

Mary

December 18, 2022

Introduction & Announcements

Welcome to the Beamsville Church of Christ Online Ministry. This week's message is titled Mary. Thank you to Dave, Ed, Tim, Barbara and Glynnis for being part of the video. The scripture reading is Luke 1:26-38. Due to a technical issue, the announcements were not correctly recorded. Announcements from this week included: Happy Birthday to Brian B and Chris F. The giving knitters are looking for donations of coats new or in good repair for children who are in need. Speak to Barbara S or Janet C. Some prayer requests. Jack M is back in hospital as of this recording. Marie was scheduled for hip surgery, which was successful. They're both in the same hospital and would welcome prayers for healing. Val's Celebration of Life was held December 4th. There's a link to the recording in the video description. Please pray for Joanne and her family. Her daughter Rhonda passed away following a battle with cancer. Dave read John 114 to 16 during his welcome. The word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only son who came from the Father. Full of grace and truth. John testified concerning him. He cried out, saying, This is the one I spoke about when I said He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me. Out of his fullness, we have all received grace in place of grace, already given

Communion

Good morning. At this point in our gathering, in our week. We often stop and pause and reflect and think about this specifically the death of Jesus, and often will mention the suffering, the broken body and the blood the cross. Today, I'd like to talk about a slightly different aspect, and I'm going to title My Little Talk today. The Miracle of Death. And to Picture the miracle. I'm going to ask you to picture a chestnut. You've seen a chestnut, I hope. If you're new to Canada, maybe it's new to you, but small little nuts, kind of brown little graze top on it comes off of a huge tree called a chestnut tree. And to picture that chestnut, think of it bobbing through a field in a squirrel's mouth. Squirrel goes through the field with this chestnut. His prized possession for a very short time, finds a spot, loosely buries it under just a little bit of earth, some leaves. And there the chestnut sits. And it will freeze and thaw and freeze and thaw several times. And then it'll be covered with snow and darkness for a month or so. And then it'll start to warm up and it'll freeze and thaw and freezing thaw a few more times. It will start to become soft and disintegrate and the shell will start to crack. For all intents and purposes, that chestnut is dead. Very dead. But then out comes the sun. And that from that top of that chestnut and I don't know how that works. It's a miracle from the top of the chestnut. Oh, we'll pop a little green stem. And somehow from the bottom, a couple of little things like little legs will start growing down. There's some science there you can ask Ed or Amy or somebody who knows better. But for me, it's a miracle. How does it know to put the green one up and the little ones down for roots?

Pretty special, right? A miracle. But you wait a little while. A few years and that rotten, dead chestnut is suddenly a tree bigger than your house. Bigger than your house. On top of my house. Huge, powerful, strong. And able to produce thousands of chestnuts every year. Pretty amazing. The design. Dave read from the first chapter of the Book of John this morning talking about the word that chapter begins with in the beginning was the word and the word was with God. The translation there for a word. I think the

Chinese Bible does it better. Some of you have not read the Chinese Bible, but the Chinese Bible instead of using the word in that case, it translates it the way in the beginning was the way and the way was with God and the way was God providing a way, a system, a plan? Yes, Jesus. The body of Jesus. The Body of Christ died. It went into the ground and it came out. And as an example, for all those who saw this a wow, he conquered death. Death didn't hurt him.

He's alive. And he's got to a more glorious, stronger, better future than before he went into that grave. Like the tree from a nut. So people could see from the example there. Oh, death's lost its sting. They can also see from nature how a seed or a nut and then become something so great they see a way. In the beginning was the way the words of Jesus. Very I very truly, I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. When Jesus died, not only washing away our sins with his with his blood, but he produced a way to reproduce Christianity to multiply because Jesus people saw what happened to Jesus the Christ, and they became Christ like in their sense that why fear death. Death is a step towards something better. Would the chestnut fear death if it if it could. If it could see the future? Jesus wants us to to see ourselves as part of that way, that part process. We die. And some of us would think, Oh, that's the end. Society wants you to believe that. But it's a way to the next step. It's a process. It's a carrying on.

