

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.
Amen.

You may be seated. So we have some fairly familiar readings today for this Sunday. The first one that I'm going to talk about is from Luke, and we have the call of Mary or the announcement given to Mary that she is going to bear a child and that child is going to be a Savior. Now, we respect Mary and love Mary. She's a wonderful example of the faith of God in humanity. Now, we don't honor her in the same way that say the Roman Catholics do elevating her above the rest of humanity, but we do still respect her for how this all played out. Think about what happened to her. She's a young little girl, maybe 16, 17, maybe younger, maybe a little bit older, somewhere around there of marrying age in that culture in that time. And suddenly the angel appears and tells her that she is blessed by God and she's going to give birth to a child. That had to be a little bit frightening and terrifying. I mean, it says she was greatly troubled by the saint. Well, that's no big surprise. Pretty much any of us, when an angel shows up, ought to be a little bit troubled and concerned. Because when an angel shows up, it is not like the image we see on a Hallmark card with a sweet looking face cherubic and really light and gentle and sort of fuzzy on the sides, something that you might just want to hang out with. No, that is not what an angel is like. An angel sees and is in presence of the glory of God. And when an angel shows up, in essence, the reflection of the glory of God shows up as well.

Like Moses, after he came down from the mountain with the 10 Commandments, his faith glowed for the rest of his life as being in the presence of just the back side of the glory of God. So an angel is in the presence of God, and then he shows up with you. Yeah, you are going to be terrified, as you should be. This is the proper response because this angel is bringing the glory of God with them.

And with all of that going on, this young girl who finds out the Holy Spirit is going to come upon her and she's going to give birth to a child, even though she's a virgin, how does she respond? "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord. Let it be to me according to your word." That is amazing faith. She was in the presence of the reflection of the glory of God, an angelic being that is so powerful that terrifies everybody whenever they show up and she says, "Okay, let it happen as you have said."

She trusted the word of God. It wasn't going to be easy for her, but she believed God's word was going to be true, and that is why we celebrate and respect Mary. Because she heard and believed. Same thing with Samuel. He's hearing the word of the Lord. He doesn't recognize it at first, but he hears the word of the Lord and what is his response when he finally figures out what's going on? Basically he says,

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"Speak, for your servant hears." In other words, God, whatever you're going to say, I'm going to listen and I'm going to do. Wow. These are wonderful examples of faith and they're also wonderful examples of service. The theme for the LWL is ready to serve. And both of these people are great examples of individuals who hear the word of God and respond with just such simple faith, ready to do what God has called them to do. Not knowing how it's going to all play out, but still ready to listen, ready to serve.

The theme of LWL is ready to serve, and we focus upon missions, but the fact of the matter is we're not focused upon missions as in missionaries like we typically think. Missionaries who go out to Africa, South America, Asia, somewhere else other than here, sell everything that they have and go minister somewhere. That's what we think of as traditional missionaries, but it's broader than that. And this is what we want to talk about today is that we all are called to focus on missions, on how we might participate in the mission of God here on Earth. How we might be filled with the spirit of God and his word, because quite frankly, the glory of God has shown up to you and to me. Maybe not in the same spectacular way that it did to Mary or Samuel, but still the glory of God nonetheless.

It's hidden. It's subdued, but it's still here. And the body and blood of our Savior in the Lord's Supper, in the waters of baptism where he promises to adopt us and seal us with his promises. In the words of absolution, in the reading of the scriptures, God is present in all of His glory right now today. It is not quite the same glory we might think, but in reality it is. The same glory that showed up to Mary, to Samuel, to everybody else is the same glory that shows up today. This is why we gathered together. This is why the first thing we do when God's glory shows up, everybody's afraid. Why?

Because God is perfect and we are not. And so we're terrified in the presence of God because God cannot be with anything that is unholy or unrighteous, and that is us. We are sinners. And so what do we do when we come into the sanctuary, into the presence of God? We confess our sins. We confess our sins because that is what hearing and knowing the name of Jesus does. What does Paul say? Every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. That's what we're doing. We're bowing and confessing that Jesus is Lord and we need his salvation.

But more than that, we are called to respond to that word. Now, you may not have a bright light coming and the glory of God coming telling you that you're going to give birth to a child or telling you that you're going to serve God or telling you to go to the mission field or something like that, but the glory of God is here and it is talking and speaking to you. Every time you open the scriptures, that is the glory of God with you. It is God himself speaking to you. And he has called us all to

respond as Mary does and as Samuel does, behold, I am your servant. Be to me according to your word. Let me serve you. Here I am, send me. Now, most of us are not going to go to Africa or South America or some other place and serve, but every single one of us are missionaries.

Every single one. Because every time we open our eyes, every time we draw breath, every interaction that we have with any individual, any thought that we have, is an opportunity for the glory of God to be present. For us to share in his love with those around him. In the Lord's prayer, we pray that his kingdom would come and that his will would be done on heaven and on earth. Well, how does his will be done here on earth? He works his will through us. We are the hands and feet of God to a nation, to a people who do not know him. And that is how we are to consider everything that we do, our vocations. Now, I'm wearing a robe and I'm preaching the word of God and it's very obvious that I am sent to proclaim the love of God to people.

But so are you. Whether you wear a robe or a business suit, whether you wear overalls and carry tools or whether you carry a briefcase or golf clubs or whatever else it might be that you're carrying around. Whatever you are, whatever your calling is, whatever you are living right now, that is where the glory of God has an opportunity to shine through. In every word you speak, in every thought you have, in every action you do, you are bringing the glory of God to your neighbor. Not in a bright shining light where everybody's terrified, but in the grace and mercy of the gospel, in the love of God, in the care that we have for one another. It's the same glory. It's just muted through us. It is the same service that Mary has to offer, the same service we have to offer.

We believe God's word and we seek to serve him in whatever way he has given us to serve. Not because we have to, not because we need to, not because he demands it or else, but because he has already saved us. He gave his life on the cross. He did not consider equality with man something to be grasped, but he emptied himself and became like us and obedient under death, even death on the cross so that we might know his glory and not be afraid. So that we might bow our knees and confess with our mouth that he's Lord. When we draw our last breath, be that in our own individual deaths or on the last day when he comes again, we will bow down quite literally and we will give glory to God. We will declare that he is king of all creation. We will confess that he is the Christ and the glory of God, but we will do it with joy.

We don't want anyone else to do it out of fear, so let us practice our faith. Let us allow the word of God to dwell in us richly that we might be strengthened, that we might be renewed. That we might be encouraged to be the hands and the feet of the Gospel wherever we might be, until the very last breath that we draw. Because he

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already loves us. He has already forgiven us. And what is that worth to us? How can we give a gift of thanks to him? We already know he doesn't need anything from us except our trust, our faith, and we demonstrate that in our giving, in our service, in our proclamation, in our love, in all that we do. We serve him because he loves us, because he has shown us his glory. The glory of the one and only son who humbled himself to forgive us our sins. May his grace and his mercy and his peace be and abide with you always now and forevermore unto life everlasting. Amen.