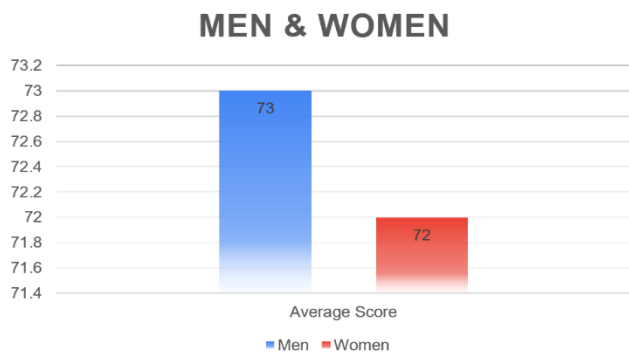


She considered him
FAITHFUL
who had promised.

There's one interesting result from the survey that we have yet to share with you. I hate to say it, but the men outscored the women. It's obvious we are more spiritually mature. 😊



Of course that can't be true for several reasons. One, a difference of one percentage point is statistically meaningless. Second, everyone knows that women are more spiritually mature than men. At least that seems to be the case with Zechariah and Mary.

Zechariah to announce that his wife Elizabeth would bear a son in her old age.

¹⁸ And Zechariah said to the angel, "How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years." ¹⁹ And the angel answered him, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I was sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news. ²⁰ And behold, you will be silent and unable to speak until the day that these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time."

Zechariah's question seemed innocent enough but Gabriel saw it for what it was—unbelief. The same angel Gabriel visited Mary and announced that she would give birth to a son. But not just any son. One who "will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end" (Luke 1:32-22)

Both Zechariah and Mary were promised a son. Both were visited by the angel Gabriel. Neither were able to bear children in their own power. Both required a miraculous intervention. Yet Mary's response was very different from Zechariah's.

³⁴ And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?"

³⁵ And the angel answered her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God. ³⁶ And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren.

On the surface, both answers seem nearly identical.

Zechariah—“How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years.”
Mary—“How will this be, since I am a virgin?”

This time it’s Elizabeth who gave us the state of Mary’s heart.
“And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.”

From just their words alone we would not necessarily conclude that Mary had faith but Zechariah did not. That’s a bit surprising when you consider these two people. Zechariah had served for many decades as a priest. He knew the Scriptures and served the Lord faithfully. Mary was just a teenager with no experience in the world except what her family and small town had provided. What was it that allowed Mary to express such great faith while Zechariah faltered? I believe the answer is found in the Magnificat. It has become known as the Magnificat because that is the Latin word for Mary’s first words. Let’s read them.

⁴⁶ And Mary said,
“**My soul magnifies** the Lord,
⁴⁷ and **my spirit rejoices** in God my Savior,
⁴⁸ for he has **looked on** the humble estate of his servant.
For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed;
⁴⁹ for he who is **mighty has done great things** for me,
and **holy** is his name.
⁵⁰ And his **mercy** is for those who fear him
from generation to generation. (Ps 103:17)
⁵¹ He has shown **strength** with his arm;
he has **scattered the proud** in the thoughts of their hearts;
⁵² he has **brought down the mighty** from their thrones
and **exalted those of humble estate**;
⁵³ he has **filled the hungry** with good things, (Ps 107:9)
and **the rich he has sent away empty**.
⁵⁴ He **has helped** his servant Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,
⁵⁵ as **he spoke to our fathers**,
to Abraham and to his offspring forever.”
⁵⁶ And Mary remained with her about three months and returned to her home.

Last year in our LEAD sessions, which is now EQUIP, we spent most of the year on the topic of Gospel Fluency. That’s the name of a discipleship book and the core of the book are four questions.

1. Who is God?
2. What has he done?
3. Who am I in light of what he has done?
4. How should I live in light of who I am?

This is a very helpful paradigm for studying the Bible and making application. It just so happens to fit perfectly with this passage.

1. Who is God?

There are three main attributes of God that Mary highlighted.

⁴⁹ for he who is **mighty** has done great things for me,
and **holy** is his name.

⁵⁰ And his **mercy** is for those who fear him
from generation to generation.

