

AWAY IN A MANGER

Scripture used: [Luke 1:34-38 \(NLT\)](#)

OVERVIEW

Pastor Hurmon started the message by relating the eulogy for George H.W. Bush last week. Bush 41's pastor visited him at the end of his life, when he was suffering from Parkinson's disease and sensing the end was near. President Bush asked: "What is heaven like?". Not "is there a heaven?" or "will I go there?". The President had a quiet confidence in God's plan. "Away In A Manger" is a medieval carol which is widely popular in the English-speaking world. The adaptation we know today is from 1892; the third verse was added and takes the form of a prayer. Mary's response during and after the visit of the angel shows the same quiet confidence, and ultimately nourished our carol's prayer for the world to join Jesus in heaven.

KEY POINTS

- 1) Today we look at Mary's response to the angel Gabriel as a model for faithful response to God. Please note that while Catholics and Protestants are both Christians, believing that Jesus' death and resurrection is the means of salvation by the grace of God, Protestants do not believe that Mary was sinless, even though she was a virgin. For example, in [Luke 1:47](#), Mary indicates that God is her Savior, and in doing so, she acknowledges her need for salvation. NBCC has a diverse community, including theological backgrounds, so this teaching should be discussed with sensitivity and respect.
- 2) Mary's initial response to the angel's visit and announcement is thoughtful. There is perplexity and wondering. The angel tells her she is "highly favored" yet she is lowly and humble. She may have wondered if God had paid attention to the true circumstances of her life. Yet there is no one so poor and powerless that God does not need him/her; just as there is no one so rich and powerful that they don't need God.
- 3) Mary's response is gradual: the Jewish tradition dictated that God cannot take human form. Mary was incredulous. Yet nothing's impossible for God. Mary shows a sort of "open unbelief", a servant's heart. She is driven by revelation (which can be immediate or a very slow "drip"). Even though she has a hard time believing the angel's message to her, she is open to the possibility that God might move in her life in a way that she can't imagine.
- 4) Mary's initial acceptance is an act of faith. When Mary says in [Luke 1:38](#), "I am the Lord's servant. May your word to me be fulfilled," she is taking the first step of faith and allowing God to respond with what only God can do. Mary surrenders to the will of God - her dreams for a predictable future, her control over Joseph's response to her pregnancy, her reputation (being pregnant before marriage in a shame-based society), and her overall control over her life. She will be faithful to the will of God all the way to Jesus' crucifixion.

DISCUSSION

- 1) **HEAR** - Consider the lyrics of the third verse of Away in a Manger: Be near me, Lord Jesus / I ask Thee to stay / Close by me forever / And love me, I pray. / Bless all the dear children / In Thy tender care / And take us to Heaven / To live with Thee there. What part of this prayer is relevant for your life right now, and how are you hoping that God answers this prayer?
- 2) **UNDERSTAND** - Consider the two truths: no one is so rich or powerful that they do not need God, no one is so poor or humble that God does not need them. Do you have a sense for how God needs you? Do you know that God's purpose and plan includes you? How have you sensed God calling you to take a step of faith in this season? How you can emulate the example of Mary (thoughtful response, gradual acceptance, surrender) in your own life? What consequences of surrender might you need to be prepared to endure?
- 3) **DO** - We were challenged to exercise faith this week. Consider inviting someone who doesn't normally go to church to NBCC's Christmas Gathering! Ask God for a way to engage in service above and beyond gift-giving as a way to surrender to God's will and celebrate the birth of our Lord Jesus in a manger to redeem the world.