

# Advent: Mary's Response

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Preacher: Chris Thornton

[ 0 : 00 ] Good morning, Watermark. My name is Chris. If you don't know me, I oversee community groups here at Watermark. If you're new here for the first time, a really warm welcome, and it's great to have you with us.

Today, we're going to look at the issue of trust. And when I first came to Hong Kong, I arrived off the plane with all my suitcases, arrived in Central, and I needed to phone my wife, Fiona, because I needed her to help me pick things up and show me where to go to find my accommodation. And the problem was I didn't have a SIM card, so I walked up and down Central, trying to find somebody who would lend me their phone so that I could ring Fiona. And I walked up and down for about 45 minutes, and nobody would let me borrow their phone.

And then, I mean, I thought, I don't look like a criminal. I may be British, but that's okay. And I couldn't understand why nobody would lend me their phone.

And then a few months later, I was watching TV, and I saw an advert on television from the government saying, Be careful. Don't lend your phone to anybody, especially British people.

[ 1 : 18 ] And then I understood. I understood that we live in a culture which actually tells us to mistrust people.

And sometimes there's a good reason for that. But it's also fascinating because I think we also live in a culture which has incredible trust.

You know, we trust marketing guys. You know, they promise you that if you just use their face cream, you will eternally look youthful, even when you're 80.

We promise... They promise us that if you buy their deodorant, the ladies will just fall at your feet in awe of you. They promise that your kids will become like Einstein, Mozart, and David Beckham, all in one, by the age of three, if you just buy their milk powder.

And people buy it. We trust them. You know, we trust experts who tell us about our diets. We trust anybody who's got doctor or professor before their name for just about anything.

[ 2 : 27 ] In fact, the whole of our lives are actually based on trust. Every moment of the day, you are actually making decisions about trust.

About who you can trust and who you can't. And you know, if somebody has a really serious problem with trusting anybody, we label them as paranoid.

Right? But the issue is, for each one of us, where do we place our trust? Every day, every moment, even now, you may be wondering, can I trust this strange British guy who's talking?

It's an issue of trust. We're all the time assessing every business deal you do, every relationship you form. You're always weighing up, who can I trust?

And today, we're looking at a very familiar story. It's the Christmas story. And the problem with a familiar story is just that. It's familiar. But I think there's a very deep truth in something that's very, very simple.

[ 3 : 36 ] And we're going to just have a little look at this. And we're going to look at it in two sections. We're going to look at a crazy situation. And then we're going to look just at a call to trust. So let's dive in and look at the situation.

So it's about 4 BC. It's in Israel. The Jewish people have been waiting for 400 years for a word from God. 400 years is a long time.

They're waiting for a king to come. They're waiting for a savior to deliver them from the foreign armies which have been dominating them for these centuries. And they want this king to come because when he comes, they will finally feel secure.

They will finally have something to be proud of. They will finally feel like they are somebody again. And instead of constantly being humiliated every time you walk down the street being mocked by

the armies, having people harassing you, mocking your religion, taxing away your profits, leaving you with barely enough to survive, they're looking for a king who's going to put an end to that, who's going to bring in a kingdom where it's going to be safe, prosperous, and peaceful.

And Luke comes to us and tells us the story of two angel visitations.

[ 5 : 02 ] Six months apart, we've read the second one. The first one is the 400-year silence ends when an angel comes to two people called Zachariah and Elizabeth.

And they're old. And the angel comes and says, you're going to have a baby. Now, they've never had kids before. And Zachariah is like, don't you know how old my wife is?

You know, she's almost dead. You know, we're planning the funeral. We're not planning the baby shower. And the angel says, trust me, you're going to have a baby.

Now, this is not normal. Women after menopause don't normally have children. But Elizabeth becomes pregnant. And then the angel Gabriel comes a second time.

Six months later, those of you who do business trips will kind of get the feeling of how Gabriel is. He keeps being sent on missions everywhere. And this time, he's sent down to a tiny, insignificant village in a despised area of the country to a 13-year-old peasant girl who is engaged to be married.

[ 6 : 19 ] And he comes and says, God's grace is upon you. God is with you. You are part of God's great plan hatched from the beginning of creation.

