

MY WORLD IS TURNED UPSIDE DOWN! LUKE 1:26-38

Have you ever had one of these life-changing moments, the kind of moment, after which life is never same again? We don't always recognise them when they come along, but afterwards, looking back we see them. You meet the person with whom you are going to fall in love and marry and spend rest of your life together. The time when something happens to change your career path. The point in time when come to faith in Jesus and make your personal commitment to Christ. The birth of your first child that changes your perspective on life forever. The death of someone you love and life is never same again because of the gap that is there in your life. There are all kinds of these life-changing moments, some of them immensely good for us, others we find hard to bear; all of these moments, good or bad, leave us with fresh challenges to face as we come to terms with the fact that life will never be the same again.

We can react to these moments in two ways: first of all, we can run away from them, trying to pretend that they don't exist and we continue to live life as if nothing has ever happened. There are people who get married and behave as if they are still single, their lifestyle and priorities don't change one little bit; it is the same with having children, they are not prepared to let children change the way they look at life and continue to live as if they had no family responsibilities; so they run away from these moments and these moments make no impact on life whatsoever. Secondly, we can embrace these moments positively, recognise them and deal with them in a good way, as Christians dealing with them in faith, trusting God. We understand that more easily with good moments: something good has happened and life needs to change to recognise that and God will be with us and help us meet new challenges; that is also true of hard things – God is also with us in the hard life-changing experiences and will help us recognise these moments and deal with them too.

Mary's life would never be the same again. Her life was changed for ever by something extraordinary that happened one day in Nazareth! What was she doing on that day? Was she doing the housework for her mother, sweeping the floor, washing clothes, doing the ironing (or the equivalent!), cooking the tea? Whatever she was doing, the next few minutes would change her life for ever. The story is so simply told by Luke, and many of us have heard it so often, that we miss the impact that it made on Mary and that it should still make on us. This is the greatest story ever told and last week, we saw how the curtain was drawn back to introduce the story with Zechariah and Elizabeth; we saw how this is God's story and a real story of real people that took place long ago and far away, yet it is also our story when we embrace by faith central character in story, Jesus Christ.

"In the..." (1:26ff) The same angel as visited Zechariah in the Temple 6 months before, now comes to Nazareth to give Mary good news; this is the next stage in the story, the next scene, the next line in the plot that God is writing as He goes about bringing salvation for Israel and the whole world.

The first stage was to feature an aging prophet and his childless wife; the next stage is to involve a teenage girl, unmarried, but engaged to the village carpenter and to tell her that she will have a son and that He will be greatest king Israel ever knew and that He will make an impact on the whole world. “Do not...” (1:30-33) How was Mary to react? We already know that she is afraid – angels don’t turn up on your doorstep every day! But then what? “I am...” (1:38) She embraces the angel’s words, not yet fully understanding what they mean, what the consequences might be, but she knows enough of God to trust Him and to be willing to serve Him. Life is never going to be same again for Mary. Let’s unpack this a little more.

First of all, what is God about? He is announcing the birth of His Son, who will be a great King and the Saviour of the world. See the way in which Jesus is described: “He will...” (1:32) This is no small matter. This is the most momentous news for the world. But God is turning the world upside down. He is announcing this news to – whom? An unmarried young girl, engaged to the village carpenter, in an obscure village in Northern Israel called Nazareth (“Can anything good come from Nazareth?” (Jn 1:46)) Kings are born in palaces; they are born to the daughters of kings; they are born in important places to national acclaim and celebration; they are born to places of power and influence so that they can become important national figures, with power and might, with servants and armies around them. But greatest king the world has ever seen is going to be born to Mary from Nazareth, says God! The world is being turned upside down.

Mary comes to understand that. We see her song that comes after this story, called the *Magnificat* from first word in the song’s Latin version: “My soul...” (1:46f) She goes on to sing of ways in which God is turning the world upside down. William Temple, once Archbishop of Canterbury, warned against including this in worship because he described it as “a most revolutionary canticle” and there are protest movements across the poor world that have taken their inspiration from Mary’s words. God is “mindful...” (1:48) “He has...” (1:52f) Mary saw that the hopes and aspirations of the world are to be found not in the power-brokers, not in bullies and oppressors, not in rich people or rich places, but in the God who turns the world upside down by filling those who are hungry for grace and peace and food and sending the rich and complacent away empty. We see the same picture in the book of Revelation, and the words that Jesus speaks to the church in Laodicea: those who think they are rich and whose wealth breeds complacency are told that in fact they are poor, wretched, blind, pitiful and naked. In fact, only when they realise that emptiness, and change their attitude in repentance, does Jesus then say “Here I am!...” (Rev 3:20) It is not wealth that will save them, but opening the door of their hearts to Jesus that will fill them and bless them. God is turning the world upside down.

