



*We show our love for God by
trusting that He will do the impossible*

Main Point:

The fourth Sunday of Advent focuses on the theme of 'Love'. There is no denying, love is woven right throughout the Christmas story. However, when we look closely at how Mary demonstrated her love for God, we find an example for us to follow in trusting God, being obedient to do what he says, and stepping out in faith that what God has promised he will surely bring to pass.

We live in a world that is besotted by love.

Whatever radio station you happen to tune into, you'll hear a love song playing.

If you turn on your TV, you'll find one romantic movie after movie on the program.

Even if you don't watch TV or listen to the radio, if you visit your local library, you'll find row upon row of romance novels stacked on the shelves.

John Paul Young was right when he wrote his well-known song,

"Love is in the air, everywhere I look around.
Love is in the air, every sight and every sound.

But, what is love actually?'

How does the emotion of love the world is utterly fixated upon differ from the love that God demonstrates toward us and how He describes love in His word?

When we think of 'love', we almost automatically associate it with the gushing emotion of deep and profound care for another.

Love is what motivates us to do things we would otherwise not do.

Love is what drives us to make a commitment to be faithful even until death.

Love is what compels us to sacrifice our own needs for the benefit of another.

However, as we look at how Mary demonstrated 'love', we see a completely different aspect of this popular emotion.

If we were to ask Jesus how he wants us to demonstrate the love we have for him, I wonder how he'd answer?

Would he say, 'I want you to come to church every Sunday without fail?'

Would he say, 'make sure you give lots of money to the church?'

Or, would he say, 'treat others as I have treated you?'

Sure ... such a question may provoke Jesus to answer in a myriad of ways.

However, I wonder if He would remind us of what He said, when His disciples asked Him a similar question. He told them,

"If you love me, you'll do what I command." (John 14:15)

We don't often associate 'love' with 'obedience' do we?

However, the more we watch how Mary responded when she encountered God's messenger, the more we learn how we too are to respond when God asks us to do something, that seems utterly impossible.

Many years ago, I read a book written by Henry and Richard Blackaby called "Experiencing God: Knowing and Doing the Will of God."

This book profoundly changed my life, as I learned the seven Biblical Realities of how we experience God in our life.

Now when I use the expression 'experience God' it unsettles some people.

However, the more we learn from how God interacted with people in His word, the more we realise that it is always God's will that we experience Him.

God desires that we know Him 'experientially' rather than just knowing Him with our minds, or mentally agreeing with a certain set of beliefs.

And one way to see this truth is through the life of Mary.

Mary's story is a powerful testimony that shows how we can demonstrate our love for God through having faith that partners with Him to do the impossible.

Let's work through the seven realities of how God desires we experience Him.

Reality 1. God is always at work around you.

The first is that we must acknowledge that God is always at work around us, even when we can't see it.

It is easy to become disillusioned, so much that we start thinking that although God created the world, He kind of abandon it to function on its own.

But the Bible clearly shows us that God has been actively involved in human affairs from the very beginning.

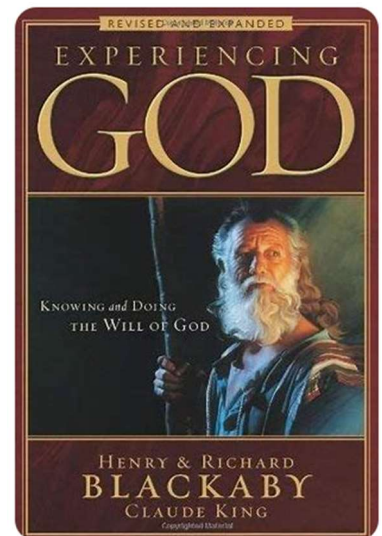
Consider what life was like for Mary before the angel visited her.

God's people were under Roman rule. It would have been easy for God's people to believe that God had deserted them, for there had been no prophet in the land for more than 400 hundred years. *(Note: Between the Malachi, the last book of the Old Testament and the angel visiting Zechariah, no Scripture was written, nor was any prophetic utterance heard. ... see Malachi 4:5-6)*

Yet, God was actively working, behind the scenes, orchestrating history, bringing about His plan of salvation for humanity.