First Corinthians 12:27. Now you are the body of Christ. Ponder that for a second. In this light, now you are the body of Christ and each one of you is part of it. Wow. We are part of that way for others to see Christ, to see death in a new light. Recently, with the pandemic, it's like society wants us to be so afraid of death, of a germ, of anything, be fearful. But our Bible tells us perfect love, drives out fear and Jesus has taken the sting out of death because we see it for what it is, just a door to the next step, to something greater, to something bigger, like the butterfly, the caterpillar becoming the butterfly. If the caterpillar knows. Oh, that's beautiful. That's me. That's me. And if in a few months. Wow, if we see that as our next step, what's death? We will take a little bit of bread in remembrance of the body of Jesus that was broken, buried and died for us. And for a way to continue, we will take a little bit of grape juice as a reminder of the blood that was there to wash away our sins. Many of us will be here this afternoon, and there are there's going to be some tears, there's going to be some sad, but there's going to be some miracle, some beauty remembered in because we know the next step. Let's pray, our Lord and Father, thank you for preparing the way for this design, this plan that you've created for us to see in nature and in Jesus and in the lives of many, many Christians who have not been afraid of death, welcomed it because they know that they're going to, you thank you for Jesus, for his willingness to be the sacrifice that opens the door to that way for us.

We pray the you bless the bread and the cup and each one who protects. We pray all this in Jesus loving name. He meant well. The behavior of squirrels has been studied. They have a long term, short term memory of 18 minutes. So when they bury when they bury that nut in the ground, the vast majority of those nuts are going to be dug up in the spring to be eaten.

Song Leader Comment

So it's buried there. And then when the squirrel rummaging around in the spring and comes across nuts that had been already buried there the previous fall, it's surprised. Oh, wow, look at this. A nut so far as the growth of a the growth of a chestnut into a tree, there are certain cells within the chestnut that are photo it's photo tropic. They're attracted to the light. And there are some cells that are

searching for water and rooting the tree. Some other great metaphors, spiritual metaphors to be attracted to the light then and dig your roots deep into sustenance. We're going to sing a song now and be still my soul. And I always think of the song as a song of amazing comfort in the time of difficulty. So there's going to be a funeral here today. And I always think of this song in terms of providing some reassurance in times of difficulty. I would invite you to stand as we sing.

Reading: Luke 1:26-38

The reading today is Luke chapter one verses 26 through 38. In the sixth month, God sent the Angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee to a virgin, pledge to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, Greetings, you who are highly favored. The Lord is with you. Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. You will be with child and will give birth to a son and you are to give him the name Jesus. 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, and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever. His kingdom will never end. How will this be? Mary asked the Angel, since I am a virgin, the angel answer. 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. Even Elizabeth, your relative, is going to have a child in her old age, and she who is said to be barren, is in her sixth man for nothing is impossible with God. I am the Lord's servant, Mary answered. May it be to me, as you have said. Then the angel left her.

Sermon

Good morning. It is good to be here. One of the things my favorite time of year is Christmas. I know we have a funeral here later on today for my dear mother in law, but I have a thing that I always wear red in the month of December. I love Christmas. My house is all dressed up for Christmas. And so it's wonderful for me to be able to come and talk to you this morning about something that is really kind of near and dear to my heart. One of the favorite times in my life was when I was pregnant with my first born, who happened to be a son. But I didn't know that because at Christmas time he was then already ten days late. And so I was like monstrous with this child, great big, huge pregnant belly. And with a child it seemed like he was never going to come. And it really I remember so well being being filled at that point with wondering what it would be like to be Mary to be pregnant. And I mean, it would have been certainly like I imagined the trip to Bethlehem and how horribly uncomfortable that must have been. But I just was sort of engrossed in the idea of what would it have been like to be Mary and to know that you had the Messiah in you.

