

A world in crisis

Luke 1:26-45

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Introduction: Today's crises are multiple, in just about every field of human knowledge: in education, religion, politics, finance, marriage and family; in other words, it's a quite generalized crisis and overwhelming! Supposedly "A.I." is going to fix everything for us (already been made a religion, thanks to Anthony Levandowski, supposedly helping people gain a spiritual connection with A.I., even using typical religious jargon, so that it helps and guides them in a way that we would formerly refer to 'God'). I.e., the human crisis deepens as humanity turns more and more to its own wisdom, and more openly turns against our Maker, the true Creator, King, and Redeemer. On the international scene, the crises abound in a lot of places besides the Ukraine and the Israeli-Gaza wars. Those are simply the places where the "human volcano" is presently erupting the most fiercely. But all over the world innocent lives are being jeopardized, damaged, and lost every day (how about Prague last Friday?!), and it's all because of the continuing crisis of humanity's selfish, warring nature, exacting a terrible toll, the fruit of our negative response to God's loving authority over His universe ... *This* is the underlying cause!

On a level closer to home, we have the crisis of divided families: between Nigeria and Spain, or Zambia and Spain, Iran and Spain, the Philippines and Spain, and how many other combinations like that?! Or in some cases the separation may not be geographical, but emotional, relational, legal ... Oh, how those separations pain my heart! The word *crisis* comes from the Greek, meaning originally a decision or judgment, the decisive point, a fork in the road; i.e., decisions that will have long-term effects! Whom are you separated from this Christmas? Whether by physical distance or emotional? Does absence make the heart grow fonder, or just make it grow colder?! Christmas is supposed to be about overcoming the distances between us! Isn't that what the incarnation was about? So why would we not be taking steps this Christmas to close the distances?! Will you really celebrate Christmas this year, or will you just keep pushing for more separation?!

In our Scripture reading for this morning, we see **Mary in crisis**: she had received overwhelming news, and she was greatly troubled (Greek: *diatarássomai* = trouble, disturb, terrify, frighten, upset, agitate.) Mary was a pious Jew, spiritually expectant, hoping for the Messiah's coming, but not expecting this! And now she was going to be *expecting* the Messiah in a whole new sense: in her own womb! A discreet young woman who had never "known" a man, she was innocence personified. **Her crisis** was how to handle this unexpected news – that she should expect to be expecting any time now. Her crisis was also about how to break this unusual turn of events to her family, and to her fiancé! She feared the distance it might create between them. **But what could she do?** The angel was so authoritative, and the disconcerting news ... that she had "**found favor**" with God (Greek: *xáris* = grace) – her defenses were totally wiped out from that point. Why should SHE have found

favor? Certainly not because of anything SHE had done! That's **the nature of grace** – it's undeserved! Ann Voskamp writes, *"You aren't equipped for life until you realize that you aren't equipped for life! You aren't equipped for life until you're in need of grace!"* And Mary the mother of Jesus was in need of God's grace just like every other human being! And here was the "favor" she would receive: **"you will become pregnant"** (Greek: *sullambano en gastrí* = "seized by the womb"). An unexpected pregnancy can indeed bring a crisis: I remember when my wife was "seized by the womb" for the third time in our marriage, and our first reaction was crisis mode – we sat down and wept! She was 38, and this was not in our plans. But it was certainly in God's, who knew so much better than we how much we would need that third blessing!

So this was the favor: Mary would be expecting and give birth to a son (no need for a sonogram here). The **prophecy** about this son said that His name would be Jesus ("Yahweh saves"); He would be great (Greek: *meγas*), called **"son of the Most High"**; God would give Him His ancestor David's throne (the long-awaited Heir), and He would reign over the house of Jacob **"forever"** ("no end," according to the age-old promise!). But **Mary's crisis** continued: **"I've never known a man."** Not to worry, says the angel; the Holy Spirit will come over you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Translated into modern scientific language, that meant God would provide the Y chromosome! XX = female; XY = male: no amount of hormone treatment or surgery can change this basic molecular structure; it's written in your genes, and God doesn't make mistakes! Nature didn't mess things up; it's how God made us from the beginning – binary; and He said it is GOOD (essentially good, though soon it would be morally and spiritually damaged because of sin). "But what about my feelings?!" Your feelings do matter, but they are NOT an infallible guide to the truth! Feelings can often lead us down a dead-end path, especially when they go against the teaching of God's Word! God didn't make up a bunch of arbitrary rules to complicate our lives; He gave us guidelines to help us know the way to life, and to avoid the pitfalls that only lead to death!

