

## **“Stepping Into the Waves . . . of the Extraordinary Ordinary”**

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*For an Advent series, Stepping Into the Waves*

Luke 1:26-38

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Leading up to Christmas, we're listening to what happened that set the stage for Jesus' arrival. As we do this, we're keeping in mind something that happened much later. It's when Jesus called his disciple Peter to step out of a boat (where things were rough, but he was safe) and step onto the waves. Jesus called him onto the water so he could come to where Jesus was.

Last Sunday we listened to the experience of Elizabeth and Zechariah. They were in the sunset years of their long lives that had not turned out as they had hoped. That was their boat. God called them to step into something new: parenthood. They did that, not knowing how it would turn out. When God calls us to do something, we don't know the outcome. Maybe we never will! Still, we can step into those waves because we trust God.

Now we turn to someone who, unlike Zechariah and Elizabeth, is just beginning her adulthood.

Mary.

II

Mary is ordinary.

She lives in Nazareth. It is one of those "Slow to 50" hamlets people zip past on their way somewhere else. Kids complain there is nothing to do there, and they're right. For anything even moderately important, folks have to go somewhere else. Everyone knows everyone's business. Many are related somehow.<sup>1</sup>

Mary's father might work in Sepphoris, just up the road. Maybe he is a craftsman. More likely he is a day labourer. Which means every day's a struggle to get by. God help them if they are in debt. Mary can neither read nor write.

She is just into her teenage years. It seems wrong to us, but in a society where a woman could expect to live maybe into her mid-thirties, and would not go to school, who was counted on to have as many children as possible (hoping a few would survive), it makes sense for her to be married soon after her first period.<sup>2</sup>

Mary is betrothed to Joseph. They might be related, but she barely knows him; he's from

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<sup>1</sup> As told in Adam Hamilton, [The Journey: Walking the Road to Bethlehem](#) (Nashville: Abingdon, 2011), 16.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, 21.

down near Jerusalem.<sup>3</sup> Of course their marriage was arranged. Their betrothal will last perhaps a year. They are legally bound, but not intimate. Once they do live together, she will start having children. Mary will keep having them, until she can't conceive any more, or dies in childbirth.

That's Mary's life. It's mapped out by necessity, tradition, poverty and sexism. How could she conceive it being any different?

It takes an angel.

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Please read Luke 1:26-38. You can see it [here](#).

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### III

Through ordinary Mary, God is doing something extraordinary.

It's not that she will become pregnant, soon. Once she moves in with Joseph, that's expected. Of course it's "how" she becomes pregnant that's extraordinary.

It's not that she will have a child. Hopefully she'll have many. Of course it's "who" her child will be that's extraordinary.

The "how" and the "who" are tightly wrapped together.

You know who Mary's child will be!

- Great, as in excellent, majestic, exalted.<sup>4</sup>
- God's son, reflective of God's very being.
- King, like his great ancestor David.
- Ruling forever, the Messiah who begins the everlasting age of God's Kingdom.
- *Yeshua*, Jesus. That means "God saves." In him, God saves us.

Because of who Mary's child will be, you heard how Mary's child will become!

- Not by human initiative.
- Not depending on normal natural processes.
- Jesus will be Holy Spirit-made.

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<sup>3</sup> My theory is that Joseph was from Bethlehem, the town of his ancestral family descended from King David. This lineage gives him some prestige, but little else. He's a tradesman, perhaps a carpenter.

<sup>4</sup> The Greek word is *meGas*. See <http://biblehub.com/greek/3173.htm>.

It's very ordinary, a woman pregnant. Very ordinary, a child conceived.

Yet because within Mary's womb, the essence of God will fuse with the fullness of humanity, it's extraordinary.

#### IV

When Jesus calls on us to step out of our boat, whatever it is, often it is to do something very ordinary. Too often in churches, we imagine God calling someone to be Mother Teresa, or Dietrich Bonhoeffer, or a United Church minister.

But maybe Jesus' most important calling to me is to be Rachel's Dad. Maybe that is where he is calling on me to step out of the boat and into the waves. Dad? That's ordinary!

Maybe God's most important calling to you is to be Bill's neighbour (or whatever their name is). Neighbour? That's ordinary!

Or to be your mother's child. That's ordinary!

Or your colleague's or classmate's friend. That's ordinary!

Maybe it is to work at your ordinary job.

Stepping out is not necessarily, or even usually, into something spectacular. It is ordinary.

When Jesus called Peter to step out, it was onto ordinary lakewater, stirred by ordinary winds into ordinary waves. What made it extraordinary? It was Jesus who was calling him to do it. And to do it in an extraordinary way.

What God is calling us out into is probably ordinary. It might not be a big life change at all! (Mary is going to have a baby! That was already going to be her life!)

Yet because it is the Holy Spirit moving through us, we will do it in extraordinary ways.

And because it is Jesus who has called us, it is extraordinary.

V

Mary was full of grace. God's grace.<sup>5</sup>

God's grace . . . kindness, love, care. God's grace . . . it's everything God does for us. All God's blessings. All God's goodness. Salvation. Redemption. Restoration. Renewal.

It's grace because it is God's gift. A true gift is not deserved; it is simply given. A grace-gift is given because of love. Everything God gives us is because of God's love. Only because of God's love. And that is enough, more than enough. It's infinite: God's love, God's grace.

God fills Mary with grace.

Why her? She is painfully ordinary. By any standard easy to miss. What did God see in her that made her right for God's grace? Maybe nothing. Remember, God's grace is a gift. Nothing makes us right for it. Maybe all God saw was that she would say "Yes." That she would say, "Let it be with me as you have said." That Mary would step out of the boat, into the waves.

Was that it? It's enough.

With grace, God filled her. So that from her, God's grace would flow and fill the world, in her son Jesus. Jesus is God's grace.

As Jesus calls on you to step out into the waves, those ordinary waves, his grace fills you. He gives you everything you need. And because his grace will fill and flow from you, you will do that ordinary, extraordinary!

This is the good news of Jesus. Amen.

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<sup>5</sup> Luke 1:28. The Greek word is *kecharitōmenē*. Now it is usually translated as "favoured one," though literally it means "filled with grace."