

December 18, 2011
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Brentview Baptist Church
'Now For the Rest of the Story'
Generosity

When I was growing up there was a man named Paul Harvey on the radio who would tell stories about people and events. What captivated us as listeners was that he would add, 'and now, for the rest of the story.' That is when he would add fascinating details to the story that he had discovered through his research of things that happened just behind the scenes of the story he had been telling. The other day, it struck me that maybe some of the Christmas story we read may have come about in a similar way. That Dr. Luke (who was writing the story of Jesus) wanted to get all the facts from behind the scenes, so he could get the story right. So he, like Paul Harvey did some digging. Listen how he began the book of Luke which he authored. (Luke 1:-4) So, my theory is that on one occasion as he was traveling through the city of Ephesus with Paul on one of their missionary journeys, he dropped by to talk to Mary (Jesus' mother) to get the 'rest of the story' from her lips. For, you will remember that scripture tells us while on the cross Jesus asked John to take care of his mother. History tells us that she lived in Ephesus for many years. So I wonder if Dr. Luke dropped by her house in Ephesus with a pad and paper so he could ask her about the 'rest of the story'.

I wonder what kinds of questions he would have asked her? I am sure that as a Doctor he had to ask her about the Virgin birth. For, he knew that while the virgin birth wasn't something that could happen without the intervention of God. He also knew that the virgin birth wasn't something that the people of his day hadn't heard any conjecture about. For Isaiah, centuries before had written 'Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.'" (Isaiah 7:14). Dr. Luke and Isaiah knew that the Virgin Birth separated Jesus from all other historical figures.

They weren't the only ones to grasp its importance. For on one occasion when Larry King was asked, "If you could select any one person across all of history to interview, who would it be?" King's reply was that he would like to interview Jesus Christ. When asked what would you like to ask him?" He replied "I would like to know if he was virgin-born". Then he added, 'The answer to that question would define history for me.' In other words, King would see the virgin birth as the evidence that Jesus Christ was indeed God. Listen to how Mary answered Dr. Luke's question about how Jesus was born (Luke 1:24-38).

As I started to wonder what kind of questions Luke must have asked Mary, I wondered if his questions would have followed a song that many of us have running through our minds this Christmas, called 'Mary Did you know?' It was written by Mark Lowery who was a Christian singer and comedian. He wrote it to be read as a poem in a Christmas program at his home church in Nashville in 1984. He said 'I tried to picture Mary holding her baby Jesus on the first Christmas morning and wondering what she was thinking about her child.

She knew he was special, Virgin birth was her first clue, but could she ever imagine all the things that he would do while he was here?' Eight years later Buddy Greene put the poem to music and it has been a Christmas favorite ever since. I wonder if Dr. Luke, like Mark Lowery asked...

1. Mary, did you know that you've kissed the face of God?

The lyrics of the song begin, 'did you know, that your baby boy, has walked where angels trod. And when you kiss your little baby, you've kissed the face of God?'

I think we forget that in so many ways that first Christmas was the exact opposite of so much of what we experience today. Instead of the hype we experience as we read or hear about the Christmas sales, great deals on every TV and in every newspaper we pick up. In contrast the Christmas story happened without fanfare in a small remote town in a small insignificant nation late at night in a stable cave (a parking garage), unnoticed by almost everyone in the town. While the fact of the Census made headlines across the 'then know world'. Jesus' birth went unnoticed by everyone but a few local shepherds.

What makes that so amazing was the magnitude of what happened that first Christmas in Bethlehem. The eternal God of the universe came to live among us. The song put it this way, 'Did you know that your baby has walked where angels trod?' Although we celebrate the birthday of Christ at Christmas time we know that he didn't come into existence the day He was born in Bethlehem. In (John 17:5) it says 'and now father glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began'. In other words, before Bethlehem, Jesus had walked where angels had trod. He had lived eternally and the star fields were his front yard and heaven was his home. If I asked you where you were 1000 years ago, you would have to say that you didn't exist, but Jesus would have had to say that he was there when the earth was created. Do you remember when the religious leaders in (John 8) were bragging about being the children of Abraham? Jesus' response was to say 'before Abraham was I am'. He was saying I existed before Abraham, for you see I always was, I always will be, I am the constant throughout all of history. I am the eternal God.