God is mighty, holy and merciful. The first thing to notice is that Mary knows this! She has been disciplined well in her young years. She's not merely reading words on a page. She is confessing truths of which she already knows and is certain. She believes these things. In fact, the reason she believed the miraculous promise from Gabriel is because she already had a solid faith. I'm not saying it was easy to believe such a thing but her faith did not seem to waver after the announcement. Gabriel knew it. Elizabeth could tell. Mary had a rock solid faith before Gabriel arrived on the scene. Do you think God knew this when he chose Mary to be the recipient of this blessing? There's no doubt about that.

Let's take a look at these three attributes of God. I'll start with God's holiness and a quote from theologian Charles Hodge.

“The holiness of God is not to be conceived of as one attribute among others. It is rather a general term representing the conception of God's consummate perfection and total glory. It is His infinite moral perfection crowning His infinite intelligence and power.”¹

God's holiness is the thing that causes us to fall down in holy fear before the Lord. This is how the Israelites experienced God at Mt Sinai. “¹⁸ Now when all the people saw the thunder and the flashes of lightning and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking, the people were afraid and trembled, and they stood far off ¹⁹ and said to Moses, “You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, lest we die.” (Exodus 20:18-19).

As Jesus was being led away to his crucifixion, he gave a similar warning about the future. “Then they will begin to say to the mountains, ‘Fall on us,’ and to the hills, ‘Cover us.’”

This was John's vision of the last days when the sixth seal is to be opened.

¹⁵ *Then the kings of the earth and the great ones and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, ¹⁶ calling to the mountains and rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of him*

who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, ¹⁷ for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?" Revelation 6:15-17

So then if God's holiness elicits this sort of holy fear, why did Mary not react this way? Because Mary also knew that God was full of mercy. Which brings us to our second question.

2. What has he done?

In general terms, God's mighty power is highlighted in red and his merciful actions is highlighted in blue.

for **he has looked on** the humble estate of his servant.

for he who is mighty **has done great things** for me,

He has shown strength with his arm;

he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts;

he has brought down the mighty from their thrones

and **exalted** those of humble estate;

he has filled the hungry with good things,

and the rich **he has sent away** empty.

He has helped his servant Israel,

in remembrance of his mercy,

as **he spoke** to our fathers,

Before I get into God's might and mercy, I want to highlight verse 55—"as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever." Here we have a reminder that our God is a God who speaks to his people. The importance of this cannot be overemphasized. There is no other religion that does this. Joseph Smith claims to speak for God but the so-called revelation he received is utterly ridiculous and worthless. Mohammed is Islam's prophet but among a whole slew of problems with the Koran, God did not start revealing himself until 600 AD. So thousands of years of human history went by before God chose to speak to anyone? That just doesn't make sense. Of course Mormonism and Jehovah's Witnesses did not come along until a couple hundred years ago, so that's many times worse.

By comparison, God spoke to Adam immediately after he was created. God spoke clearly to Abraham to call him out of a pagan land to the future Promised land. Moses came on the scene almost 3500 years ago to lay down the first five books of our Bible and then it just built from there. Hebrews 1 has an excellent summary of this process. "Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets..." Not only is he a God who speaks but he is a God who continually spoke. There is a theological term for this—progressive revelation. It's just a name for what Hebrews has already told us—"Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets..." God did not reveal himself or his purposes all at once. Instead, he revealed himself progressively over time. God said a lot to Abraham, but he did not tell him everything. God said an awful lot to Moses, but he did not tell him everything. God reveals to us exactly what we need but not what we want.

That should be a source of encouragement to us because often there are things we wished we knew about God's plans and purposes. Why did God do this? Why did God allow that to

happen? These are not necessarily wrong questions to ask and much of the Psalms writers ask the same sorts of questions. But there is tremendous comfort in knowing that God has told us enough. It's not all that there is to know but all that we need to know.

The second verse of Hebrews 1 finishes the thought. "but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world." About four thousand years of human history went by before God spoke through his Son in this way. There are appearances of the Son in the Old Testament but not in the way he enters our world through a virgin named Mary. But long before that happened, Mary was already listening to what God had already said. Verse 50 is a quote from the 103rd Psalm.

