Title: Not What I Expected

Scripture: Isaiah 9:6-7 / Luke 1-2

Now most of you know my daughter Lily and that most of the time she is ahead of the curve from when she started walking, to fashion, to decor. But most of you don’t know her birth story, she started that ahead of the curve too.

When I was five months pregnant she decided she was ready to be born. We are so thankful for modern medication that stopped her. Then at seven months I was feeling pretty good, so Steve started out on a snowmobile trip with some friends, about three hours into their drive north, he got a disruptive phone call, I was in labor again. That put me on bedrest. During this time we started to get a bit worried that a normal birth story was not going to be in our future. Just before we hit 8 months the doctors quit arguing with her. Now to say my pregnancy was not what I expected is putting it mildly and I am going to guess Jesus and his birth story was not what Mary was expecting either. To add another layer on to that he wasn’t what the Jewish people were expecting either.

The Christmas story is full of people who weren’t expecting God to come to earth as a baby. The Jews were expecting a Messiah. They expected someone who would be a king — who would ride into Jerusalem in a chariot of fire, overthrow the Roman Empire, and place Israel over all the nations. They expected a warrior surrounded by angels. They expected someone who would judge the wicked and bring down the mighty. They prayed for their King.

In a small village a young Jewish girl was also praying. She was expecting to get married and start a family. Mary wasn’t expecting to have a baby who would be the Son of God. No one was expecting God to send a baby. The Christmas story really is an unusual story, an unexpected way for God to connect with His people and the world. Today we are going to take a look at that story.

Luke 1:26-27 “In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin’s name was Mary.”

The first thing we learn about Mary from the scripture is that Mary was engaged to be married and that she was a virgin. This point was actually understood back in ancient Israel, as the Mosaic Law was very clear regarding the details of the betrothal period, though the engaged couple was legally married, no sexual relations could take place for a period of 1 year. Mary was probably about 13 years old when her parents arranged for her to marry Joseph.

We also learn that Mary’s fiance was a direct descendant of King David. Later on in scripture we learn Mary was also a descendant of David. This is a critical point as the prophecies regarding the Messiah, that we read earlier, foretold that he would be born of David’s lineage. So the prophecy was about to be fulfilled in Mary.

Now we are going to Jump ahead in the scriptures to Luke 1:29 right after the angel Gabriel had spoken to Mary. “Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be.”

Mary was confused. She was dumbfounded wouldn’t you be if there is an angel in your room talking to you. Nowadays you can almost hear the teenage response “Are you talking to me?” Maybe the angel had gotten her confused with somebody else? Mary couldn’t imagine why she of all people would be visited by an angel or in what manner she was “highly favored”.

Verses 30-33: “The angel said to her, “﻿Do not be afraid, Mary; for you have found favor with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name 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 the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.”

Wow! Now that’s quite a promise! I don’t think this is how she expected her life to go. How is a young girl (like Mary) equipped to handle this? Mary said “MAY IT BE with me according to your word.” Mary, without hesitation, responded positively to God.

Mary didn’t have to think about it. She didn’t tell the angel that she’d get back to him….that she needed to sleep on it. No. Without hesitation she answered “let it be to me as you have said”. She gave no thought for herself, her plans, her problems. She simply said “yes” to the unexpected.

Luke 1:38: “Then Mary said, “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.” Then the angel departed from her.”

But I can’t help but wonder how I might have responded? “So, this is how you treat your “highly favored``? Allowing my life to face hardship…misunderstanding? Couldn’t you get everyone on board first?…Maybe remove the rough spots…get rid of the resistance?

These are expectations we might all have at Christmas when we consider God’s presence in our current circumstances which is what makes Mary’s response even more striking…v 38 “I am the Lord’s servant,” Mary answered. “May it be to me as you have said.” Mary didn’t let the fact that trouble was sure to come her way deter her from accepting God’s will for her life. And believe me; she knew there would be trouble.

Put yourself in Mary’s place. Can you imagine having a child at the AGE OF 13? But not just any old child but God’s Son? Can you imagine knowing you will be talked about, laughed at, sneered at?

I mean GOD DISRUPTS HER PLANS FOR HER LIFE ENTIRELY! She’s “pledged to be married” to Joseph. The traditional Jewish one year waiting period had already begun. This “engagement” would last one year and was as binding as marriage itself…in fact it required a divorce to free one from this pledge…which is just what one could expect if they were to be found pregnant. So here she is, enjoying the most cherished plans of one's entire life…the point in her life when she’s the center of her family and friends attention…the bride-to-be! NOW SHE IS TO BE THE CENTER OF THEIR SHAME AND SCORN. Not quite the life she was expecting.

So I have to ask myself, am I like Mary? Just how sacred are my plans? Do I presume God will honor them? Do I secretly expect that I can enjoy God’s presence in my life on my terms? Without being disrupted? Mary learned otherwise. Mary learned that THAT THE PRESENCE OF GOD IN OUR LIFE IS BY NATURE…DISRUPTIVE.