2. Mary did you know that your that your baby boy is the Lord of all creation?

And then, in the song comes this great line, 'And when you kiss your little baby, you've kissed the face of God?' To me the idea of kissing the face of God is an amazing one. You see the only way for God to have a face is for Him to take on a body, to take on flesh and live close enough to us so he could be touched. In the Old Testament (as it tried to unwrap who God was), it taught that God was a spirit, that God was invisible and that if you even came near God you would die. But by the time of the New Testament, we learn that there in the cave in Bethlehem something changed on that first Christmas. (Colossians 1:15) says 'He is the very image of the invisible God'. What does that mean? It is like this, if you want to know what my wife is like. I can show you a picture, an image of her. In that same way, Jesus came to show us what God looked like. But here is the problem, how does the powerful God of the universe come and let us see him, touch him?

David Dykes explained it this way outside this church, your house on a power pole you may see a cylinder shaped object a little bigger than a garbage can. It is called a transformer. It takes the high voltage power coming from the substation and reduces it to a power level that can operate appliances within your house. If that transformer wasn't there, your house couldn't take the power surge and it would probably be burned to the ground. But the transformer allows this amazing power source to enter our lives and not harm us. That is a good picture of how Jesus came to live in the flesh, He is like a Divine Transformer. The Old Testament taught that if any person ever looked at God. They would die. God's brilliance and glory were so great that it would be like looking into the sun from a distance of 25 feet, you wouldn't survive. But the eternal, almighty Jesus came covered in human flesh so we could relate to Him.

That is what the Christmas Carol 'Hark the Herald Sing' is talking about when it says 'Veiled in flesh the Godhead see; Hail the Incarnate Deity.' Incarnate means to put on flesh. That is what it meant when (Matthew 1:23) said 'The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel' which means God with us. Right from the get go, God wanted us to know an amazing thing, that He, who was before the beginning of time. He, who was present at creation, He, who carried the power of the universe within, He, put on Flesh and became Immanuel (God with us). So that He, who was unapproachable and untouchable, could somehow become the transformer through which the amazing power of the God could be filtered so that we could touch him and he could touch us. So the song was theologically correct when it asked 'Mary did you know that when you kiss your little baby, you've kissed the face of God?'

When I think about it that way, it really is amazing isn't it? But it is also so reassuring, for it reminds us that Jesus came so that you and I (even in the midst of the hard stuff that sometimes happens around and because of Christmas) could have access to the God who came in Jesus so that we could at anytime touch and be touched by the power and presence of God himself. It is an idea almost beyond our comprehension. But here is the amazing thing; it is not beyond our experience. For I can say, as can many of you, we have experienced in a real way the touch of God in our lives. That Immanuel has become God with us. Here is another question.

3. Mary did you know that your baby has Power enough to change our World?

Mary did you know, that your baby boy, would one day walk on water?
Mary did you know, that your baby boy, would save our sons and daughters?
Mary did you know, that your baby boy, will give sight to the blind man?
Mary did you know, that your baby boy, would calm a storm with His hand?
The blind will see, the deaf will hear? The dead will live again,
The lame will leap, the dumb will speak? Praises of the Lamb?

The bible records that Jesus performed many miracles, he walked on water, healed people who were sick of all kinds of deceases, and he brought people back to life that had been dead. Even his enemies didn't discount what he had done; instead they tried to say that his power came from Satan not God. In the four gospels we read of 37 different miracles that Jesus performed.

His miracles ranged from turning water into wine, to feeding thousands at a single sitting, to casting out demons and giving a person who was completely paralyzed the ability to take up their bed and walk back home under their own power. Plus, John concludes his gospel by saying that the miracles listed in the bible were just a smattering of all the miraculous things which Jesus had done (John 21:25). Why was it so important for the gospel writers to let us know about the miracles that Jesus had done? First, so we would see that Jesus had the power to step into people situations and make a profound difference (Like we learned last night at Handel's Messiah). And second, it was so that we would see examples of how Jesus (Immanuel) which means 'God come among us' was touching the lives of those around him.

