

The Glory of Christmas
3rd Sunday of Advent: Mary

The word "glory" can also be translated as "weighty". What happened in Jesus' coming has a **weight, substance and importance to it**. It's not to be **taken lightly or trifled with**. This is the *Glory of Christmas*

Christmas time can also feel weighty for some but not in a good or "glorious" way.

- Pressure to get the **required good feeling** or expectation
- Not wanting to **disappoint people**
- Getting to everyone's house so **as not to offend**
- Financial **debt** accumulated
- Make the most of this because **winter will be long** and dark.
- **Grief is heavier** when someone isn't with you this time of year

This is the kind of weight that is oppressive. It is because something that God has **meant for good has been twisted or perverted**. It's the **opposite** of what God wanted us to experience when we recognize and celebrate his coming to earth.

Let's put it this way...**The true weight of Christmas is to be an anchor not an anvil**.

If we had lived a few hundred years ago this comparison or **contrast between an anchor and an anvil would be obvious**.

We know what an anchor is. ([Anchor Pic](#))

But most of us don't have need for a blacksmith therefore we might not know what an anvil is. This is what an anvil is and how it is used. ([Anvil pic](#)) You bring the red hot metal out of the fire and then you place it on the anvil where you beat it into the shape you want with a hammer.

People of my age who still didn't have a blacksmith in the neighborhood became familiar with what an anvil was. **How you ask?** It's because of **Saturday morning** cartoons. Specifically one called *The Roadrunner*. The

roadrunner is a type of bird that is really fleet of foot. In the cartoon version he is happy and says nothing more than "beep, beep". The bad guy is **Wile E Coyote** who goes to great lengths to try to catch and then eat the roadrunner. **His plans are intricate as you will see and his failures spectacular.** And many times the company "**Acme**" is involved. Apparently they were **Amazon before amazon.** And they didn't even need an address they could just deliver to some dirt road in some dusty canyon. Don't know if Wile E paid digitally or what.

For those who have never seen an anvil in action along with some **questionable physics** if offered for your **enjoyment and in this case edification, Wile E Coyote versus The Roadrunner with special guest the anvil.** ([Video](#))

As if the fall wasn't enough, it's the anvil that finishes him off. The anvil is the symbol for what finally crushes you. It's heavy. It stops you in your tracks from doing what you need to do.

Let me say it again, "**The true weight of Christmas is to be an anchor not an anvil.**"

An anchor keeps us from drifting. More specifically it keeps us from drifting away from **safety and into danger.** You drop the anchor from a boat when you **get to the right place and you want to stay there.** Drifting on the water can happen when you **don't feel it or notice it.** Then you realize you are **out in the current** or wind that is taking you into danger.

In our lives we get busy, distracted, take our eyes off the ball and start to drift into new patterns or currents that take us away from Jesus and in some cases into real danger for our souls.

The Glory or the weight of Christmas is an anchor to keep us where we need to be so that God can transform us, and work through us, reflecting the glory of Jesus.

Today we look at **Mary,** who had a lot of things that could **have felt like an anvil not an anchor.** She could have **felt adrift** in a situation that was incomprehensible to her.

²⁶ In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a village in Galilee, ²⁷ to a virgin named Mary. She was engaged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of King David. ²⁸ Gabriel appeared to her and said, "Greetings, **favored woman!** The Lord is with you!" Favored is not the word I would have chosen being in Mary's position.

²⁹ **Confused and disturbed**, Mary tried to think what the angel could mean. ³⁰ "Don't be afraid, Mary," the angel told her, "for you have **found favor with God!** ³¹ You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. ³² 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. ³³ And he will reign over Israel^[c] forever; his Kingdom will never end!"

³⁴ Mary asked the angel, "But how can this happen? I am a virgin."

³⁵ The angel replied, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the baby to be born will be holy, and he will be called the Son of God. ³⁶ What's more, your relative Elizabeth has become pregnant in her old age! People used to say she was barren, but she has conceived a son and is now in her sixth month. ³⁷ For the word of God will never fail.^[d]"

³⁸ Mary responded, "**I am the Lord's servant.** May everything you have said about me come true." And then the angel left her. Luke 1:26-38

How can all of this be interpreted as favored? It could be viewed more like a curse. "I'll follow the messiah, just don't choose me to be the one who actually the prophesied virgin who gives birth to him and raises him."

