

MARY'S CALL

by Carol Duerksen

KEY VERSE:

Luke 1:26-28

FAITH STORY:

Mary is a young Galilean girl promised in marriage to a man named Joseph. She receives a most unusual visit from an angel, who tells her that she is a "favored one" and that "the Lord is with you." Mary wonders what is going on, and the angel reassures her, saying not to be afraid, and that she is going to bear God's son, the Messiah. Mary isn't sure about that, in light of the fact that she has not "known a man." But the angel reassures her again that God will be with her and with God, all things are possible. Mary says "Okay, count me in. Let it be with me according to your word."

SESSION GOAL:

Help students explore the fact that Mary had a choice in the matter of giving birth to Jesus, and we also have choices in saying yes to God's calling in our lives.

SESSION OBJECTIVES:

By the end of this session, the students will:

- Students will dig into the cultural and historical setting of this story.
- Students will seek to identify with Mary and the call she heard from God.
- Students will identify what God might be calling them to do in their lives

MATERIALS NEEDED AND ADVANCE PREPARATION:

- 1 Bibles for each student
- 2 Bible reference books of Luke (such as The Interpreter's Bible), study Bibles, commentaries—as many different study and reference books as you can locate on the Gospel of Luke. (Check your church library, your pastor, or a local library. Bible software is also an option.)
- 3 Newsprint and markers
- 4 3 x 5 index cards and pens
- 5 Several copies of Hymnal: A Worship Book
- 6 A dictionary

SESSION OUTLINE

FOCUS: (5–7 minutes)

Welcome students and say: Imagine this: What if, for the next hour, you could get into a time machine and travel to any time in the past? Where would you go? What time in history would you like to visit?

Ask each student to share their “time travel” wish.

CONNECT: (3–5 minutes)

Say: *Of course I can't actually put you in a time machine today—sorry—but we're going to do something that will, in a small way, take us back in time to Palestine. We are going to cross a hermeneutical bridge. Any idea what kind of bridge that is?*

Ask for a volunteer to look up hermeneutical in the dictionary and read the definition. Discuss what a hermeneutical bridge might be.

A hermeneutical bridge is one that we cross into the context of the Bible passage we are studying. We study the events in light of the culture at that time, the world at that time, the people's experience with God at that time.

We interpret the story on that side of the bridge, and then we cross it back into our time and interpret what it means for us today.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE: (20–30 minutes)

- 1 Ask for volunteers to read the parts of the narrator, Gabriel, and Mary in Luke 1:26-38.

- 2 Divide into small groups and ask each group to take one of the reference books or study Bibles and read what it has to say about the passage. The groups should get newsprint and markers and do one or both of the following:
 - Make a list of the things you've learned about the cultural and historical setting of this story.
 - Make a list of the questions that come to your mind as you read this passage and study the background.

Bring the groups together and compare lists. Discuss these questions:

What do you understand to be true about Mary as a person and her life?

What do you wonder about Mary as a person and her life?

What do you understand to be true about the conversation between the angel Gabriel and Mary?

What do you wonder about their conversation?

What do you understand to be true about Mary's response to the angel?

What do you wonder about Mary's response to the angel?

- 3 **Say:** *The angel Gabriel told Mary that she had “found favor with the Lord.” That is a wonderful thing, but what did it mean for Mary's life? Let's make a list of how Mary's life went after the angel's visit.*

Ask students to make a list on the newsprint with you. It would include the following:

- Mary had to face Joseph and tell him the story—something he found hard to believe.
- Mary and Joseph had to face their family and friends with this pregnancy out of wedlock.
- Mary had to make a long tiring trip in her last stages of pregnancy—not because the foreign masters of her country ordered it.
- Mary had to be satisfied with less-than-wonderful accommodations at the end of that trip—and then give birth there without the assistance of a midwife or anyone else other than her husband.
- Mary and Joseph and their baby had to flee to another country to save his life.
- Upon their return to Nazareth, life was probably pretty normal, except Mary certainly had to wonder what the future held for her unusual son.
- When Jesus began his ministry, he was loved by humble people but hated by many of those in power. How does that make a mother feel?
- In the end, Jesus alienated enough people that they put him on trial, tortured him horribly, and finally executed him in a most excruciating form of death. Mary witnessed it all.

Say: *And this is what happened to Mary as a result of being found “in favor with God.” Obviously God does not promise us an easy way. Jesus did not promise that following him would be easy—in fact, he guaranteed just the opposite. What do you know about what Jesus promised us in our lives as a result of following him?*

Ask students to share based on what they know, and to locate and share passages that answer that question.

APPLY: (7–10 minutes)

Invite students to symbolically cross the Hermeneutical bridge back to the present by closing their eyes and imagining themselves in their room at their home. Allow enough time for them to make this “transition”; then invite them to continue to keep their eyes closed as you continue.

Imagine that you’re in your room one day when an angel shows up. What would that angel look like? (Pause.)

Imagine the angel saying, “Guess what! God loves you!” (Pause.)

Now imagine that the angel is telling you about something special that God wants you to do. What do you think it might be? (Long Pause.)

What do you think you’ll say to the angel? Be honest! Do you want to do what the angel is asking? (Pause.)

What will be your final words to the angel? (Long Pause.)

Imagine that the angel fades away and you are again alone in your room.

Hand out the index cards and pens. Ask students to take a few minutes to write down the possible consequences in their life if they do what the angel called them to do.

RESPOND: (10–15 minutes)

Allow students to choose from the following options:

- 1** Take Mary's final response to the angel and come up with movements to go with it. "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Prepare to share the statement with the actions with the class.
- 2** Come up with a skit portraying the visit of the angel Gabriel with a teenager today. You can use your personal example of what the angel is asking the student to do, or create another one. Plan to share the skit with the class.
- 3** Turn to #395 in the Hymnal. Practice this song (use a piano in the church sanctuary if possible) and prepare to lead the class in singing it together.

Invite students who prepared actions to the "Here am I" statement and skits to share them with the class.

CLOSING AND BLESSING: (5–7 minutes)

Invite the students who learned "Here I Am Lord" to share it and teach it to the class. Sing the song together, then form a circle and offer this blessing to the group: "Shalom to you, God's favored ones. May God bless you and keep you. May the very face of God shine on you and be gracious to you. May God's presence embrace you and give you peace."

**This lesson is adapted from "Sacred Search: Encountering God During Advent," by Carol Duerksen, Faith and Life Resources, 2005. This new resource will be available from Faith and Life Resources for the Advent season. Call 1-800-245-7894 for more information.*