

# PASTOR'S PRAYER AND SERMON

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*Please note that the following are the pastor's notes for his sermon and may therefore have some grammatical or spelling errors, etc.*

Second Sunday of Advent

Christmas Characters: Mary  
"Attuned to the Will of God"

Message by Rev. Barry Robison,  
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December 4, 2022

Luke 1: 26-38

This is a very familiar story, even for folks who aren't Christian believers. I imagine we all have slightly different pictures in our own mind's eye how it might have played out, how Mary reacted and responded. But what if an angel made such a visit today? How might that happen in today's world? And what if it happened to us? How would we respond to such a visit?

The angel's visit to Mary was a totally unexpected encounter with God. Everything about the visit and

the angel's message was unexpected. You know, a consistent witness throughout the Bible is that God acts in ways that we do not expect. And so, a probing question to ask ourselves is, "How do we respond when the Lord comes to us with the unexpected?" Notice, the question is not "How would we respond," but "How do we respond" because God comes into our lives in unexpected ways all the time.

It is especially appropriate to consider that question at this time of year because the Christmas story is full of the unexpected. The story begins with a childless couple, Zechariah and Elizabeth, who unexpectedly have a son in their older years. They then name him John, which was surprising since it was not a family name.

The story continues with one of the most powerful of God's angels announcing to a virgin teenage girl, Mary, that she would become the human mother of the Son of God. Her fiancé, Joseph, unbelievably goes against the convention and practice of his day and follows through with their marriage rather than breaking it off.

Then, God's very own Son is born in a dirty stable, surrounded by animals rather than by humanity's finest citizens. What's more, the first people to whom the birth was announced were not the rich and famous, but instead they were shepherds, considered to be second or even third class citizens of that day.

And as if the story couldn't get any more unexpected than that, the signs and importance of the birth were recognized by magi or wise men, gentiles from a foreign country no less, rather than by the religious leaders of God's people. Astoundingly, they travel a great distance to come and visit the child so they could honor him with expensive gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh, while the leaders of God's people seek to destroy rather than worship him.

Yes, the Christmas story is all about the unexpected, which is consistent with the behavior of God. Down through history, over and over again God has proven the words of Isaiah 55:8 to be true: "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, and My ways are not your ways," says the Lord. NLV

So, the question is asked again: How do we respond when the Lord comes to us with the unexpected? Since God has a tendency to act in unexpected ways, we should not be surprised that the Lord would act in our lives in such ways, too. Is there a blessing that seemed to come to you "out of the blue"? Or was a prayer that we were sure would be answered the way we wanted it to, not?

We should not be surprised that God would come to us, or intervene in our lives at all. After all, God used a young teenage girl from a simple background to carry out God's most unexpected action ever. So, why couldn't God come to and use any one of us today? Mary's role in the Christmas story is an example to us that God can use even those of us who are ordinary in the world's eyes because we can be extraordinary in God's service.

What's makes Mary so special was her faith. As Christian teacher Margaret Feinberg observed, "Though her doubts must have been huge, her faith was greater". Isn't that neat? Faith is always able to overcome doubt. Trust is always able to overcome

fear. Mary could be a poster child for faith and trust, a role model whose example is worthy to be followed.

Why? Mary proved her faith and trust in God in this way: Mary was invited to join God in the journey of a lifetime, and she accepted. She didn't know where the journey would take her, but she did know it wouldn't take her where she thought her life was going to go. Already surprised by the announcement of her pregnancy, Mary had no idea what other surprises lay in wait for her along the way God would lead her. Unprepared and humanly ill-equipped, nonetheless Mary willingly, confidently, and even joyfully stepped out in faith to follow God. She put into practice the words of Proverbs 16:3: "Commit your actions to the Lord, and your plans will succeed." NLT

Mary's actions reveal that to commit our actions to the Lord does not mean simply to ask God to bless whatever we want to do. Instead, this verse teaches that when we give everything we are and have over to God, so that God can use us and them however God wants to, then we will be successful in all that we do.

Though surprised, Mary made the decision to commit her life and her future to the Lord. Though she did not know what the days ahead would be, she was willing to trust God enough to lead and guide her through them and commit her every action to the Lord. Attuned to the will of God, she would do as God wanted, not as she wanted.

And so, when the Lord comes to us with the unexpected, like Mary, we have the choice to respond with faith and trust rather than disbelief and doubt. Rather than think that God could never use someone like me, we can attune ourselves to the will of God and choose to make ourselves available for God to use however God wants to use us. Rather than doubt or fear that we could never possibly do what God is asking, calling, or expecting us to do, we can choose to believe with confidence in the truth that with God nothing will be impossible.

So, to what is God calling you, right now? What surprising, amazing and wonderful things is God calling Charlton United Methodist to be and do as a church? Don't wait around, standing on the sidelines,

wondering if you're part of the Charlton team. Just as God wanted to use Mary, God wants to use each one of you. Don't wait to be asked to get involved. God has already called you to be active and involved in the life and ministry of this congregation or you wouldn't be here now. So, step out in faith and seek out ways that God can use you in ministry here.

What incredible, fantastic and unexpected things is God calling you, personally, to be and to do, right now? Perhaps God is calling you to make some radical or significant changes in your life, such as giving up unhealthy, immoral or un-Christlike behaviors. It may seem to you that God is calling you to do the impossible, just as it seemed to Mary. But like Mary, when we choose to attune ourselves to the will of God, then we can choose to rise above those doubts and fears and step out in faith to let God lead us down the paths God wants us to go.

To do so takes the servant-heart attitude on our part that was displayed by Mary. Like her we can choose to serve God rather than ourselves or anyone or anything else. When we do, then we can say as did Mary that

we are willing to let it be as God has said in our lives.  
Or as the hymn writer so eloquently put it, we can say  
with Mary: "So be it; I am ready according to your  
word."