As believers in Christ we often want to know what God’s plan is for our lives. We pray about it, study God’s Word to see it, and sometimes we are left confused and without answers. I do not think Mary asked God to choose her to bring the Messiah into the world. Gabriel has shown up in her life at God’s command, identified himself, is about to address her in a way that is completely astounding, and with a plan that seems virtually impossible.

When God’s plan is revealed in our lives, we may think it’s an impossibility, but when God’s will is made clear in life and we obey, nothing is impossible. As the divine plan is set in motion, the specifics of that plan are communicated and explained.

Many times, God shows up with his plan when we least expect it to arrive. When God’s plan arrives, it may not be with neon signs but in calm quietness. We must learn to listen and hear what God is saying. This is why prayer is so important. We can’t hear God if we are not in conversation with Him to start with.

Let's look back at the conversation between Mary and Gabriel. Luke 1:31-33: “31 Look! You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. 32 He will be great and he will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of David, his father. 33 He will rule over Jacob’s house forever, and there will be no end to his kingdom.”

If Mary wasn’t sitting down prior to Gabriel showing up, she may have at this moment. Still uncertain about how this will come to be, she asks Gabriel how this can even be possible since she is a virgin. Gabriel explains how this will happen, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God” (Luke 1:35). This clarifying statement sets Jesus’s birth story apart from any other human being ever born. His was a divine conception and not a human conception. While Jesus will be born as every human being is born, he will live in perfection as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

As we continue to look for the unexpected in the Christmas story. We also take a look at Joseph. I am sure having his fiance say I am pregnant with God's son was not what he was expecting! We have to make a quick detour to the book of Mathew to see how Joseph responded to God’s disruptive plans for his life. Matthew 1:19-24 “Because Joseph, her husband, was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly. But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.” All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: “The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel”. When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife.”

Talk about a disruption, Joseph knows what this will look like to his family, friends and community. He knows there will be talk, anger, and shame. But, Joseph, like Mary, accepts God’s plan for his life. He doesn’t try to argue or negotiate with God. He hears and trusts that this unexpected turn in his life will be used for God’s glory.

We see, in Luke 2:1-6, that God continued to choose an unexpected birth story for Mary in the place God chose for Jesus to enter the world. “In those days Caesar Augustus declared that everyone throughout the empire should be enrolled in the tax lists. This first enrollment occurred when Quirinius governed Syria. Everyone went to their own cities to be enrolled. Since Joseph belonged to David’s house and family line, he went up from the city of Nazareth in Galilee to David’s city, called Bethlehem, in Judea. He went to be enrolled together with Mary, who was promised to him in marriage and who was pregnant. While they were there, the time came for Mary to have her baby.” Keep in mind Mary was pregnant. Now gentlemen if you were God, do you think it would be a good idea to send a pregnant woman 70 miles away by walking or on the back of a donkey? Ladies, if you were pregnant would you like doing it? In Luke 2:7, we discover that the place they ended up wasn’t even fancy, it was probably more than a little uncomfortable. It was out in the back 40, a stable, a cave. But this is exactly what God did. God will often do things that appear to us to be inconvenient. But often there is a good reason behind it.

How often do we sit around waiting for God to show up? As believers, we need to consider the times God did show up, but we either failed to see because it was not a dramatic revelation, or we failed to obey because it wasn’t what we expected. God’s will is not always discovered in dramatic invitation, but instead through simple obedience. As we listen in prayer and obey the Lord and live transformed lives, we will be able to discern the will of God.

As we have seen in Mary’s story, her invitation comes from one who stands in the presence of God. God may be showing you exactly what he wants you to do, but in your mind, you believe the task is impossible and you continue looking. Perhaps that impossible task that you sense you need to do, may in fact be that dramatic invitation from the Lord to partner in His will.

As we seek the Lord through prayer and through reading his Word, we need to ask God to make us sensitive to his leading in life, no matter how difficult the task may seem. We must contemplate the words of Gabriel to Mary, “with God, nothing is impossible.” Mary took the words of Gabriel and was obedient to be what God called her to be. She was able to personally watch the impossible become possible. As Steve and I watched that little preemie come into this world, health and strong, we realized God had a hand over her long before we did. Christmas reminds us that God does some very unexpected things and works in some very unexpected ways. In the same way, expect God to work in unexpected ways in your life. Maybe God will challenge you with new directions in your life; Maybe give you peace and hope in what seems to be a hopeless situation: Maybe he will challenge you to restore a relationship; Maybe he will challenge you to reach out to a person you would never have reached out before; Christmas is a time where the unexpected happens. It’s where God turns hopelessness into hope. It’s where God turns despair into Joy. It’s where God defeats evil with good through the birth of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.

Benediction: May God bless your Christmas time again this year as you celebrate God’s love revealed in a baby wrapped in clothes lying in a manger. Go in Peace