You are going to be a major player in this plan because the king who you and the whole of Israel have been waiting for is coming now. And you're going to give birth to him.

And, you know, if you're not sure if this is true or not, your relative, Elizabeth, you know, the one you always used to mock because she never was able to have any children.

You know what? She's going to have children too. She's going to have a son. And, you know, it shows the kind of God that I am. I'm the kind of God who does the impossible.

I'm the kind of God who does what you would never, ever believe could happen. Because I'm the one who's in control of history.

[ 7 : 15 ] I'm the one who rules. Now, if you think about this for a minute, if you were God, I think it's not a particularly clever marketing strategy.

Because in a culture where the average Jewish male would every morning wake up and say, I thank you, God, that I am not a Gentile nor a woman, God seems not to care about what the rest of culture says.

And he chooses not just a woman, but someone who is right at the bottom of the pile in society. And I don't think God would do very well in HR either.

Because, you know, he chooses those who, when you look at their CV or their resume, they've got nothing on it. He doesn't look for those who've got all the credentials, all the achievements.

He looks for those who have nothing on their CV. And he says, I am going to give you a CV as I use you and I work through you. And everyone's going to look at it and say, wow, only God could have done that.

[ 8 : 24 ] And I don't know if you also notice, the angel comes and, you know, we live in a big world. You know, it's an anonymous world. You know when you go to the MTR and it's rush hour and it doesn't matter if you're a multimillionaire or if you're a cardboard collector.

Nobody cares about you as you're running to get on the seat for the MTR, right? You're anonymous. And if you just imagine that in a global scale, think how anonymous most of us are to everybody else.

We're nobodies at that point. And Mary is just one of those anonymous nobodies that actually even the somebodies would not want to be associated with.

And yet God comes along, sends the angel, and the angel says, Mary, I know your name.

When you may be anonymous to everybody else, I know your name. And I want to display my grace to you.

[ 9 : 33 ] Because that's the kind of God I am. He's a God who does the impossible. He's a God who knows intimately every single one of us.

And now if I was Mary, I think this would have been a little bit of a shock. I mean, I like the way Luke writes it. It says, she was greatly troubled and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be.

You know, when a salesperson rings me up and says, congratulations, you've won that special prize. I often wonder what kind of greeting this might be. And I think, what do you want?

Because Mary is not naive. She's not stupid. You know, virgin births don't happen all the time in the ancient world either. She wasn't going back to Joseph and saying, hey, Joe, I'm going to do virgin birth.

And Joseph is like, well, you know, my sister had a couple of those recently. And just before she decided to go natural with the third one. It wasn't like that. This was totally out of their frame of reference.

[10:40] She says, how is this going to be? How am I going to have a child when I'm a virgin? You know, she's done biology. She knows the stork doesn't bring babies. She's done the sex education classes.

And she knows that the angel is telling her something that is just out of this world. And we might not kind of get the situation going on here.

But Matthew's account gives us a bit clearer situation. Because Mary says, okay, let it be to me according to your word. I trust you. But the situation that has just happened here, as God is breaking through, as God is up to something, is God is doing it in a very inconvenient way. Because he's totally shattering the plans that maybe Mary and Joseph would have had. Because he could have waited maybe a year later, and Mary and Joseph would have been nicely married. And then it wouldn't be another scandal. Okay? To have a baby at that time. But God causes a 13-year-old teenage girl who is not officially married to become pregnant.

[11:55] Now, in our culture that might be shocking. But in their culture, this would have brought shame on the whole family. Shame on Mary.

Because what kind of a woman are you? Pregnant. Pregnant. And you are not yet married. It would have brought shame on the whole of her family, the whole of Joseph's family.

And imagine if you're Joseph. I mean, Mary comes up to you and says, hey, I've just got something to tell you. I'm pregnant. And Joseph knows it's not with him.

And imagine the sense of shock that he must have felt at that point. You know, he's thinking, and I thought she was a nice 13-year-old girl.

Little did I know, how could she have betrayed me? How could she have done this to me? What am I going to tell my parents? You know, he was thinking, maybe we'll just settle down, have 2.4 children.