So the angel told Mary, **"the holy fruit of your womb will be called Son of God."** And then to give her a little bit of encouragement in this moment of crisis, the angel gave her some other news: "you're **not the only one** to have an unexpected pregnancy – your kinswoman Elizabeth is also expecting even in her old age (Greek: *geras*), the one who was ready for the *geriatrics* ward! She's in her sixth month now – **"for nothing will be impossible with God."** This message was basic to the whole Bible and it's essential to the Christmas story! Gen. 18:13-14, *Then the LORD said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh and say, 'Will I really have a child, now that I am old?' Is anything too hard for the LORD?"* Num. 11:21-23, *But Moses said, "Here I am among six hundred thousand men on foot, and you say, 'I will give them meat to eat for a whole month!' Would they have enough if flocks and herds were slaughtered for them? Would they have enough if all the fish in the sea were caught for them?" The LORD answered Moses, "Is the LORD's arm too short? Now you will see whether or not what I say will come true for you."* Job 42:1-2, *Then Job replied to the LORD: "I know that you can do all things; no purpose of yours can be thwarted."* Jer. 32:17, *"Ah, Lord God, it is you who have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and by your outstretched arm. Nothing is too hard for you."* Mt. 19:26, *"Jesus looked at them and said, 'With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.'" (Mk. 10:27, Lk. 18:27).* Rom. 8:31, *"What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?"* Eph. 3:20-21, *"Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory..."*

After a speech like that, who could resist?! Mary said, **"I am the Lord's maidservant; be it done to me according to your word."** Done deal. *Trato hecho*. And what had she just committed herself to?! No wonder Mary would be known for a lot of pondering in her heart! This was hard to wrap your mind around! The popular Christmas song, *Mary, did you know?*, really captures those paradoxes: "This child that you deliver, will soon deliver you!" "When you kiss your little baby, you kiss the face of God." "That sleeping child you're holding is the great I Am!" Though she had undoubtedly not finished discovering all these deep truths, it was mind-boggling enough just to know that she was expecting a

baby without ever having had any intimate relations with a man ... a doctrine that moderns love to sneer at and joke about. But the fact is if we believe in a God who is the Creator of life, what difficulty is it for Him to create life in the womb of a virgin? Especially when it's His own life that He's planting there for the purpose of identifying with His fallen, wayward creatures! (And He had foretold it!)

But Mary is still in crisis – you don't assimilate news like this in a day! So the text says she made haste to go to her cousin's house in the hill country of Judah. She's so eager, in fact, desperate for some confirmation regarding this, someone to ratify what she has just experienced ... to be sure she wasn't hallucinating! And the answers she receives are so perfectly geared to her need! Notice how her cousin ministers to her, and the Lord Himself was reassuring her, and don't forget that Elizabeth herself is experiencing something totally extraordinary:

1. The first thing Elizabeth did was to bless Mary for her offspring. Hearing Mary's greeting, the baby in Elizabeth's womb leaped for joy! And Luke writes that she was filled with the Holy Spirit and declared a blessing over Mary: ***"Blessed are you among women! And blessed is the fruit of your womb!"*** Mary hadn't even mentioned being pregnant, and her cousin is already confirming it – and blessing her, suggesting she will hold a special place among womankind! Then Elizabeth goes on to bless her baby! No one else even knew about this child, and here Elizabeth is blessing Him. There's hardly a greater blessing for any person than to bless their children!
2. Immediately afterward, Elizabeth exclaims, "What on earth have I done to be granted a visit from the mother of my Lord?!" The important phrase here, of course, is ***"the mother of my Lord"*** – this is a prophetic word that Elizabeth has just pronounced over Mary. Who told her that Mary would deliver the Son of God? The Holy Spirit revealed this to her. And it must've given Mary goose bumps! Especially when she mentioned how the baby jumped for joy in her womb!
3. Finally, she blessed Mary for her faith ... for believing! ***"Blessed is she who believed there will be fulfillment according to what was spoken to her from the Lord."*** Elizabeth is experiencing this herself, and that's why she could be so emphatic about it. Being able to ***bless others*** comes from having experienced blessing oneself and knowing where it came from! And being blessed is the fruit of believing the Lord's word!

There would be more crises to face ... but Mary was reassured for the next steps she needed to take ... enabled to overcome her fears and the distances that could have separated her from loved ones. Even so the Lord desires to bless us in our crises if only we have eyes to see and ears to hear! May we invite the Lord Jesus to be present in our crises this Christmas – and in the world's crises! Only He can help us overcome the distances that tend to separate us! May we also invite Jesus into our crises and learn from Him how to have faith and to bless.