The 9 months building up to the first Christmas could have very easily been a very heavy even oppressive time.

Have you ever had a season like that where there was so much anxiety about something that was coming that it bordered on dread? That sense that what was coming was **both bad and out of your control to avoid.** Mary could have felt like there was this weight that she was carrying around

What weight could have crushed Mary?

Since my Quinten was killed from time to time I would get this feeling like someone is sitting on my chest. **It's a combination of that and anxiety.**

That is what **I imagine Mary could have felt** like for the next 9 months minimum.

I want to look at 2 different weighty, not glorious things happening to Mary that could crush her. We are going to look at **her response** to this weight. Here's the first...**1. Plans being changed, or blown up...**

There was a standard rule in youth ministry. Don't allow your students to see the schedule during a mission trip. Some cannot handle if something changes and on missions trips particularly in a large city or developing country because you have to stay flexible. Also not looking ahead keeps you **focused on the moment** and **keeps you from developing preconceived notions** about what is coming next

To quote the Great boxer **Mike Tyson**, "Everybody has a plan until you get punched in the face." **Mary had a plan and then she got punched in the face.** You are going to be pregnant and **everyone who sees you is going to assume the worst** is true and never imagine the best that it really is.

Don't think that this young woman, probably still in her teens, didn't have plans. She had imagined what it was going to be like to have a husband and the security that would bring her. **Women were completely dependent upon men** in that culture. **Marrying was about having a future, period.** But she also wanted to have a husband she could be proud of. She imagined kids and **probably a son** again because that would be more security for her and for the whole family.

What woman doesn't think about the home they want to have?
Neighbors and relatives to share time together.

When you have a picture of the future, you may not even be aware of it but you are making plans. The things we picture about the future tend to be **what we move toward.** It may not always be a developed plan but a plan it is.

Mary would have known these words. **¹¹ For I know the plans I have for you," says the LORD. "They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope. Jeremiah 29:11**

These are words of confirmation when what you planned as coming to pass. But in Mary's case this is not a confirmation of anything but complete left turn. These words do not take on an unintended consequence.

Now I have to see how this can be good. Not just good in general terms but good for Mary. Of course Messiah coming is going to be good for people but is it going to be good for Mary right now?

Sacrificing one for the many is good for the many but what about the one. Can't someone else be the one? Why does it have to be me?

® Therefore, the real plan is not being disrupted at all, the one that is based upon the reality of who God is and what his purposes are for this world. It's just my stuff that is getting changed or blown up. That means Mary can have a sense of security that is not based upon her, and how I think things are going to come to pass. It is based upon the One who has The Plan.

Or this one... That is what the Scriptures mean when they say, "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined what God has prepared for those who love him. 1 Corinthians 2:9"

I'm sure Mary is living this verse. She can't even imagine how this is what God has prepared for her, God's favored child.

In other words there's no way that we are going to actually get the plan right. We can't even imagine what God is orchestrating. And it is all because he loves people like us who can't seem to get it right.

What is Mary's response to her plans being busted up? Did she allow it to crush her? Instead Mary trusted before the way was clear

"If I could see it all I would say yes. No you wouldn't."

I like being in this season in life and ministry. It's really starting to get fun now. God has asked us to do some non-traditional, not particularly common things. We've stepped out in faith and this has really been a

blessing. **A second Cultivate, Sanford Cultivate** another bridge into another community from which disciples can make disciples. **The opportunity to do some coaching for others, who want to lead disciple-making churches. A possible 3rd Cultivate in Arkansas.** Two congregations **each are sacrificing some of what they want** to make this new one, Eagle Ridge Church of God Beaverton and Midland. **A sense of being the most effective and confident in my own skin** in the ministry that God has designed me for.

But if you were to tell me 30 years ago what it would take and what I'd have to live through, the heart ache, the suffering, the struggle, the stupid mistakes, the betrayal...I'm not sure if I could have handled seeing all of that and still move forward.

Mary, trust and wait for 9 months...and then wait until he comes into his mission.

The idea of trusting and waiting is all through scripture.

- The whole nation waited centuries for messiah
- Zachariah waited for a son who became John the Baptist who would later recognize Jesus as Messiah and baptize him.
- John waited for Jesus to become the promised Messiah his mother told him about.
- Simeon who waited for the Messiah and was able to see and hold him.