[12:54] You know, maybe we'll build up the career ladder. Well, I'll go to Jerusalem, you know, once we've got a bit more money. And he thinks the whole thing is a mess. It's confusing.

Everything seems to have gone wrong. And yet, God comes to Joseph in a dream and tells him, trust me. Trust me. Take Mary as your wife.

Your child's going to be the savior of the world. Trust me. And he does. And he says the same thing to Mary. Trust me. And Mary says, I trust you.

And what could have been Mary's greatest shame, she actually sees is her greatest honor. And Mary, you go down and you look into verse 46 to 55, and Mary breaks into song.

I mean, she just rocks out this power ballad to God. Because she's so full of joy at what the privilege that God would choose her, God would honor her, and that she could be part of God's plan.

[13:56] She says, My soul magnifies the Lord. And my spirit rejoices in God my savior. For he has looked on me, my humble estate. And now all generations will call me blessed.

My friend, my mom has a friend from New Zealand who may be 50 years ago. The Queen of England was visiting New Zealand, doing a tour around.

And my mom's friend was chosen to be one of the people who would, she's from a tiny, tiny farming village, that she would be one of the people who would go to meet the Queen and would give her flowers.

And, you know, she couldn't stop talking to everybody about the honor and privilege that she would be able to meet the Queen. But this is far more than that.

The angel is saying, The King is coming, and you're not just going to meet the King, Mary. You're going to give birth to the King. And she's like, Wow, what kind of a God would choose someone like me for such an awesome responsibility?

[15:08] But that's the kind of God we have. So that's the kind of crazy situation. That God is working through what seems to be a mess, but he is working his plan through that.

But then the second thing really for us to get hold of is this story is a call for all of us to trust. You see, when Mary goes off to her relative Elizabeth, Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, says, Blessed is she who believed that there will be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord. You're blessed. You're enjoying the favor of God because you trusted that what God said he'll do, he will do. And the more I study about Christianity and theology, the more I just find it's just very, very simple.

You know, the whole Bible story, you can summarize in two words. Do you know that? Two words. Trust me.

The whole Bible story, God says, you know, in the Garden of Eden, Genesis, Adam and Eve, God says, I want to bless you. I want to give you everything. There's one thing I just want you to trust me with.

[16:20] Don't eat that tree. Trust me. You know, you go further on in the story, and God says, I want to take you, the people of Israel, into the promised land. I want to give you this amazing blessing.

There are some big people there, but don't worry. Trust me. All the way through the Bible, God's saying, trust me. Trust me. Trust me. But, you know, there is, the Bible also says something called sin.

And, you know, you can summarize what the Bible says sin is in four and a half words. I don't trust you. I don't trust you.

God and Eden, Adam and Eve. God says, trust me. What do Adam and Eve do? They look at the tree. Satan says, oh, can you really trust God? And they think, ooh, tree looks good.

God, we don't trust you. We think we know better. The people going into the promised land, they look at the big people. They say, big people, scary.

[17:27] God says, trust me. They say, ooh, we don't trust you. And everything starts to go downhill from that point.

And the whole Bible story is, God says, trust me. We say, oh, I'm not sure. I think I prefer to do it my way. Things start to go downhill. We're going, ah. And then they run back to God. And God says, trust me.

And then things start to go better. And then they say, God, I don't trust you. And then things start to go downhill again. And they go, ah. And that's the way the whole of the Bible story is. Simple. There you go.

You can tell your kids that now. But if you think about it, I think that's actually the story of pretty much most of our lives.

You think of all your stress. Think of all your angry outbursts, your impatience, your complaining. All of those moments, God is saying, when things are going pear-shaped, when everything seems out of control, God's saying, trust me.

[18:33] And we say, God, I don't trust you. I've got to stress a little bit about this. And we look at Mary's simple trust.

And we say, yeah, but, you know, I haven't had an angel come to me recently. You know, if I'd had an angel, maybe it would be better. Or we say, yeah, but Mary hadn't experienced what I've experienced.

But the thing is, if you don't trust God, it's not you trust in nothing. You always trust in something. If you don't trust God's word, it means you're trusting somebody else's word.

