

Luke 1:26-55 sermon

Christmas Day 2010. Rev. Bruce Stanley

Sermon text and audio can be downloaded at www.waitara.anglican.asn.au

Merry Christmas! I hope you've had a great morning. Let me ask you – do you have a Christmas routine? Do you do the same routine every Christmas morning? ***Is this Christmas morning the same as last Christmas morning...?***

I was thinking about this last week. I was sitting in a Gloria Jean's cafe, drinking what some people might call coffee, and I read their sign and it got me thinking. Their sign says:

- ***“Escape the daily grind”***

I read that and it occurred to me that Christmas can be a bit of a grind. That we can end up doing the same things, with the same people, buying the same presents, putting up the same decorations. It can become a routine that might be a great routine, but after while, the Christmas routine might begin to lose some of its meaning.

As I sat there in the cafe, I looked around the shopping centre and all around me was the usual Christmas routine. Trees, decorations, advertising, presents, Santa charging \$400 for a photo with him, the fast, frantic pace! All the same old Christmas things as last year. And it felt like Christmas was a bit of a grind.

But of all the times of the year, Christmas should be one of the times we ***escape*** the daily grind of life. Because Christmas is a celebration of one of the most unusual events in history. Angels appearing, a pregnant virgin, people following stars in the sky. And today as we look at Mary's story, it's a great time to be reminded of this extraordinary time we're celebrating today. Because Mary's story helps us to think more clearly about **today** and **tomorrow** and escape the daily grind of Christmas.

Look with me at Luke 1, verse 31. The angel Gabriel visits Mary in Nazareth and tells Mary that she has found favour with God, and Gabriel says:

- *³¹ You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. ³² 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, ³³ and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.”*

And how does Mary respond to that extraordinary announcement?

³⁴ “How will this be,” Mary asked the angel, “since I am a virgin?”

³⁵ The angel answered, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.

To us, this all sounds a bit mundane because we've heard it all before. But imagine Mary's surprise at hearing this strange news! And now listen to Mary's response:

³⁸ “I am the Lord's servant,” Mary answered. “May it be to me as you have said.” Then the angel left her.

There is nothing normal about that story. This virgin is going to give birth to a child and he will be Jesus, the son of God, the saviour of the world. Yet how does Mary respond?

“I am the Lord's servant. No problem. Understood.”

This would not have been an easy thing for Mary. She was a young girl, possibly as young as 13 or 14 years old. And she was a virgin, pledged to be married to Joseph. She was engaged to a man and now she's pregnant with someone else's child, who happens to be the Messiah. It's not an easy story to explain to people. It's not an easy thing to understand yourself. But Mary says: "I am the Lord's servant. May it be to me as you have said."

And then from verse 46 she begins to praise God:

- ⁴⁶ *And Mary said:*

*"My soul glorifies the Lord ⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,
⁴⁸ for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant.
From now on all generations will call me blessed, ⁴⁹ for the Mighty One has done great things for me— holy is his name.*

Mary is faced with a life changing event, bigger than any of us here today can imagine. And she responds by saying: "I am the Lord's servant." Mary is already thinking about tomorrow. She's thinking about how she's going to serve God tomorrow. She's not thinking of herself or her own plans.

And that's our challenge – to think about how we will serve God tomorrow. How will we be a part of God's plans tomorrow? Not to think about how inconvenient God's plans might be for us. But to be His servant and to be ready to follow him.

That's the first challenge – to ask ourselves, like Mary, how am I going to be part of God's plans tomorrow?

But Christmas is also about today.

Let me share with you one more advertising campaign that grabbed my attention this year. From Myer:

- **"A little help this Christmas".**

Myer wants to offer people a little help at Christmas. And I think that's brilliant because that is Christmas. Obviously, Myer wants to help you to spend money and find the right gifts, the right tree, the right lights and decorations. But that one word, '**help**', is perfect for Christmas. Because "help" is what Christmas is all about.

Christmas is about **God** helping **us**. And Marys' song is a great reminder of that. From verses 50-55:

- ⁵⁰ ***His mercy extends to those who fear him,
from generation to generation.
He has performed mighty deeds,...
He has brought down rulers...
Has lifted up the humble...
Has filled the hungry with good things...***
⁵⁴ ***He has helped his servant Israel,
remembering to be merciful***
⁵⁵ ***to Abraham and his descendants forever..."***

Mary's focus in this song is giving thanks to God because of what God has done to help us. Mary thanks God that he has remembered his people, that he has sent a saviour to rescue his people. This young girl sees the big picture. She sees that after thousands of years, God is finally sending his Saviour, the Messiah, the one he promised so long ago. And she says: Thank you God, today, for remembering your promise and sending your saviour! Thank you for helping us!

Today, Christmas Day, is about God helping us. It's a day to look beyond all the things WE do, and remember that today is about what God has done for us.

Today's story has words of wisdom for us for tomorrow AND for today.

- **Tomorrow and today**

First, some wisdom for tomorrow. Mary doesn't think about herself or her own plans for tomorrow. She thinks about God and his plans and how to serve him tomorrow. Every year, after Christmas, we celebrate the New Year. And it's often very easy just to think about *ourselves*. It's very easy to think about our *own* plans for next year. But listen again to Mary's response to the angel: "I am the *Lord's* servant." She's thinking about how she will serve **God** tomorrow. And that's the challenge for us – are we thinking about **God's** tomorrow, or *our* tomorrow?

But there's also wisdom here for today. As we listen to Mary's song, we're reminded that today, Christmas Day, is all about "help". Christmas Day is about **God** helping us. Today is the day to remember what **God** has done. It can be a trap for us at Christmas to make it all about ourselves or our family. But Christmas day is a day to remember what God has done – it's about Him. **God** has helped us by sending us his Saviour Jesus.

There are our two challenges today.

- A challenge for Tomorrow – are we preparing for God's tomorrow? Or our own tomorrow?
- And the challenge for Today – are we focussing on what **God** has done, or on what we are doing?

Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, thank you for Christmas.

Thank you for today – what you have done for us by sending Jesus as our Saviour – for keeping your promise and for showing us your love and mercy.

And thank you for tomorrow. Thank you for the opportunity to serve you. Help us to think about your plans for our life and to think about how we might serve you each day.

We pray you will be with us this Christmas Day and tomorrow, and each day, and that you will give us a fresh understanding of what you have done for us as we celebrate Christmas in our lives.

We pray this in the name of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.