At the right time, God chose a non-descript young girl, named Mary to play a pivotal role in His divine plan.

The first step of experiencing God is recognising that God is always at work around us, even when we don't see it.



Reality 2. God pursues a continuing love relationship with you that is real and personal.

Secondly, because God's character is love, He always pursues a love relationship with us, that is real, personal and experiential.

God's choice of Mary wasn't random; it was a profound expression of His love and personal relationship with her.

When the angel Gabriel greeted Mary, he said,

"You who are highly favoured! The Lord is with you" (Luke 1:28).

Doesn't this underscore God's gracious love towards Mary?

God didn't love Mary more than He loves each of us.

Although God's plan for Mary's life was pretty amazing, and I don't believe he'll call any of us to divinely give birth to a child, God is also pursuing us – so that we enter into a deep, personal relationship with Him, and experience His love in tangible ways.

Reality 3. God invites you to become involved with Him in His work.

Let's move on. God always invites His people to be involved with Him in His work.

We see this pattern again and again throughout history.

Whether it be God sending Abraham to leave his hometown, and become the father of an entirely new nation, or telling Moses he was to be his mouthpiece to stubborn Pharaoh – God always chooses to involve us in His work.

In Mary's case, God's invitation was clear and specific: she would conceive and give birth to Jesus, the Saviour of the world.

And despite her initial fear and confusion, Mary accepted God's invitation with faith:

"I am the Lord's servant...May your word to me be fulfilled" (Luke 1:38).

God similarly invites us to join Him in His work, and usually it will be in ways that stretch our faith.

Reality 4. God speaks by the Holy Spirit through the Bible, prayer, circumstances, and the church to reveal Himself, His purposes, and His ways.

Although Mary's encounter with Gabriel was through an angelic visitation, God still speaks to us in a myriad of ways.

The testimony of the Bible from Genesis to Revelation is abundantly clear: God speaks to His people.

Whether it be through the Holy Spirit using the Bible, personal prayer, our circumstances, and the faith community, God speaks to people because of His desire to enter into a loving relationship with you.

However, it's hard to love someone who is forever giving you the silent treatment!

That's not how God designed us to live. So, we need to be giving God plenty of opportunities to speak to us, so that we discern His voice and direction.

Reality 5. God's invitation for you to work with Him always leads you to a crisis of belief that requires faith and action.

However, the reality is, that God's invitation for you to work with Him will always lead you to a crisis of belief. God's call will always require faith and action, or a decision to obey or disobey what God is calling you to do.

For Mary, her acceptance of God's plan led to a significant crisis of belief.

She faced potential societal shame, misunderstanding, and talk about the challenge of raising the One who would bear the title "Son of God".

[show cartoon]

While it's a funny cartoon ... can you just imagine the pressure Mary was under?

However, Mary's response was a model of faith and obedience.

When God calls us to do something, we too will face a crises that challenges our belief, requiring us to step out in faith.

Reality 6. You must make major adjustments in your life to join God in what He is doing.

And when the decision is made to obey God's call, there will be major adjustments that need to be made.

Just as Mary's life was irrevocably changed, she had to adjust her expectations, her plans, and even her understanding of God's workings.

Joining God will usually require significant adjustments in our lives — He'll ask us to alter our priorities, lay aside our comforts, face our fears, forgo our well-designed plans so that we are aligned with His will.

Reality 7. You come to know and experience God as you obey Him, and He accomplishes His work through you.

Finally, because of her obedience, Mary experienced God's provision, strength, and presence in profound ways.

From the miracle of Jesus' birth to the support during His crucifixion, Mary's life was a testimony of God accomplishing His work through her.

As we obey God's call, we too will experience His power and presence, witnessing His miraculous work through us.

Application |

Mary's story invites us to reflect on how we can be ready to partner with God.

Like Mary, we are called to recognize God's work around us, respond to His love, accept His invitations, listen to His voice, confront crises of belief with faith, make necessary life adjustments, and ultimately experience God in powerful, transformative ways.

Let us show our love for God by being prepared to partner with Him, believing that through faith, He can achieve the impossible in and through us.