You're trusting in your job to bring you security. You're trusting in your family to bring you happiness. You're trusting in yourself to handle life's crises. But there's a fundamental problem that when you trust in anything other than God, it's always going to let you down at some point.

And if you think, why does Mary trust God in this situation? Well, I think there's something very interesting. If you look in verse 38, look at Mary's response.

[19:44] You know, I mean, this is a crazy thing to trust God with. But she says, behold, I am the right-hand woman of God, and I can do this to you, God.

Does she say that? She says, I am the servant of the Lord. What she's saying is this.

I'm not the master of this situation. I'm not in control of this situation. I don't drive life's car, and I know it.

But I know the one who does. And I know that he is good, that he is gracious, and I can trust him. I don't have to be in control of this situation.

And you know, why do we struggle? And if we're honest, I think it's a daily struggle to trust God. Why? I think the Bible would say the biggest hindrance to me trusting God is pride.

[ 20 : 44 ] God, I don't want to admit that I can't handle life's situations. Because I think I can do it. I think I'm fine. I think I can control my world. And so I say, God, I don't trust you. I think I can do it better.

And I have friends who are not Christ followers, and they say to me things like, you know, religion is just a crutch for people who can't handle life.

Or they say things like, I think it's nice that you've got your religion, but, you know, I trust in myself. Now, if I'm honest, I mean, I think that's really interesting, because if I'm honest with myself, I really wouldn't trust myself, because I can't even find the TV remote on a regular basis.

So how can I possibly handle all of life's situations? Someone, a professor of psychology at Northeastern University said this.

[ 21 : 50 ] He said, at the most basic level, the need to trust, and we all need to trust, implies one fundamental fact. You're vulnerable.

The ability to satisfy your needs or obtain the outcomes you desire is not entirely under your control. This guy's not a Christian.

But he says, the ability to satisfy your desires and needs is not entirely under your control. But we, pride says, I don't want to admit that.

I can handle it. I'm fine. But then, you see, we have a whole load of other crutches that we try and hold on to, like our job, like other people's opinions, so that when we feel vulnerable, we go to these other things as our crutch, so that we can still keep saying, I'm fine, because I've still got this.

But Mary's song, she says, and this is, we don't have time to go into detail in this, but her song, go home and read this song and think about, meditate on this song, because it really is devastating for many of us.

[ 23 : 04 ] Because Mary says, verse 48, she says, Fascinating.

Fascinating. He scatters the proud, but he fills the hungry. You know, when you go into a bookshop, what's the number one book type that you find in bookshops?

It's self-help books, isn't it? Like, how to grow your business, how to grow your confidence, how to earn a million dollars in 24 hours while learning to crochet and bringing up 15 children.

Okay? And we love these books. Why do we love them? Because that shows us that we're actually quite vulnerable. Because we actually can't trust ourselves, so we've got to go to somebody who seems to have the title doctor or professor before their name, and then we'll believe anything they say.

Because if we're honest, we actually can't trust ourselves. We've got to trust somebody else. And this I don't trust you syndrome, I think I like to call it superhero syndrome.

[ 24 : 40 ] So, just to make the point. You see, I am now superhero husband.

You see, your wife comes to you and says, you know, you need counseling. I think we need counseling. We've got issues in our marriage. You know, we've really got to work through this. And superhero husband says, we're fine. I can handle this. And, you know, because, you know, I'm superhero husband. And I even sometimes wear my underpants on the outside of my clothes when I've drunk too much.

Because that's the kind of superhero I am. And the thing is, we say, I'm fine. But actually, if your wife's saying something's not fine, then it's not fine.

But, you know, superhero husband can't see it because he's so intent on saving the world, saving his job, that he can't see that actually he's letting a few other things slide down by the side.

[ 25 : 54 ] Because the superhero is trapped in a fantasy world, and he doesn't actually see all of the reality that's going on around him.

And so many marriages unravel. And even today, some of you are being superhero husbands, and you just can't see the mess that's going on around you.

Or maybe you become superhero planner man or planner woman. Okay? If you're a Hollywood director, I've copyrighted that, so don't make a movie.

Okay? You know, Christmas is coming, and there's so much to do. And you feel, okay, I've got to do all my checklists. You know, I've got to write all my schedule out.

