

Journey of Wonder
Luke 1:26-45

I have a confession to make. Christmas is not my favorite holiday. Some years it's less favored than others. Perhaps it's the commercialization and the fact that Christmas stuff is being set out already in September. Maybe it's because all the "Christmas" things to focus on and Christmas preparations just seemed to be get in the way of what Christmas is really about. Then again, maybe Christmas isn't all that special anymore because attempts to make it so in the past didn't live up to the expectations I had. What ever the reason, the fact is Christmas could come and go and not bother me in the least. I know, I know ... Bah, Humbug.

As much as I love to sing, even the Christmas songs that typically lift my spirits sometimes fall flat on my soul. One afternoon, while struggling with this feeling of disinterest, I was absentmindedly singing a traditional Appalachian carol with a folksy, almost haunting tune:

*I wonder as I wander out under the sky
How Jesus the Savior did come for to die
For poor on'ry people like you and like I...
I wonder as I wander out under the sky.*

Then it struck me: I was losing the wonder of Christmas. Could it be that the reason Christmas joy has lost its luster for me is that the Christmas story has become old, that its over familiarity has become the problem. I've heard the story over and over. I've told the story so many times I can recount it from memory, almost without thinking. But the *wonder* of the story ... that's what is missing.

Perhaps we lose the wonder because we don't know the stories as well as we think we do. Revisit one of the stories with me and look at Christmas from the perspective of a young woman who had more cause for wonder than any other person. **(Read Text Here)**

In a trifling village with a reputation less shining than most places in Israel (as Nathanael said, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth") young Mary was about her daily tasks:

sweeping up, fetching water, grinding grain into flour, maybe watching a younger sibling.

Perhaps only 15, Mary was already engaged to be married; so she was already looking forward to her greatest day – her wedding.

All of a sudden, she was looking directly into the eyes of an angel who tells her she is highly favored by God and that God is with her. Notice something special about Mary. When anyone else encounters an angel their immediate reaction is terror. When Mary's cousin Zechariah, a priest, encounters the same angel he is “startled and gripped with fear;” in other words, he was terrified. Mary encounters Gabriel and wonders.

Wonder can mean astonishment, surprise, amazement. It can also mean to speculate about, question, or ponder. I can understand a sense of wonder at encountering an angel. But the text tells us that Mary wonders about what kind of greeting the angel is giving her. God has just told her that she is special and the He is with her; and, Mary is surprised that God would say such a thing to her and is, as it were, trying to understand what it all means.

But before Mary can respond Gabriel shares the most amazing news of all: God would bring about the birth of a child who would be his very own Son through her. Mary would bring him into the world. Think about that: God's very own Son, a Savior and King; isn't that *wonderful* news? But Mary doesn't seem to grasp that part. Again, she begins to wonder – not whether this *can* happen, but *how*. She simply wonders about the process. How can a virgin have a baby? How could a simple peasant girl, who has known no man, ever – I'm to be pure for my future husband – bring the Savior to the world?

Gabriel graciously answers, “*The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the most High will over shadow you. The baby to be born to you will be holy and be called the Son of*

God. O, by the way, your cousin Elizabeth ... the one who is barren and too old to have children, yeh that one ... she is going to have a baby, too. Nothing is impossible with God.”

Now Mary is left with wonder, not the trying to understand kind of wonder, but the standing in awe, totally amazed, and overwhelmed kind of wonder. *“I am the Lord’s servant. May it be as you have said.”* How Luke shares her response seems way too calm. I like how Charles Swindoll interprets this moment: “In a matter of minutes the encounter is over, and Mary sits alone in stunned silence. But before long, her heart starts bubbling over like a fountain. She is going to have a baby! Her eyes sparkle, her face glows ... but the words dam up in her throat. Whom can she tell?” Talk about wonder!

Mary must have taken a few days to let this whole encounter sink in, but it only takes a few. Then Mary hurries of to see Elizabeth, for no one but another who has experienced a similar wonder from God could understand.

How’s Christmas for you? Do you still have the wonder? Does it amaze you? In the midst of shopping, decorating, party planning, carol singing, attending regular and special worship services, are you inspired or are you missing something, too? When December 26 arrives, will you be glad another Christmas is past or will you still be wondering, marveling at God’s plan of grace? As we travel our Christmas journey this year, if we would truly anticipate Christmas then we must restore the wonder as Mary experienced it.

When was the last time you stopped to consider that God highly favors you? Jesus came so that you could be restored in favor to God. And, as with Mary, God is with you. These two realizations should astonish us and cause us to continually strive to understand what it means to be favored by God and that God is always with us and we should be continually amazed.

But before we can fully respond, God reminds us that now it is our turn to bring Jesus to the world. And I suspect that, like Mary, our response is usually “how?” Some of us come up with excuses why we think we can’t. But if we are truly amazed that God is with us, our real response will not be disbelief but a wonder of process: How are we to do this, God. There is nothing in us that can make this possible.

But God answers us as he did Mary, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the most High will overshadow you... Nothing is impossible with God.” When we reflect on what God has done in our lives thus far, the salvation that is ours in Christ Jesus, the fact that God now call us “highly favored,” our wonder of trying to understand will become a wonder of standing in awe, totally amazed, and overwhelmed.

*I wonder as I wander out under the sky
How Jesus the Savior did come for to die
For poor on'ry people like you and like I...
I wonder as I wander out under the sky.*

*When Mary birthed Jesus 'twas in a cow's stall,
With wise men and farmers and shepherds and all.
But high from God's heaven a star's light did fall,
And the promise of ages it then did recall.*

That is wonder of Christmas: The wonder of God’s love found its fullest expression in the coming of *Jesus the Savior* who *did come for to die* on our behalf. I pray that the wonder of Christmas will be strong for you and begin anew today.