So one of that sort of led me and this is sort of something that I have thought about for a really long time and probably always will, is wondering about what other people thought at their point in history, from their perspective, what would have been like to have been that person and over time, I came to understand that that is actually a genre of literature called historical fiction. And if it's going to be good historical fiction, the author has done a lot of research into it. So it's very firmly embedded in in the actual history that happened. So today, I wanted to bring you some of my thoughts over the years, and particularly surrounding this book that was written. And some of you will be familiar with the author, Francine Rivers. Lots of you won't. She is very much a scholar of biblical history and writes a lot of historical fiction that is deeply for me anyway. It fulfills that, that wondering to me, what would it have

been like? It gives sort of some flesh to what would it have been like to have been that that person. So this is part of a series of five women that she writes about in this particular. One is about Mary, and it's called Unafraid. And once again, her name is Francine Rivers.

So I want you to imagine, just to sort of set the tone, I want you to imagine a people who have no real power over their lives, they're made to work at a job that they have no choice but to do. They're made to sit apart from all the rest of society. They have no recourse if they're beaten or treated badly because they are considered property, they're considered inferior and treated as less able citizens excluded from most important aspects of society. They're not allowed to voice their opinion unless they're asked to do so. They're not allowed to follow their own dreams, but their influence to follow someone else's dreams for their entire lives. They are told whether or not they can go to school. Some are allowed, but the vast majority aren't. They're excluded from learning many things, no matter how interested in them they are, they can have their entire existence, everything they hold dear, including their place in society, torn away from them by an act of force. They're repeatedly treated as unclean and sent away from society. They grow up their whole lives, knowing that they're a let down to their parents. They have no significant role in their religion and they are considered at fault if they are raped or caught in any act of immorality. I'm actually talking about half the population of the world. This was the world that women were born into and this was the world Mary was born into.

It was a world that was completely controlled by men. And if you're a man, I challenge you not to dismiss the in the inspiration that we take from Mary. Just because this is a story of women, I challenge you and I invite you in the spirit of humility to go beyond the male and female to see what in Christ God is doing to inspire you to go deeper in your own faith for all of us. I encourage us not to dismiss some of my references because I have chosen some unusual references for our fellowship. But to take what you can from them in order to grow your faith. So this is the world that Mary was born into. And Francine Rivers gives real flesh and bones to the story of Mary's Divine Conception by the Holy Spirit.

It's so lovely that I want to read it to you. All she had ever wanted was to be close to the Lord. Her heart yearned for him. She longed for him as a dear panted for streams of water, how she wished she'd been among the people delivered from Egypt. How blessed they'd been to see God's miracles, to hear the law for the first time, to see the water springs from a rock, and to taste the manna from heaven. Sometimes she almost wished she had been born a man. Then she would have gone to the desert cliffs of Qumran and dedicated her life to God. Was it youth that made her restless, her deep thirst for the Lord frustrated her? How could she loved the Lord with all her heart, mind, soul and strength? If she was to be given to a man, how could she love God fully and give proper honor to her husband? And yet she understood the practicality of marriage. Women were vulnerable, how often she had heard the beats of Roman soldiers approaching her little village of Nazareth. Countless times she had seen them at the well, filling their water skins. Then they took whatever foodstuffs they needed from the resentful, downtrodden citizenry. Sometimes they took young women as well, leaving them abused and ruined. Life could become unbearable for an unprotected woman, especially a young one. Mary's mother had taught her to run and hide when she heard the sounds of horses or marching feet, her heart squeezed tight with anxiety, for she could hear them coming closer now and then later. Oh, God of Israel. I don't understand these things. Is it wrong for me to want to belong to you? My soul longs for you. Help me to be obedient, to be a proper wife to Joseph for You're sovereign and must have chosen this man for me. Make me a woman after your own heart Create in me a clean heart and renew a right spirit within me

A strange tingling sensation and spread over her skin. Her hair pricked as she raised her head and saw a man standing before her. Her heart thumping with terror. She stared at him, for she had never seen anyone like him before. Was it merely the sun at his back that made him look so terrifying? Greetings. Favored Woman. The Lord is with you. Trembling, she sat still in silent, wondering, in his words, she shot her eyes tightly and then opened them again. She was still standing there, looking down at her with kind patience. What does this greeting mean? We're not all God's God's chosen people favored. Why did He say the Lord was with her? Was He the Lord? Fear filled her and she closed her eyes again for surely anyone who looked upon the Lord would die. Don't be frightened, Mary, for God has chosen to bless you. I saw welled up in her throat, catching her off guard, for she wanted nothing more than to please God. But the Lord knew how undeserving she was. She blushed, remembering that only the moment before she had resisted the idea of marrying Joseph, though he loved God as much as she, and how this man said precious words that filled her with joy, the stranger drew closer in his head, inclined towards her. You will become pregnant and have a son, and you are to name him Jesus.

