

**Luke 1:26-38**  
**“A Christmas I can believe in - *Mary*”**

So here we are, Christmas Day 2020, celebrating in a way we couldn't have imagined a year ago. A few years back we decided that our annual **carols by candlelight** would have to be done differently, without the use of all those real candles, because of the potential fire risk, and for the sake of a few who reacted badly to all that smoke that is generated when you blow them out. But that was a trivial change, compared to this.

So today there's no question of needing to run away quickly afterwards to do something critical in the cooking of the traditional **turkey** in the oven. You can just wander down the hallway (**decked with boughs of holly**, I hope) to the kitchen ... perhaps you've even done so a couple of times when you were safely muted and the videos of the songs filled everyone else's screens.

We've found we could still do church in ways we wouldn't ever have guessed. And although it's not totally great doing it via **screens**, at least it's not totally dire, either.

But imagine someone paying us a visit at the end of 2019, and asking us whether we knew what was going to be ahead. The obvious answer would obviously be *NO*. It always has been, but, most years, we've presumed that for most of us, the year following would be fairly similar to the year now closing. For some individuals, of course, we recognise that life-changing events might will happen.

Now I don't know for sure what Mary and Joseph had in mind for *their* next year, back before that

***In the sixth month ...***

(Luke 1:26)

They might have heard about what that sixth month is the sixth month *of*, and been a bit bemused about cousin Elizabeth's surprising pregnancy at that ridiculously advanced age. But probably the year ahead was due to feature, since they were already betrothed, Joseph and Mary's **wedding**. After that, well, who knows ... but that's all part of the adventure, isn't it?

And yet, with the visit of, *would you believe*, an angel, all of those future plans are just thrown out of the window.

***In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary.***

(Luke 1:26-27)

And of course that little phrase I slipped in there, “would you believe”, is significant. *Would* you believe this stuff - in a way different from what you mean if you say that you “believe” in Santa Claus? That’s the whole problem, isn’t it? Such a mixture of stuff, in the popular 21st-century Christmas!

That’s why I thought we should do this short series over Christmas time, picking up on the Aldi Christmas slogan

### **A Christmas you can believe in**

Because - not that I doubt the big facts of the Bible accounts - but there are, to me, some little comments or observations about the characters in these accounts that really have the hallmark of authenticity. That is *exactly* how someone might behave when there are all these admittedly peculiar things happening around them. It rings *true*.

We’ve already looked at Joseph and Elizabeth. Today, just briefly, some snippets about **Mary**.

It’s often pointed out that Mary is an amazing example of trust in God. Remember that she was very unlikely to have been older than teenage when all of this stuff started kicking off around her. Possibly she would have been too young to marry, according to modern thinking, but there’s not the slightest hint that anything was going on that would have been thought inappropriate back then.

So when she is told about this pregnancy, we can jump too quickly to the end of the account, where we’re told that she said Yes:

***And Mary said, “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.”***

(Luke 1:38)

And that is amazing, I have to say. But if that was all we had, I would start to wonder if she was properly aware of all the implications of what the angel had said. She could be just sort of dazed ... and would say Yes to anything in that kind of state. Or you could say that this is plain unrealistic.

For me, what makes this a whole lot more believable is what we read earlier, when we see this young girl is actually a very canny lass. And that this really is all part - and right at the heart, actually - of

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Just two things I want to point out to you. First: the angel starts speaking:

***And he came to her and said, “Greetings, O favoured one, the Lord is with you!”***

(Luke 1:28)

And just look at the response that Luke records here! She is right on the ball!

***But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be.***

(Luke 1:29)

If you were just making this up, Mary would have been all smiles at this point. Leaping around singing. Or maybe falling to her knees in silent worship. But I think I see her much more as standing back, not *quite* hands on hips and *Oh YEAH?* on her pursed lips. Not quite cynical like that. But wary. Skeptical, almost. Certainly realising that the angel had come to say more than simply this ... and, well, if people come to break *bad* news, too, they might start with something upbeat like this, rather than launch straight in with something unhappy.

So I think I see her maybe putting her head to one side, maybe raising one eyebrow involuntarily as she thinks this through. Surely ... an angel just popping up out of nowhere, and giving a greeting like this ... something's going on, isn't it?

Do you see what I mean? Mary's refusal to be immediately drawn into this makes it all the more credible to me:

### **A Christmas you can believe in**

Not a bland little story cooked up for gullible kids, but one that rings true to real life, and human beings as we know them to be - sometimes gullible, yes, but sometimes as canny as this young Jewish girl seems to be.

So how do you think she will react when the angel gets to the meat of his message? First, an assurance - Mary obviously does not have a perfect **poker face**.

***And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God."***

(Luke 1:30)

But, it has to be admitted, this is a very strange "favour"!

***"And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus."***

(Luke 1:31)

I'm guessing that Mary somewhat baulks at this point - and you could understand why. But the angel carries on with his message:

***"He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."***

(Luke 1:32-33)

But, wondrous though these last couple of sentences are, *Just hold on a moment. Don't rush me. I need to go back to what you said BEFORE that.* I mean ... there's this stuff about a *baby*. Which, don't you realise, is currently *impossible*.

***And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?"***

(Luke 1:34)

Not unbelieving, I don't see it in that way. Not refusing, either. Just ... *hold on ... aren't you missing something here?*

Yes, of course the angel has an answer ready for that question:

***And the angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy — the Son of God."***

(Luke 1:35)

And that is glorious truth about the baby whose birth we are here remembering and celebrating. We talking not so much about the Son of Mary - though he is that, too - but the Son of God.

But just look how God has provided these two appropriate parents for him. Joseph, we have a few days back:

***... her husband Joseph, being a just man ...***

(Matthew 1:19)

Just and believing, responding immediately to that earlier message from an angel. And here, Mary, also believing, responding immediately to this message from an angel. But canny - skeptical in front of that angel - and strong - able to interrupt him to press for answers that can't just be glossed over, too.

Folks, what we have read about *both* of these, Joseph and Mary, make me all the more convinced that this is a true and reliable account of what happened in Bethlehem all those years back. It is precisely what Luke intended his account to be.

***... it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.***

(Luke 1:3-4)

Folks, that is what we have been given here. Not cleverly devised fables, but the very truth of God about the very Son of God. So these songs we sing are not just jolly old tunes that we sing or whistle to keep the dark of an unpleasant world at bay.

No, it's actually true that ...

***And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.***

(John 1:14)

And so we are going to finish our time together today speaking this truth to one another, in song, before we log off and retire to our kitchens. This really is

*Christ, by highest heaven adored,  
Christ, the everlasting Lord,*

He really is

*Pleased as man with man to dwell,  
Jesus, our Immanuel.*

So are you ready, this Christmas Day 2020, to

*With the angelic host proclaim,  
'Christ is born in Bethlehem.'*

Jesus Christ,

***... the Word became flesh ... the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.***

(John 1:14)