But, as marvelous as it is to know that God did things like this in the past, the real issue is if He is still entering in the lives of men and women today. Can I just say that this past month I have had so many conversations with so many of you who have felt the hand, the whisper, the amazing intervention of God in you life? I have been told of people, whose lives were hurting others, now becoming new people in Jesus. Of people who were wrestling with hard questions all week long, only to come to church and have those exact questions being discussed in the morning sermon, week after week until they found faith. To folks like Vicki Park feeling a call to a month of ministry in India, Ralph Kruger, heading off to help in the area of clean water in Cambodia and now this morning hearing of one of our young ladies (Mariah Wilson) feeling the call to go to work with her Grandma at HATS mission in Haiti. God is still present, still whispering, still moving.

Mary did you know, that this sleeping Child you're holding is the Great I am? He is the one who did miracles in the lives of people centuries ago, and is still the 'I am present' in today's situations?

But let me take this one step farther. You see when Jesus crept into the world the first time he did it quietly, almost unseen by those around him. But the next time he will enter our world it won't be in the same manner. Mary would have passed on to Dr. Luke one other thing the angel Gabriel told her when he told her that she would become the mother of Jesus. Gabriel said 'The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.' (Luke 1:31-33) He was reminding her of what the prophet Isaiah had said centuries before, 'For unto us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulder, of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever' (Isaiah 9:6).

What is he talking about? He is speaking about his next entry into our world, only the next time he comes no one will miss it. (1 Thessalonians 4:16-18) The next time Jesus enters our world He won't be coming as a baby, He won't be coming quietly to the back country of Israel, and He won't be coming as flesh and blood. He will be coming as the 'Great I am', the powerful God of the universe. He will be coming in his full power with none of his glory, or majestic power being put through the transformer of human flesh. He will be coming with the Angelic choir, the trumpet blast from heaven and millions of believers who have already passed into glory. He will be coming as the powerful God of the universe. And it will make his first Christmas entrance look like a kids pageant in a country church.

The song puts it this way, 'Mary did you know, that your baby boy is Lord of all creation?' 'Mary did you know, that your baby boy will one day rule the nations?' You see, Mary's baby (Jesus) has enough power to change the world, and renew our eternities.

4. Mary did you know, that your baby boy would change you?

When you reach the end of the book of John, after he has told us who Jesus is and after he has given you examples of the amazing miracles he had preformed, and the profound words he has said. He tells you why he has taken you on this journey. He says it, so that you will believe that Jesus was the Christ, the son of God, and by believing in him you would have a new life in his name (John 20:30-31). Here is how the song put it. 'Mary did you know, that your baby boy, has come to make you new? This Child that you delivered will soon deliver you!' When I hear those lines I wonder what it must have been like for Mary to try and get her head around the fact that the child she birthed would somehow give her a new and eternal life. Jesus put it this way to a preacher named Nicodemus, 'You must be born again'. You must become a new person. One of the reasons there is such anticipation during the Christmas season is that people get new things, new toys, new clothes and new bills. The Christmas story is all about the gift Jesus gave us on that first Christmas, out of love for us. It is about his desire to help us begin again, by coming to reside within us.

Let me conclude by reminding you that Mary asked a question herself, she asked the Angel how this miracle could happen. 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'. The angel was saying the miracle of new life will happen only after you give permission to let this Jesus grow within you. In the same way this Jesus who came that 1st Christmas needs to be given permission to come and dwell with us. And we like Mary need to give him permission to place his life creating power, to birth something supernatural within us. So this morning will you answer like Mary did, when the Angel asked permission to place Jesus within her, She said 'as you wish, I am yours, come and grow the life of Jesus within me.' And that is the rest of the story.

Mary did you know?

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Mary did you know, that your baby boy, would save our sons and daughters?
Did you know that your baby boy has come to make you new?
This Child that you delivered will soon deliver you!

Mary did you know, that your baby boy, will give sight to the blind man?
Mary did you know, that your baby boy, would calm a storm with His hand?
Did you know, that your baby boy has walked where angels trod
And when you kiss your little baby, you've kissed the face of God?
Oh, Mary did you know?

Mary did you know?

The blind will see, the deaf will hear, The dead will live again,
The lame will leap, the dumb will speak

Praises of the Lamb?

Mary did you know, that your baby boy, is Lord of all creation?
Mary did you know, that your baby boy, will one day rule the nations?
Did you know that your baby boy was Heaven's perfect Lamb?
And this sleeping Child you're holding, Is the Great I AM

(Words by Mark Lowry, Music by Buddy Greene)