I've got to plan everything down so that this can be something that goes well. Okay? Now, that's not necessarily a bad thing. Some of us probably need to do more planning in our lives.

[ 26 : 49 ] But the problem comes when something gets in the way of your plans. You know, a child throws up on grandma. City super runs out of every known food known to man that you actually wanted at that point.

Or your boss suddenly says, Oh, I'd like to bless you this Christmas and give you 15 extra meetings and a whole load of extra work. Merry Christmas. And all your plans are in tatters.

All your dreams are shattered of what your nice Christmas was going to be. And do you know how superhero planner man responds at this point? He starts freaking out.

He starts cursing the day that his child or her child were born. She starts cursing the day that city super was born. Starts cursing the day your boss was ever born.

And we go rushing around trying to hold the world together. And we end up in a crumpled heap snapping at everybody else. Stressed out.

[ 27 : 48 ] About as merry as a turkey at Christmas time. Because superhero planner man is maybe not so super after all.

And when the world gets out of control and situations come in your life which you know you can't control, superheroes are desperately trying to keep their underpants from falling down.

And we become stressed and we lose sight of reality around us. The people that God has placed around us to love, to care for. Because we're stressed. Because we're angry. Because we're frustrated.

Think about this. In the last two weeks, how many people have you been frustrated at? Angry at? Because they didn't do what you wanted them to do? Whether it's your kids, whether it's your colleagues, clients.

How many people didn't respond? And you ended up seething inside.

[ 28 : 49 ] You told everybody else just how bad they are. How many of you have been complaining this week about just how life is unfair because things just haven't worked out your way?

Maybe you have a superhero syndrome. Because you think you're in control but actually each one of us are desperately insecure. And you know, I mean, I could list so many other superheroes. Superhero Christian who says, I'm fine. I don't need to be part of a community group. I don't need to be reading my Bible. I don't need to be doing these things because I'm fine. And then they don't see how everything else is unraveling around them.

And when you live in this fantasy world, you're blind to the areas where you're not doing so well. Or you're just trying to run away. You try and hide. You don't want to think about those because actually, they make you look not quite so superhero after all.

This is what the Bible calls pride. And it's the root of our distrust of God. When I was growing up, I used to watch a British comedy series called Monty Python.

[ 29 : 58 ] Some of you know it. From the 1960s or 70s. And there's one movie that they made and it's a little bit of black humor really. But there's a scene in one of their films where King Arthur is trying to pass through a certain land.

And in front of him is the Black Knight. And the Black Knight tells him, you cannot pass this way. And so they end up having a fight. And as they fight together, King Arthur chops off one of the arms of the Black Knight.

And King Arthur says, okay, stand aside now, worthy adversary. I've won. And the Black Knight says, oh, it's just a scratch.

And so they keep fighting. And then Arthur cuts off the other arm of the Black Knight. And Arthur falls on the floor, thanking God for the victory he's had. And the Black Knight's still there saying, it's just a flesh wound.

And then Arthur, very confused at this behavior, gets up again, chops off one of his legs. At this point, the Black Knight says, I'm invincible. The Black Knight always triumphs.

[ 31 : 08 ] Come on, let's go again. Arthur chops off his last leg. He's got no legs left. He's got no arms left. He's lying on the ground. And in this pitiful state, he says, well, let's call it a draw, shall we?

And the thing is, I wonder whether many of us, we look at how ridiculous the scene is, but I think most of us live our lives under the delusion that we're invincible.

That we can actually, okay, it's not going well now, but if I just get enough knowledge, if I just get enough self-help books, if I just get enough advice, if I just manage to work a bit harder, if I just manage to do this, then my superhero underpants will go back on and I can be superhero man

again.

But the call of Mary and this story is a call that, to stop trusting in yourself, wake up to see that actually none of us are invincible, and that when life sometimes goes out of control, and some point it will, will you be like that knight who just keeps pushing on saying, I can do it, I'm fine, or will you say, God, I need you.

I trust you. Because the first point of learning to trust is learning to surrender. To say, God, I'm not in control.

[ 32 : 56 ] Whatever's going on this Christmas time, whatever situations you're in at the moment, I need to say, I'm not a superhero.

