

## Advent 2021 | Week 3 | Devotional #1

What makes a great story? Much ink has been spilled on this profound question, and surely it would do no one any good if we presumed to answer it here. But perhaps one observation might be made, nonetheless. There are basically two kinds of heroes that seem worth following: the humble who accept a call to adventure, and the great who accept a call to become humble.

Mary, despite her youth, was perhaps qualified to be a mother in her culture. No doubt she had learned the skills of keeping a home and raising children since she was young. She was on the verge of marriage, after all. But surely such a young, innocent girl never dreamed she would be asked to bear the *Messiah*. Mary was among the truly humble in history that God called to great adventure. Mary's chance to be part of a great story didn't come through her own extraordinary skill as a mother; it came because she said yes to God.

But what about God himself? Surely God is as great as they come! Is he not a hero worth following? Consider the man Jesus, born of this virgin, Mary:

***Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;<sup>7</sup> rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.<sup>8</sup> And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!<sup>9</sup> Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name,<sup>10</sup> that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,<sup>11</sup> and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.***

### ***Phil 2:6-11***

Surely God could have accomplished his purposes without the use of feeble human beings. He chose to share his rule with fickle, weak creatures like us—prone as we are to seek after the *transient*, when we were created for the *transcendent*.

Surely God would not have been less great if he never created anything at all. Nor would his majesty have been diminished if he made a world without conflict, struggle, or suffering.

But consider this possibility: God knows what makes a great story.

God decided to create the sort of world where a great story could unfold. He certainly knew that sharing his rule with us would lead to a conflict only he could resolve. He knew that saving the world he loved would require nothing less than emptying himself of all his privilege and status to become a servant—the immortal Creator become obedient to death.

But God wanted to invite us into a great story. And he chose to be glorified by *calling* the humble like Mary. He chose to be glorified by *becoming* the humble in Jesus.

So, there are two kinds of characters worth following: the humble who accept a call to adventure, and the great who accept a call to become humble.

Each of us receives a call. The faithful will accept it. Will you?

**Questions for Reflection:**

- In what ways are your circumstances, resources, and gifts *humble*? In what ways are they *great*?
- To the extent that these things are *humble*, are you willing to follow God on an *adventure* you don't feel equipped to handle?
- To the extent that your gifts, talents, resources, and circumstances are *great*, are you willing to empty yourself of those things to serve and identify with the *humble*?

## Advent 2021 | Week 3 | Devotional 2

When my son and daughter were little I would often tell them they were my “favorite boy” or “favorite girl.” I loved to see their little faces light up. Now that they are 8 and 12 they just roll their eyes and say “I’m your only boy or your only girl.” I loved telling them this because it was absolutely true. This wasn’t because they have perfect behavior. It wasn’t because they had done something good for me. They are my favorite because they are mine. In the eyes of God favor isn’t so much a medal to be earned but a gift to be received. God’s gracious favor is demonstrated to Mary in Luke 1,

**<sup>28</sup> The angel went to her and said, “Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.” <sup>29</sup> Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. <sup>30</sup> But the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God.**

God's choice of Mary to bear this child springs from his grace, not from any inherent merit that she possesses. She is the object of God's kindness. And this incredible gift of grace wasn't so much about her deserving it, in fact her first response was to be troubled or alarmed at the angel's greeting rather than see it as a pat on the back. God is not giving Mary a prize for her holiness but the most gracious invitation to host the Savior of the world. As Ann Voskamp writes,

**“Mary kneels before us this first Christmas not as a woman producing, performing, or perfecting but simply bending before a God who has all the power to dispatch angels, enfold Himself in embryonic cells, choreograph the paths of the stars—a God who quietly beckons every man, every woman to simply come, bend, make a space, receive.”**

### Questions for Reflection:

- Where do you see God’s unmerited favor at work in your life?
- Where are you tempted this season to produce, perform or perfect rather than receive?
- Take a moment to pause and thank God for the favor he has given you. Then take a moment to just sit and silence and receive whatever invitation God might have for you for the day.