Jesus. That name meant the Lord saves. The Angel was still speaking. He will be very great and will be called the son of the most high. And the Lord God will give Him the throne of His ancestor David, and He will reign over Israel forever. His Kingdom will never end. Mary swallowed. Her mind was whirling vile, the implication of his words. He was telling her she would bear the Messiah. As soon as the words were uttered, she felt attacked by a chorus of dark voices. You. Why would the Lord choose anyone so low? The Messiah will not come from some Nazarene peasant girl. What evil is this? That once so unworthy would dare imagine she could bear the Messiah Ignore this mad man Look away from him Reject what he says Close your eyes saying nothing yet another voice spoke a quiet voice A voice her heart recognized. What is your answer, Mary? She stood, tilting her head, and as she looked up at the angel, she said, How can I have a baby? I'm a virgin. The angel smiled tenderly. The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the most high will overshadow you. So the baby born to you will be holy, and he will be called the Son of God. What's more, your relative, Elizabeth, has become pregnant in her old age. People used to say she was barren, but she's already in her six month for nothing is impossible with God. Mary drew in her breath with a smile and clasped her hands. Oh, she knew how Elizabeth had always longed for a child. Nothing was impossible. With God. Elizabeth would be like Sarah, who bore Isaac in her old age. She would be like Hannah dedicating her son to the Lord. The news made Mary's faith leap. She wanted to race to Elizabeth and see this miracle for herself. But the angel stood in front of her silent, waiting for an answer. If she said yes, she would become the mother of the long awaited Messiah. Why the Lord had chosen her to be part of his plan.

She couldn't even guess. She was uneducated, poor and lived in an obscure village that most Jews disdained. Yet she knew from listening to Scripture readings in the synagogue that God often used the most unlikely and unworthy to fulfill his purposes. It didn't matter who she was. God would accomplish his purposes in his way. The Angel of the Lord was asking her to be a part of God's plan, and every thing within her heart and soul cried out a joyous Yes. Do you really think you can be the Messiah's mother? Do you think you will know how to rear God's son to be king over Israel? The dark voices again. No, I won't. Her heart answered. Good God, we are gathering her courage. Mary looked up. I am the Lord's servant. She spread her hands, and I am willing to accept whatever he wants. May everything you have said come true. As soon as she had made her decision, the angel was gone. She uttered a soft gasp of dismay. She would have thought, she imagined the entire episode had not. The air still trembled around her, shaken. She clutched her hands against her chest until she remembered

the angel of the Lord and said, who said not to be afraid, letting out her breath softly she knelt and lifted up her face to heaven. She lifted her hands, palms up. Lord, your will be done. Her skin tingled strangely as she saw a cloud coming down, she placed her hands over her heart as she was overshadowed, closing her eyes, she breathed in the scent of spring, flowers, earth and heavens. Her skin warmed as her body was flooded with sensation. She drew in her breath and held it for one brief space and time. Nothing lived, no sound was heard as all creation paused within the womb. The poor

Mary's faith is remarkable so much that could have it could go wrong socially. Amid all of that, she said, a resounding yes to God. So Alu, it's kind of unusual to do this. I looked into the teachings into some of the Catholic teachings on Mary because most of us know that Mary plays a very significant role in Catholic faith just to see what is there something there that could inform my faith about her story. At catholic.com, which is a Roman Catholic website, says the following about Mary. Mary said Yes to God and gave birth to baby Jesus, but she could have said no. We look up to Mary as the greatest saint in our church because she said yes to God. Mary knew that she could have been stoned to death for being a unwed mother, while she was engaged to Joseph, she knew how Joseph's, her parents and the people in her town could react. And she said yes. Anyway, that is why we look up to her as our church's spiritual hero. Hallowed.com says at every moment Mary placed her complete trust in God's plan for the world. When we pray, we remember her humble yes, and seek to have the same disposition before God in our relationships with him. Mary's faith shows us that humble obedience is a way to the favor of God rather than the power that comes to the to people through learned nurse money or anything that comes from this world. Mary and her story remind us that it is faith filled trust and acceptance of God's word that truly causes us to be blessed.