Mary (Luke 1)	Psalms
50 And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.	But the steadfast love of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him (Psalm 103:17)
53 he has filled the hungry with good things	and the hungry soul he fills with good things. (Psalm 107:9)

There are several implications from this fact. First, it shows that Mary not only knew God's revelation but she also memorized God's revelation. And of course that was the way it had to be. Mary did not have a Bible. Old Testament scrolls were kept in the Synagogues. They were rare and extremely expensive, so the lay person had to commit them to memory. Second it demonstrates that this had been part of Mary's upbringing. In other words, Mary was disciplined by her parents. They raised her so that she would know both the mighty power of God as well as his mercy. Third, she models to us what it looks like to pray through Scripture. A while back I introduced this practice to you through Don Whitney's book, Praying the Bible. As part of her spontaneous outburst of praise, Mary quoted OT Scriptures.

But even more than that, everything she says here is based on God's revelation of himself. Only some of what she said is a direct quotation from the Scriptures but everything she said was based on who God revealed himself to be and what he had done for his people. Mary memorized Scripture and prayed through Scripture because she was disciplined by her parents. Most scholars believe that Mary was about fifteen years old. By then she had come to own these truths for herself but that only happened because they were spoon fed to her by her parents and her Jewish community.

Parents, do not be afraid to spoon feed your children the Word of God. Feed them long before they understand what you are feeding them. When your kids started eating solid food, did you start them off with chocolate pudding? Hopefully you didn't! You fed them carrots and peas and natural foods that were good for them. They didn't know **what** you were feeding them or **why** you were feeding them this food. They just ate it. The same is true with the Word of God. Feed them young. Feed them often. Feed them even if they occasionally spit it back out as little ones are prone to do with their food. Parents, you are literally raising little Mary and Josephs of the world.

The result of all of this discipling and memorizing the Scriptures was that her faith was made rock solid. But notice that her faith did not come from within her, but it was based on what she knew about the faithful one. We should never say, “Oh her faith was so strong” but rather, “Her God was so big. Her God was so faithful and worthy of her trust.”

That’s why I borrowed the title of this message from Hebrews 11. This is how Hebrews 11 described Sarah. “She considered him faithful who had promised.” In other words, the only reason Sarah could have any faith whatsoever is because God himself was faithful. I’ve said it a bunch of times, but it bears repeating. As you walked into church today, not a single person was worried about falling through the floor. Maybe you should have been worried because if you fell through the floor it’s a long way down onto a concrete floor. You’d be seriously injured and potentially killed. But no one gave it a second thought because you trust the inherent strength of the floor. In the sense, the floor is faithful. The floor is trustworthy. Does your faith in the floor have anything to do with you? All we have to do is recognize the faithfulness of the floor, that’s it. But we have such faith in it that we take it for granted. We know it’s trustworthy, but we know it so well we never give it a second thought.

This is the kind of faith that Mary had and she arrived at this type of response because she knew God’s character and faithfulness because she knew God’s word. The strength of our faith is always related to the object of our faith. Is God 100% faithful? Then we merely consider him faithful.

3. Who am I?

For the answer to this question we need to ask, who was Mary? What did she think about herself?

⁴⁸ for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant.

For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed;

⁴⁹ for he who is mighty has done great things for me.

This is an intensely personal part of Mary’s beautiful song. This is where she applies all of the wonderful truths to herself. God is merciful, therefore he looked on the humble state of his servant. God is mighty, therefore he has done great things for me. Her perception of herself was fully rooted in who God was and what he had promised to her. She also recognized the future implications—from now on all generations will call me blessed. She was absolutely convinced that she was pregnant with the Savior of the world, so of course all future generations would call her blessed. God was faithful in all that he did and said so therefore she saw herself in light of these truths.

4. How do I respond?

Here’s how Mary responded. “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.” She responded in pure faith and pure worship.

Let me ask you this? Do you have such faith in God’s faithfulness that you never even give it a second thought? Do you trust God as instinctively as you trust this floor? Do you consider him faithful who has promised? Too often we have faith in our own faith instead of faith in God’s

faithfulness. Until we get to that point, we need to keep exposing ourselves to and reminding ourselves of God's truth. If we trusted him like we trust this floor, nothing would be impossible for us. Obedience would be as easy as breathing and walking across the floor. For over two thousand years Christians have been rejoicing along with Mary in the birth of our Savior. May we see him as completely worthy of our trust.

Rich Maurer
December 22, 2019

¹ Archibald Alexander Hodge, *Outlines of Theology*, 1866, p. 128.