**Good Shepherd Lutheran Church**

**Watertown, WI**

**“Ready to Serve”**

Pastor Aaron Reseburg

October 20, 2024

*Luke 1:26-38*

When America entered World War I, there was a great need to bolster our military. To help with the recruiting process, there was a famous poster. The poster was designed in World War I and was used again in World War II. The caption reads "I Want You for U.S. Army,” and Uncle Sam is pointing directly at the viewer. Today in our text, God points His finger at Mary and says, “I want you!”

God calls on Mary. Mary responds in faith and trust in her Lord as a servant — ready to serve. She was ready to serve on short notice for a big task of being the mother of the ultimate servant — God’s Son, her son — and give His life as a ransom for many. May we be ready to serve as baptized children of God in gladness.

An angel by the name of Gabriel, God’s messenger, was sent to bring Mary a message that would change her life. Gabriel shares words of comfort along with Mary’s job description: “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. 31 And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call His name Jesus” (Luke 1:30–31). Not only does Gabriel say to Mary — “Stop fearing,” but adds “you have found favor” with God. Mary was not worthy of God’s favor, His grace, or His undeserved kindness. She was a sinner, just as are we. She did not earn God’s favor any more than we have. But God had chosen her to be the mother of Jesus.

What was about to happen? God was about to fulfill His promise to send a Messiah. God was going to send His Son on a mission to save the world, to save mankind from their sin. God did not merely recruit His Son, as someone may be chosen for a special task. He was going to send His Son to pay the sin debt for you and me and all people. As Luther stated: “(Jesus Christ) has redeemed me, a lost and condemned person, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil; not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death.” After all these years of waiting — God was going to make it happen. Mary, of all people, was about to be the mother of the Messiah.

Mary, needless to say, was perplexed. You can only imagine what thoughts may have been racing through her mind. So, she asked a question. Her question was not like Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, when he asked the angel for a sign. She does ask for an explanation. Her confusion is understandable. She asked a simple question: “How will this be, since I am a virgin?” (Luke 1:34).

Mary received her answer. Mary’s child would not have a human father. “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you” (Luke 1:35). This child was not to be conceived and born in sin; this child was going to the called the “Son of God.” This child that Mary would conceive was going to be God’s Son. Perfect! He would not be sinful. The title of Son of God was a title that belongs only to Jesus. As Jesus said, “whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16b).

Mary’s response? “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.” (Luke 1:38a). Mary was ready to go. Mary was a woman of faith. It was faith that allowed her to accept the angel’s message without question and place herself in the position to serve her Lord. She was ready to serve.

What was the basis of being ready to serve? God’s Word. “Let it be to me according to your word.” (Luke 1:38). She believed the message that Gabriel delivered from God. It was God who was telling her that she would be the mother of the Son of God, and she believed it. She heard and she believed God’s Word. God’s Word was the basis of her belief and trust in God. It was her faith that allowed her to say she was ready to serve. How she would tell and explain this to Joseph was not going to be easy, but she trusted in God that it would all work out.

She was ready to serve. Jesus, as God’s Son, came ready to serve, but for a bigger task than just being miraculously born. His task, His job description, as He shared with His disciples: “For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45).

Jesus became man and came to serve. He taught and healed people, and then went to the cross and rose from the grave to bring us salvation. He was a true servant. Paul summed it up in his letter to the Philippians: ... Christ Jesus ... emptied Himself, by taking the form of a servant being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross (Philippians 2:6–8).

As a true servant, He made the impossible possible. By God’s grace and favor, He was able to accomplish the impossible — open up eternal life to all who believe in Him. He came to earth on a rescue mission, a mission that took Him to the cross to suffer death for all the sins of the world and then to rise on that first Easter to conquer death. On that first Easter morning, Jesus accomplished His mission.

So, what about us? Mary was ready to serve! Jesus served. What about us? If we are looking for someone to imitate, we can look at Mary and her response. We are to make ourselves totally ready to serve our Lord. And how does that take place? We have experienced God’s grace through the efforts of His Son. God has given us His written Word that we hear proclaimed – God has redeemed us through Jesus. Because of that redemption, we have the opportunity to be servants just as Mary did. Paul put it this way in 2 Corinthians 5: (Jesus) died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for Him who for their sake died and was raised.” We stand ready to serve and with joy.

On this Sunday, we celebrate Lutheran Women in Mission, the LWML. Their motto is all about willing service and the attitude of joyfully serving. Serve the Lord with gladness! (Psalm 100:2). Since 1942, Lutheran Women in Mission has focused on affirming each woman’s oneness with Christ, encouraging and equipping women to live out their Christian lives in active mission ministries and to support global missions. They have been and are ready to serve their Lord. They have a goal for this biennium, 2023– 2025, to raise through their Mite Boxes and offerings, a mission goal of $2,350,000 to fund mission projects both in the U.S. and around the world.

God called on Mary and she was ready to serve as she told Gabriel, “I am the servant of the Lord” (Luke 1:38). God sent His Son to serve, and Jesus said to His disciples, “even as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.” May we be ready to serve. May our response as His baptized children of God be one of service or as Martin Luther expressed it: “that I may be His own and live under Him in His kingdom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness.” Amen.