I need you, God. I cannot be the husband, I cannot be the wife without you. I lay down my plans to you. I cannot do the things that I know you want me to without you, God.

Here I am, use me, but you're going to have to work because I need your grace. The thing is, if you think you're competent, if you think you're rich, the text here says, he sends the rich away empty.

And the problem is, when things are going well, when you're successful, that's one of the most dangerous places to be because you actually become blind to all the areas where you're not successful.

And you think you are really the superhero who can control the world. And he's saying here, if you think you're fine, maybe you need to think again because none of us in all of our lives are really fine.

[ 34 : 15 ] But it says, God fills the hungry with good things. If you are hungry knowing, God, I can't fix this situation. I can't make my kids do everything I want them to.

I can't turn them into the perfect people I want them to. I can't control all my career path. I can't control everything that is happening into my life. I lay this at your feet and I know you're a God who is good, who can do the impossible, who is gracious, who I can trust because you know me and you know my name.

And I know that you will see me through. because trusting God starts with surrender. It continues as you marinate in the promises of God.

It continues as you rehearse to yourself. You meditate on what kind of God it is that we serve. You see, if you don't read your Bible regularly, if you don't rehearse the truths of God's Word regularly, do you know what?

You have superhero syndrome because you think you're fine and you don't need it. But the thing is, when you do that, you're going to end up not trusting God.

[ 35 : 42 ] You're going to end up trusting anybody else who's maybe got doctor or professor in front of their name. And you have no idea what the fruit of their lives is. we need to see we're not the superhero.

When your plans are thrown aside this Christmas time, things are not working out the way you wanted to, and you're one stressed superhero and your underpants are falling down, you need to turn and say, God, I trust you.

Why should I trust you? Because you know we're always weighing up who is trustworthy. Well, here's why you should trust him. Because this is the kind of God who comes down from his glory to the most insignificant place, who comes down to save people who are anonymous to everybody else, who comes down to die on a cross so that you might be saved from you, from your own sense of pride and arrogance which actually leads us to hurt and destroy both ourselves and other people. He didn't come that he could just boost up your superpowers a little bit. He came that when your plans are thrown right out of the window and everything seems to be going wrong, like with Mary and Joseph, you know that you can have a joy in the midst of that because your God is working out something so much greater than what you can imagine and you can trust him.

That's how you get joy. He doesn't promise you life is going to be a joy ride in the sense of it's going to be perfectly wonderful. Everything's going to go smoothly but he says you can have joy in any and every situation when you realize you're not the one who has to control the world.

[ 37 : 47 ] He's in control. He's loving me in control. He loves you. He knows you. He died for you and he is the one who says now with what's going on in your life trust me.

If he died for you do you not think he's capable of handling your kids? Do you not think he's capable of handling your work situation?

your exams? Do you not think he's capable of handling your Christmas crises? He says to you and to me remember the kind of God that I am and trust me.

Let's pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Father I just admit that even though I know in my head that you're in control so much of my life I end up trying to take back that control trying to fix the world by myself.

I say I'm fine. I can handle it and then you bring me to my knees again and I realize it again and then things are just starting to go well again and I begin to get back into that superhero syndrome of thinking I can handle life.

[ 39 : 20 ] Lord forgive me. I pray for people here who in their marriages they think they're fine but actually things are crumbling beneath the surface.

Lord I pray that you would open their eyes to see that they need you that they need to turn to you and that you can work through even the mess you can work through even the trials and difficulties for good.

I pray for those who think they're fine who think life's doing well they're successful they think they're doing well Lord I pray that you'd show them the areas where actually they're letting slide that actually they're not invincible but that you're a God who comes to them and calls them to trust you. Please help us Lord in our communities because Lord we're all going to forget this. We can go out of here and then in 5-10 minutes we're stressed again because we've got so many things we've got to work on whether it's the bel-air fair we've got to do whether it's planning for all the Christmas meals whether it's the vacation we've got to go on Lord we can just suddenly lose sight of it all again and I pray that you'd remind us help us to get into your word help us to marinate on your promises to remember to infuse ourselves with knowing the kind of God that you are so that in the midst of it all we can say we trust you thank you that you are trustworthy amen