Pope John Paul, the second said in 1987. Mary's faith can also be compared to that of Abraham, whom Saint Paul calls our father in faith. Coming from Romans four, verse 12 in the Salvi, I love this expression in the salvific economy of God's revelation. So it's in the the saving story of God's revelation. Abraham's faith constitutes the beginning of the old covenant. Mary's faith at the Annunciation inaugurates the New Covenant, just as Abraham in Hope, believed against hope that he should become the father of many nations, which comes from Romans 4:18. So, Mary, at the Annunciation, having professed her virginity, how shall this be? Since I have no husband believes that through the power of the most high, by the power of the Holy Spirit, she would become the Mother of God's Son. In accordance with the Angel's revelation, the child to be court, to be born, will be called Holy. The Son of God

In Luke one and 35, Mary is the first woman to appear in an important role in the Bible in well over seven centuries of Scripture. If you think back, I kind of looked back a little bit to see that and I was kind of surprised by that. Not only is Mary's role important, God chose to elevate and commend to readers the faith of a woman. We are completely familiar with the story. Of course, it's still remarkable that it was very outside of the norm for a woman to be the hero of faith. During these times, God was definitely doing a new thing, a world that was focused on a male power perspective was also the world that Jesus was born into. But his birth heralds a peace on earth that is far beyond what the men of the time thought the Messiah would bring. Jesus brought a way of life that was out of step with the culture of the time and in step with the culture of His Heavenly Father. We know that we are all subject to the culture in which we find ourselves the very way we think is fashioned and shaped by our culture. It's part of our humanity. It's inescapable, its shapes, what we value and what we neglect. It shapes what we respect and what we disrespect. It shapes what informs our thinking about how how people are to

be good people. And it shapes who we actually are, is sending people. But this was not true for Jesus. He was not bound to the culture He was born into. Rather, the culture he grew up with was nurtured by his Heavenly Father. It was not natural for Jesus to overlook women, to ignore them, to think less of them because they were less educated, to think of them as second class because they weren't born boys. His Heavenly Father's culture was one in which women are cherished, in which their thoughts and insights are valued in which they are seen as significant spiritual human beings.

Mary, as Jesus first teacher must have been amazed by the way Jesus listened to her and I. This is one of the things that I just love about this book. This like blew my mind because it was beyond what I had thought, but is captivating to me without that sort of sinful self focus that every other child in the whole universe has. Raising Jesus must have been quite a different experience, as all good teachers do. Mary must have learned a good many things from him as well. What a joy it must have been to sit alongside of little him, watching him learn new words, new skills, watching him pretend, imagine Jesus the Messiah, pretending how amazing and even bewildering it must have been to know that playing right through her right in front of her was the Messiah and she had been chosen to witness it all. Talk about pinch me moment. I think over and over again it must have been we struggled to understand how the young Jesus could have lost such track of time when He was missing to his parents for days, while he listened and asked questions of the teachers in the temple. When Mary rebukes him for his thoughtlessness, Jesus seems to be surprised that she didn't get it, that he would be in his father's house. Clearly there was a difference in perspective there about how that day should have ended. Jesus could have so easily argued with his mother. He was the first born in his family, and let's not forget he was the Son of God. But he didn't. John two, verse 51, says, Then he went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them.

