

## **“Mary's Legacy: Blessed”**

A Sermon Based on Luke 1:26-38

First Presbyterian Church, Kingwood

December 4, 2011

Dr. Jim Davis

This morning as we begin, I'd like to introduce you to two people. The first one is a young woman. You just know her already. But you just met her again. Her name is Mary.

And as you learned from Luke Mary was a young woman who never intended to meet God. But God intended to meet her! So He sent His angel to her with a message: a call to get personally, very personally involved in God's mission in the world. Mary was to become the mother of the Messiah. But she had a question.

“How will this be?” Mary asked the angel, “since I am a virgin. And the angel answered “The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.” And the angel's says more. But that's enough for now because I want us to stop and think for a moment this morning on the second Sunday of Advent, think about just that much of the angel's message.

"The power of the Most High." A power that "will overshadow you" and your circumstances. Maybe this Christmas it's just the kind of power many of us would like to find.

A power that can "overshadow" the world around us with its windstorms and its wars, and its political wrangling. "The power of the Most High" A power that can "overshadow" our crazy "almost Christmas" lives with all their stress and strain. "The power of the Most High ..." What if that power was really strong enough to overshadow everything else going on inside us and around us this Christmas? Well hold on to those thoughts for a moment because I've got another person I want you to meet

This is person is different than the first. He's not a young woman like Mary. He's a young man. His name is Clive. But you probably know him better by his initials and his surname, C.S. Lewis. And like Mary, he never intended to meet God either. He didn't believe in God. But God intended to meet

him. So he kept on sending a message to Lewis, a thought that wouldn't leave his mind.

And the power of that thought overshadowed him until he finally gave in to it and put his faith in it. And for the rest of his life he wrote about it; the thought that there really is a Most High God. He wrote about it in all sorts of ways; in books, letters, broadcast talks. But he also wrote about it a series of children's stories he composed for his God-daughter, Lucy.

“My dear Lucy,” the Preface says, “I wrote this story for you. But when I began it, I hadn't realized that girls grow quicker than books. As a result you're already too old for fairy tales. And by the time it's printed and bound you will be older still. But someday you'll be old enough to start reading fairy tales again. You can then take it down from some upper shelf, dust it off, and tell me what you think of it. I shall probably be too deaf to hear, and too old to understand a word you say, but I shall still be your affectionate Godfather, C.S. Lewis.”

The stories are known today as “The Chronicles of Narnia.” And for the last 61 years they've been printed and reprinted. All together they've sold more than 100 million copies. Because these stories, well they aren't just any stories. They're stories about power, the power of evil and the overshadowing power of the Most High. So let me take a moment and tell you about the story line in the first book.

As the story begins, we meet four children named Peter, Edmund, Susan, and (yes) Lucy. They're playing hide and seek in an old house. And Lucy hides in a place that leads her into another world and a country called Narnia.

But when she does, she discovers Narnia's under a powerful spell “the spell of the White Witch.” And because of her power, in the land of Narnia, it's “always winter but never Christmas.” (I wonder? Was Lewis was trying to tell us something?)

In any case, Lucy and her siblings eventually discover their arrival in Narnia means a prophecy's about to come true. A great lion called Aslan is coming to Narnia. He has a power strong enough to overshadow the spell of the White Witch. That's what a Beaver tells the children. Listen to the way Lewis writes it.

“The Beaver’s voice sank into silence and it gave one or two mysterious nods. Then signaling the children to stand as close around as they possibly could, so that their faces were actually tickled by its whiskers, the Beaver added in a low whisper, ‘They say Aslan’s on the move right now; perhaps already here.’

And now a very curious thing happened. None of the children knew who Aslan was any more than you do. But the moment the Beaver spoke the words everyone felt quite different.

Perhaps it’s sometimes happened to you in a dream that someone says something you don’t understand. But in the dream it feels as if it has some enormous meaning – either a terrifying one which turns the whole dream into a nightmare or else a lovely one, too lovely to put into words. And it makes the dream so beautiful that you remember it all your life and are always wishing you could get into that dream again. It was like that now.

At the name of Aslan each of the children felt something jump in inside. Edmund felt a sensation of mysterious awe. Peter felt suddenly brave. Susan felt as if some delicious smell had just floated by her. And Lucy got the feeling you have when you wake up in the morning and realize that it’s the beginning of the holidays.”

