

Sardis - December 23

During this time at Sardis where we have wanted to hear from 'different voices' this Christmas season, I am taking a bit of a different approach this morning. There were --- are --- many different voices making up the Christmas story --- then and now. So, what if, what if we could really hear them --- not just read their words someone put together in the Bible, but really hear them. Perhaps it would sound something like this ---

[Speak softer] ---Good morning Sardis Baptist. Let me introduce myself --- my name is Mary. I probably do not need to tell good old Baptists like you who I am --- at least not this time of year. I bet many of you have put on a bathrobe and wrapped some kind of material around your head, put a pillow at your stomach and pretended to be me in some Christmas play at church.

I imagine you did a pretty good job too.

Let me tell you, I don't think you would really want to be me. But then again, maybe, maybe in some different kind of way --- you have been me --- or you might just be me now.

But I hear this Christmas time at Sardis Baptist you are focusing on hearing 'different voices'. Now, I can tell you about some 'different voices'... especially, around that first Christmas. I was hearing some different voices, having so many mixed messages coming at me before Jesus was born.

You see, I was engaged to be married to a man named Joseph. I was pretty young, and that was kind of normal for back then. So, things were progressing along, you know, planning for a wedding.

And then that voice, --- your Bible says it was an angel named Gabriel, --- that voice talking to me and telling me I had found *favor with God*--- I was going to conceive a child --- it wasn't going to be Joseph's, but yet this child, this son [I even knew it was going to be a boy --- and there was no such thing as ultrasounds] --- and he was going to be called the Son of the most High and he was going to reign over the house of Jacob forever and of his kingdom there would be no end.

What??? I was planning a small wedding --- not all of this --- not a Kingdom movement.

Ever hear things --- voices --- that came with more questions than answers. Even if it was from God. Boy, that's what happened to me that day.

Your Bible says I was perplexed or troubled. But that angel knew different. Because --- then that voice told me *not to be afraid*. Yeah, right. Well, I'm here to let you know --- telling me not to be afraid ... even if it was from God --- did not work.

Along with all those voices of questioning, there was now this voice of fear.

Quickly, came the other voices ---

Voices of doubt --- *this can't be happening --- there's no way I, a lowly servant, could have found favor with Almighty God.*

And there voices of shame ---*there goes my image, yeah I might be God's favored one, but what about the neighbors or the people I go to church with. What will they think about me or Joseph --- or this child --- even if it is from God.*

And still --- as I pondered these things in my heart --- there were other messages --- different voices.

After hearing what God wanted to do in my life --- even in the midst of the questions, the fear, the doubt, the shame --- I found myself praising God and my spirit was rejoicing, celebrating what was about to happen --- not just to me --- but on all generations.

I was humbled to be chosen --- knowing generations will call me, Mary the mother of Jesus --- blessed by *the Mighty One who has done great things for me.*

Well, thanks for listening to me --- and remember I am one of many, from generation to generation, living out God's promises --- just like you.

I read a quote by Suzanne Guthrie. Listen, to **her** voice --- she writes "*Mary isn't the only one asked to receive the Spirit's indwelling. Our hearts are the womb, the inn, the resting place for Emmanuel*".

So, like what Mary said earlier --- we do not have to be chosen to give birth to God's Son to know and experience Emmanuel.

Regardless of how --- or when --- or why --- I still believe when we hear the voice of God or get some kind of message that God wants to move in our lives --- we question, we doubt, we fear, we celebrate, we rejoice --- even when it is from God.

This Christmas season, may we take the time to celebrate Emmanuel in our past ---Emmanuel today --- and *let every heart prepare Him room* in the future.

Amen