Trust, wait & then see God's glory.

Our human nature is to say, "Show me and I'll trust you." Jesus says I am good, "Trust me and I'll show you."

Trust in the LORD with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. ⁶ Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take. Proverbs 3:5-6

Not the whole map with the destination, but just the next path. It's like trusting your directions on your phone 1 step at a time.

What other weighty thing might crush Mary? **2. The responsibility for what will affect many...**

Mary being a young unmarried woman who is pregnant is going to affect those around her.

She cannot manage the perceptions of others. She is a powerless young woman in a male dominated society.

This has been a struggle for me that God is helping me with. **® Trying to make sure people see you the way you want is a very heavy responsibility.** I would say it's almost impossible. So much is lost in translation between one person to another. And in some cases someone may not be able to see me the way I want them to **because of what has happened in their life.**

Movie stars and public figures have someone whose whole job is this. They are called publicists. They try to spin everything that the person says and does to fit the image that this person wants to portray.

There's no way to spin this in a positive way for Mary. Who is going to believe her story?

Worldly level is how it will affect her life, Josephs and both of their families.

Who can she talk to or trust? This is heavy.

Now look at it on a larger scale. She is carrying the messiah in her womb. How could a teenaged girl or anyone for that matter **get their head around that?** The **single most important event in human history** depends on her fragile body. Every time she **felt a little sick,** every weird feeling could send panic. **What if I do something wrong and lose this baby?** It all depends on her. It's all resting on her shoulders. **What if I feed him the wrong thing?**

We could talk about the phrase forever when thinking about the weight of responsibility, **"what if I do something wrong."** Is that stopping you?

But she didn't respond this way...**Instead she demonstrates a proper view of God and self**

- God is good
- He sees the big picture
- He has thought this thing through
- He is faithful to those who trust him.

This is how Mary chooses to view God.

What about a proper view of self? Me on the other hand, my sight is foggy and short. I can't see clearly nor can I see what is far off. I lack a proper view of my limitation and power to affect situations the way God has and can.

This is about a King and His Kingdom. If I chose myself as a self-directed king then I get a kingdom fit for that type of King. But if I choose The King then I get his Kingdom that is expanding. It is coming on earth as it already is in heaven.

²⁹ Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light." Matthew 11:29-30

® Mary believed that this was the God she served. It's an anchor not an anvil.

® Do you have a proper view of yourself and of God? That will be the basis of your ability to handle your plans being blown up and the suffocating pressure that comes from realizing that you are affecting other people's lives.

You are causing ripples that affect others. But if you know that God is God and you aren't. If you know that there is a king with a real kingdom and that's not you then the pressure is off.

The Glory of Christmas grows out of the broken plans of unlikely people.

This is what it means to be favored, the object of God's grace and therefore his honor.

Following Mary following God

We are trying to follow God obediently and God in his wisdom has given us Mary as the most amazing example.

- Offer King Jesus your plans

(Introduce the response card)

This is a **tangible way** you can offer your plans to God. I'm challenging you to be specific. Offer your plan for **career and college**. God tweak this, change it or blow it up if there's something else you have for me, something better but maybe scarier. Maybe it's **retirement plans**. Maybe it's **plans for you kids**. Or possibly it's **what to do with your money**. You have a plan for something good to do with your money. Offering that to God is to say, "Here's what I have in mind for my money but it's yours so change it if there's something better."

Write a word or two on this page. **That makes it real. It doesn't mean you're tossing your plan out. No, you're making it bow to King Jesus.** It might be what God wants. You're still offering it.

I'm going to ask you to come forward and offer this by laying it down at the altar (or manger if that works). But before you set it down I want you to flip the card over and read Mary's response to God, "I am the Lord's servant. May everything you have said about me come true." Luke 1:38

Let's read something together that I want to send home with you. I'm going to read a promise from God that is for you and then you are going to follow Mary's response to the angel. It will be on the screen but we have something for you to take home to pray through.

Leader: ¹¹ For I know the plans I have for you," says the LORD. "They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope. Jeremiah 29:11

Congregation: "I am the Lord's servant. May everything you have said about me come true." Luke 1:38

Leader: ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light." Matthew 11:29-30

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