And I wonder? What kind of feeling did Mary get in her heart as she heard the angel say, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you." The truth is, no one knows. But although we don't know the feeling Mary experienced, we do know the decision she made. For after the angel finished speaking, Mary spoke the five most important words any human being can ever say.

Do you know what they are? Have you ever said them? If you haven't, then you haven't yet experienced all God wants you to experience. So do you know the five words Mary said? Here they are. And they sound so simple we usually read right past them. But God hopes we'll ponder them, learn to say them and live them out in each of our lives. "I am the Lord's servant." Those are the five words and they can transform a human life. Why? Well let me break it down for you.

They can transform a life first of all because they're personal. They begin with an "I." So they make God's mission personal.

Ben Patterson, who visited with us last year, once told another congregation, "The most frequently asked question I get as a pastor is this. 'How can I know the will of God?' There are a lot of ways to answer that question," Ben said. "But the best response I can give anyone is to say simply, 'Don't worry about God telling you what he wants you to do. God wants you to know His will better than you want to know it!'"

"Don't worry about God getting His will through to you. Worry instead about whether you'll do what He asks you to do.' You see it's our readiness," Ben said, "our personal willingness that makes it possible for us both to know and do what God wants us to do. And that willingness always comes first."

And somehow Mary knew that. So the first word she spoke in answer to Gabriel was the word "I." "I'm willing," Mary said, "to do whatever God calls me to do. I'm willing to get involved in God's work in my world. Are you? Are you willing to say the first word Mary said? Are you willing to say the word "I?"

Then how about the second word Mary said, the word "am." Think about what that word means. Because it marks out a time frame. With the word "am" Mary is saying, "I'm willing to do what God calls me to do in the present! I'm not going to delay. I'm not going to plan to do it at some point in the future. I'm not going to get around to it someday. I'm willing to do what God calls me to do today. I'm willing to involve myself in God's mission in the world now."

So let me ask you. Are you willing to do that? It's a challenge isn't it? Because so often when God calls us to get involved in His work in our world, we're already doing something else. We've already busy at the office. We've already got a full day and an appointment coming up first thing next morning. We've already got plans for the weekend. So you see, we're already busy.

But so was Mary. She was already doing what she had planned to do. She was already getting married. She was already getting ready for the day. She was already planning for a new life as Joseph's wife. She was already busy.

But she was willing to step away from her plans to do what God asked her to do. Are we willing to do that? Are you? Am I? Are we willing to say "I am?"

Then there are the last three words. "I am," Mary says, "the Lord's servant." And if the words sound familiar, like you've heard them before, you have! For last month when we looked at the legacy of David's life we heard God speak them through the prophet Nathan. "Go," God told Nathan, "Go and tell my servant David."

And you remember at the time the words were spoken, David already had plans. But God had other plans. And when God told David His plans, David recognized God's plans for his future were better than his own. Did Mary remember that story? Is that why she spoke those three words, "I am the Lord's servant."

Again we don't know. But they do leave us with another question, don't they? And the question is, are we willing to say them too? Are we willing to see ourselves that way, as the Lord's servant? Are we willing to live our lives as something more than our own? Are we willing to plan second violin?

Leonard Bernstein, the celebrated composer and conductor, was once asked, "What's the hardest instrument to play in the orchestra?" Without a moment's hesitation he replied, "Second violin. I can always get plenty of people to audition for the first chair. But to find someone who's willing to play second violin, or second French horn, or second flute; that's a challenge!

But if no one's willing to play second violin," he continued, "there can be no real music. For music can't be made with two melodies. Music depends on harmony. So the role of the second chair is crucial. Few people want to play it. But in reality it's the best role of all!"

And Leonard Bernstein's right! Musically and spiritually! For it's just as hard to play with God in your life if you're always trying to play the lead as it is you're always trying to play first violin in the orchestra. But the truth is that's what most of try to do in our spiritual life, isn't it?

And the only way that will ever change is if we learn to say Mary's last three words, over and over in our lives. "I am the Lord's servant, the Lord's servant, the Lord's servant."

So there they are. Five words that are a big part of the legacy of Mary's life. And the question are they part of your life too? And if they aren't yet, then let me give you an idea. Call it an Advent adventure. Why not start out every day next week with Mary's words. Say them out loud as you're waking up, or driving to work, or walking into school. Tell yourself, today "I am the Lord's servant. I am willing God to make myself available to to your work in my world." And then watch what happens.

Let's pray ...