The world still needs to hear this kind of revolutionary thinking. We still, indeed perhaps even more than ever, need to hear these words. We are still obsessed with wealth and accumulating money and possessions as a society; we are still taken up with power which is why parliament is always such headline news, even for £950! We are fascinated with those in power and

their failings; we still think that the race belongs to the swift and the battle to the strong and we want to be these people who are powerful, successful, and wealthy; we are still obsessed with being first and getting our own way in every situation, regardless; that would be our hope and aspiration as a society. The gospel tells us that these things ultimately are empty; that God's blessing rests on humble, faithful people, people who recognise and admit their sense of need, people who are hungry for grace and can't satisfy that hunger themselves. The Saviour of the world did not achieve His aim with a great army to defeat other powerful men; the Saviour of the world achieved our salvation in His death on a cross. The world is turned upside down.

How does Mary react? "*I am...*" (1:38) How much does she understand of what is going on? It's impossible to tell. She is being promised a son, earlier than she would have wished perhaps; she is being promised help and strength from the Spirit of God to be in her and around her. So her response is the model response that anyone could make. It is a response that demonstrates trust – she trusts God to know what He is about, even if she doesn't understand everything; she demonstrates a sense of obedience that is willing to be the person that God wants her to be; she demonstrates a willingness to serve God and do whatever it is that He wants her to do. A model response – is this the way we should respond to God, with trust, humility, obedience, willingness to serve? Yes! These are qualities to which we should all aspire in our relationship with God; our circumstances are vastly different from those in which Mary found herself, but these are qualities to which we can and should all aspire every day.

"We are apt to take this as the most natural thing and accordingly we miss Mary's quiet heroism." (Morris) There's more to this than high ideals! It came at a cost. She ran the risk of being rejected by Joseph, misunderstood – how do you tell the man to whom you are engaged that you are pregnant and he's not the father, but this is from God? God had to intervene and reassure Joseph and Matthew tells that story; she ran the risk of being ostracised by the community for her 'sin' or worse being stoned for adultery. These were some of risks that Mary was taking! Making no fuss about it, but heroically, magnificently she accepts God's promises and walks in the way of faith. Life would never be same again.

Jesus Christ is a colossal figure; some enormous things are said about Him, some enormous claims made for Him and that He made for Himself. But... once did a talk which features the manger with the baby inside and then we bring some presents to the manger and then some balloons and streamers and then some party food and then some cards and by time we are finished the manger and the baby are hidden, covered by all these others things that go with Christmas. When that happens, Jesus is not allowed to make any impact on us at all. The real Jesus is hidden underneath all the trappings of this season of year. Yet, the gospel should make an impact on our lives; Jesus should make an impact on us; we should never be the same again having embraced Jesus by faith. The challenge of the gospel, of Christian faith is that we embrace not only Jesus Himself, but the values of His kingship: to live by faith, trusting God rather than wanting to be in total control

of our own life; to be humble, rather than always trying to win every battle and get our own way every time; to be obedient to God, to serve God in way that we live, in the kind of people that we are, as loving and generous and gracious people. I could go on, but that's the impact Jesus should be making on us; that's the impact the gospel should be making on us; it turns our world upside down; life is never quite the same again.

Mary's life was turned upside down in a moment; she would never be same again; the story would give her a unique place in history, her name known forever as "*blessed...*" (1:42) She would experience joy at the birth of her son and her Saviour. What impact does Jesus make on us? What impact does this story make on us? The ahhh! factor of a baby? That's not quite what I mean! God is turning the world upside down in the greatest story ever told. Does that story change us? Does it change the way we look at life? Does this story change our priorities? Mary's model response to God challenges us: to trust? To humility? To obey God? To serve God? These are qualities of life that God blesses! Does the story have this impact on us?