We see Mary again years later at the wedding in Cana, although it's historical fiction to paint the story in this way. Francine Rivers paints the picture of Mary asking Jesus to do something that seems to have happened before. In her book, Jesus often made sure that there were there was enough oil for the lamps so it didn't run out. And so Mary makes the request that Jesus help out with the situation at this wedding in which the host runs out of wine once again instead of shutting Mary down because it wasn't yet his time. Jesus fulfills his mother's request because she asked it. Changing the water into the from the well into wine for the wedding celebration. As much as anything, Jesus taught that a life that is pleasing to God is filled with the fruit of the Holy Spirit. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. All of these practices being loving when you're frustrated, finding joy when you're feeling grumpy, being a peacemaker, when your rights are being ignored, being patient when you're exasperated, being kind to others, when they're being rude to you, engaging in self talk and God talk when you're tempted to make a poor and ungodly choice. All these practices take work really hard, faith driven work. Partnering with one another is a way to stay faithful to our to one another. In Luke 821, Jesus says My Father and mother's my father and brothers are those sorry, let me try that again. My mother and brothers are those who hear God's word and put it into practice.

In Luke 1127 B and 28, a woman in the crowd called out, Blessed is the mother who gave birth and nursed you, but Jesus replied, Blessed rather are those who hear the Word of God and obey it. And then to the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples, then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free. Jesus came to set free and half of those people are women. Jesus had a very radical view of women. He saw them as people, people in

need of salvation, and people who are capable of the persevering work it would take to stay faithful in a world pitted against the faithful. I more quick thought to share about Mary with you. One of the things that that is remarkable to me about Mary was it says several times that Mary observed what was happening to her and stored it up in her heart. And it strikes me that this is a really important perspective. It allows us to keep a place of not knowing, of not explaining, of not being able to figure things out at the core of our faith. It's a place of not rendering into black and white or yes or no or right or wrong. It's a place of patiently waiting for God to reveal and sometimes even not to reveal how the mysteries of life all fit together. It's a place that's reserved for and is expectant of the insights to come later in our life. It's a place reserved for what I like to call a ha moments in which you suddenly say, Oh, I get it. It's a comfortable and patient place in which, although you're filled with faith and are certain about the end goal, you can laugh at the uncertain days ahead because you know that God has it all covered. Never would such faith be needed more for Mary in those in those last days of Jesus life. Most certainly Simeon's Prophecy came true at Jesus presentation at the Temple. When Mary, when he told Mary that a sword will pierce your own soul to I can't even imagine the pain of watching your son suffer and die as Mary watched hers suffer and die. It would have been enough to have her husband die and to be a widow, but to have her son, this son, this messiah son, die. But he had said he would rise. And I imagine that against all hope, Mary believed as one of the disciples of Jesus in Jerusalem. Mary was surely there when Jesus revealed that He was alive because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him. What an incredible aha moment to realize that as her son death came, but as God son life came life for all life born of love that was more powerful than death. Mary loving, nurturing, teaching, believing, faithful. What a hero we have in her as we celebrate with Christmas coming, the first coming of Christ and look forward to His second coming. Let's be encouraged by the faith of Mary to be faithful, no matter the cost and forever to hold a place for God to reveal Himself and His plan for our lives.

Song Leader Comment

So how old was Mary when all this was happening in that time, in that culture, once women had evidence that they could reproduce, that was a time to get married. So Mary could then 12 years old, 13, 14 years old and wrap your head around that. This is this child. And goodness, this just opened us up. So many amazing things about her at such a young age. I would like to direct you to a song that's recorded by Pentatonix, and the song is called Mary Did You Know? And it's a series of questions that are searching, questions that beg for answers about Mary. I'm not going to read the song to you. I would I would recommend that you look it up. It's a great song. Music fabulous message is fabulous. I would have liked to sing it for you, but I don't want to belabor your patience. We're going to sing a song. In conclusion, I think of the song as This is what we want to be. It's about us and the kind of community that we want to be.

Closing

Thank you, Glynnis, Ed, Tim, Barb, for your participation, and thank all of you for participating with us. I just have one little thought and I have expressed this before, but I think it applies every day to those who are in Christ Jesus. The only thing that counts is faith, expressing itself through love. I commend you to take your faith and express it when you leave here. Amen.

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