else to do something to change our society
- My friends we need to desire it, we need to yearn for it, we need to treasure the dream that God has given us and do our best to bring it to maturity
  - Not somebody else, you and me
- Even though there will be times when we will see these same things broken and we will need to stoop and build them up with worn out tools

- Even though there will be times when things seem hopeless
- Even though there will be times when the night is dark, and dawn seems impossibly far away
- We need to have a yearning for what is right, to see to fruition the dream that God has placed in us

## CONCLUSION

- I've been speaking to all of us, but especially to those who have brought children here this morning to be baptised
  - You have brought them to be a part of this community
  - You have brought so that they can grow knowing what it means to follow Jesus
- We have promised that we will do our best to support you, and encourage them in that role
  - The role of working for a society that is transformed more and more into the likeness of God's kingdom
    - \* The role of making God visible in the world
- That means teaching them to come to God just as they are
  - even as we come ourselves
- It means teaching them to make themselves available when they hear God's call
  - just as we make ourselves available
- It means ensuring that they are not just available, but ready to respond even when it will bring discomfort
  - Even as we are willing to give up our comforts for the sake of the kingdom
- And it means instilling in them a deep desire and yearning to be a part of fulfilling God's plan for this wonderful mixed up creation
  - Even as we ourselves cry out together with all of creation as we await our redemption (Rom 8:22-23)
- And in this way, I believe, we will begin to see the new dawn arrive
  - In this way we will see the Christ born anew into every situation, and we won't have to ask, "Where is God?"
- In this way we will see our lives and our communities begin to change
  - Not in a new political party or dispensation
- But in the promise of a God who allows himself to be born into this world when people offer themselves up to do his bidding, even as Mary did.
  - May it be so for you, even as it is for me.
- Amen