

Monday, December 16. Read Luke 1:38 & 1 Peter 1:7. Mary makes it seem so easy. The angel Gabriel tells her that she'll give birth to the Son of God, and she responds with immediate surrender to her role in God's plan. What was Mary thinking? She had no assurance of a comfortable outcome. A virgin engaged to be married, she likely knew how difficult giving birth to and raising Jesus would be. The only assurance Mary received was God's Word, and it was enough for her to say "yes." In 1 Peter 1, the apostle Peter says that through the trials we face, the genuineness of our faith is revealed. God frequently asks for our trust through difficult, uncomfortable, and seemingly impossible circumstances. But how often do we respond like Mary? It can be easy to let our questioning of God get in the way of what He desires to do in and through us. We may want to be refined, but are we willing to say "yes" to God and walk through the fire? Mary couldn't possibly understand all that was on the other side of her response to God, but she trusted Him. As a result, God brought Jesus to the world through Mary, offering us forgiveness for our sins and mending the brokenness in our relationship with God. During this Christmas season, reflect on Mary's response to God's plan for the birth of Jesus. What challenging task has God placed on your heart? Whether it's mending a broken relationship or stepping out in faith to walk in the purpose He's given you, take heart in knowing that on the other side of your "yes" to God is an outcome greater than you can imagine. *Prayer: Father, I trust that Your will is perfect. I pray You will place Your desires on my heart, aligning my dreams with Yours. Thank You for the example You've given me in Mary. Please give me the wisdom, courage, and faith I need to say "yes" to Your plan for my life.*

Tuesday, December 17. Read Luke 1:39-45 & Matthew 1:21-23. Something powerful happens when we trust God enough to not only hear what He says, but *believe* it. If you believe what God says is true and that His plan for you will lead to the best possible outcome, that trust results in peace and blessing. After Mary encountered the angel and submitted to God's plan for her life, she visited her cousin Elizabeth, who was also miraculously pregnant after experiencing infertility for years. When Elizabeth heard Mary's incredible news, she was filled with the Holy Spirit and declared, "Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill His promises to her!" Mary believed God when He said she would give birth to the long-awaited Messiah, and He blessed her with peace when she could have been full of anxiety. She was confident that the birth of the Savior of the world—*her* Savior—would be worth any trial she would face along the way. Mary trusted God's plan and moved forward believing His promises would be fulfilled in her life. As we draw closer to Christmas, think about the incredible result of Mary's belief: The Son of God was born! What has God spoken over your life that you need to believe today? Trust His plan, receive His peace knowing He knows best, and look forward to the blessing to come! *Prayer: Father, as I focus on the blessing of Jesus' birth, help me to become more like Mary. Help me grow in my trust and belief in Your promises. I know Your plan for my life leads to the best possible outcome. Help me identify any areas of unbelief in my life, and give me faith that You're working in ways I can't see. I choose to trust You today!*

Wednesday, December 18. Read Luke 1:46-55. After God revealed His plan for Mary to be the virgin mother of Jesus, she responded with an incredible song of praise. She glorified God for His willingness to use someone humble to carry out His great purpose, and she praised Him for His mercy, faithfulness, and power in fulfilling His promise of a Savior. One of the most powerful things Mary declared in this song is, "From now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me." This was a strong statement of trust in God, because the task assigned to her would likely bring judgment and shame from almost everyone she knew. Who was going to believe Mary was a virgin? Her own fiancé needed the reassurance of an angel to believe her story. Two thousand years later, many still question her claim of virginity. Knowing this would be the case, Mary focused on the blessing of being chosen by God for such an important purpose. She knew that those who would believe in her Son would honor her and trust God's Word about her integrity. She didn't dwell on the difficulties she might face in society or within her family. She didn't need to defend herself. Mary chose to trust God rather than resist her calling, even if it meant a lifetime of being misunderstood. Whatever God has asked you to do, don't let any potential persecution or judgment of others keep you from obedience. We aren't called to be comfortable, accepted, or understood. We're called to make a difference! *Prayer: Father, thank You for choosing someone as humble as me to be used for Your glory. I commit today to do whatever You want me to do, even if it's difficult. Even if the people around me don't understand. What You think is most important to me. I know Your plans are worth any resistance I might face in this world.*

Thursday, December 19. Read Matthew 1:18-21, Matthew 2:1-15 & 2 Timothy 1:7. Fear can stop you in your tracks. It can make you run and hide. Satan loves to distract us with fear to keep us from seeing the safety of God's direction. Fear threatened the fulfillment of Christmas multiple times, and God was intentional to remind His story's key players over and over, "*Do not be afraid.*" Matthew 1:18-21 tells us Joseph's side of the Christmas story. Mary became pregnant before she and Joseph were married, and Joseph, "being a righteous man and not wanting to disgrace her, planned to send her away secretly." But an angel from God appeared to him in a dream, reassuring him that he had been chosen to raise God's Son on earth. Joseph initially responded to the news of Mary's pregnancy by trying to preserve both his and Mary's reputations, fearful of all the implications. He had no way of knowing Mary's claim of virginity was legitimate, and he was going to break off their engagement. In the midst of a painful, confusing time for Joseph, God came to him in a dream, challenged his fear with the peace of divine purpose, and set him on course to be the earthly father of the greatest Man the world has ever known. In our moments of fear, God wants to speak truth to us and break the power of whatever lie is holding us back. When we seek His peace, He will conquer our fears with His love. Ask God to come and speak truth to whatever lies are giving you anxiety today. He will be faithful to respond and empower you to move forward into the incredible purpose He has for you. *Prayer: Father, your Word says that You have not given us a spirit of fear, but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind. Thank You for giving me everything I need to move forward when the enemy tries to hold me back. I praise You that fear has to bow to the name of Jesus. During this Christmas season, and always, help me take fearful thoughts captive and immediately bring them to You so that Your peace can reign in my life.*

Friday, December 20. Read Matthew 1:23, Isaiah 7:14, Exodus 3:4 & Hebrews 13:8. In Joseph's dream, the angel revealed that the birth of Jesus would fulfill centuries-old prophecy and end the separation that had existed between God and man since the first sin in the Garden of Eden. Joseph learned that Jesus would be "God with us." How easy it can be to forget this truth! We read in Exodus, long before the birth of Jesus, that Moses had to wait for God to speak to him on a mountaintop or through a burning bush. At that time, mankind did not have constant access to an intimate relationship with God. Sometimes, it can be easy to slip into this old mentality of communicating with God. How often do we still ask for our own burning bush, wishing for an explicit, tangible sign or a clear word from Him? Even as Christians, we can start to believe God is far away when it feels like we're waiting and waiting to hear from Him. We need to remember that Jesus has bridged the gap between us and God. He is God's answer to our desire for a burning bush or a mountaintop conversation with Him. We don't worship a distant God who doesn't want to speak to us. Jesus has restored our relationship with Him and made a way for us to daily approach His throne with boldness. This Christmas season, find comfort in knowing that God is with you. He hears your prayers, and He is for you. If God can mend our broken relationship with Him, think of what He can and will do in our lives and on our behalf! *Prayer: Father, thank you for the gift of Jesus, that He made a way for me to be close to You again. Thank You for desiring relationship with me so much that You sent Your only Son to die in my place. Father, give me boldness to seek You in prayer and worship, knowing I have access to You again through Jesus. Thank You for giving me confidence that You are always with me, that I am never alone.*

Adapted from <https://www.churchofthehighlands.com>