For the last three weeks, we have been learning about how God came to us to give us new hope amid deep darkness and gloom.

Now, we arrive at this place of glorious light: with an angel and a humble young woman that didn’t hesitate for a moment to go along and play her part in God’s plan.

This is the story of Mary, mother of Jesus, as told by Luke 1:26-35,

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. And he came to her and said, “Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.” But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.” Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I am a virgin?” The angel said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God.

In this text today, Luke tells us how Mary found out she was going to be pregnant with Jesus—although she was a virgin.

This is what happened. An angel appears to Mary and greets her, and she was “much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be.” The angel tells Mary not to worry (really?) and then tells her what is about to happen. She accepted the message but was confused about how she can have a baby because she was still a virgin. Gabriel informed Mary that her pregnancy will be supernatural and that her child will not have a human father (great, that may have made her feel much better!). Instead, the Holy Spirit will be the agent of conception.

Now, Mary’s response to all this news is remarkable. She says, “I am the Lord’s servant, may your word to me be fulfilled.” She just accepts it! She is not worried about what her future husband or family will think. She doesn’t think about how it will harm her in society. She just says that she is willing.

Have you ever thought about this? When the angel appeared to Mary and explained God’s amazing plan of salvation, Mary could just have said, “NO!! NO WAY!!” But Mary trusted God over her fears and concerns. And after this, her entire life changed. Incredible.

Nevertheless, we need to keep this story in context to appreciate the magnitude of what was happening to her and the extent of her faith and trust in God.

She was a young girl engaged to be married to Joseph and planning to have a family and live the rest of their lives together, but then she comes out pregnant out of nowhere. She told her parents and her fiancé about what happened to her, but still, this was hard on everyone. We know that Joseph, feeling betrayed and lied to, wanted to divorce her quietly, and it took another visit by the angel Gabriel to get Joseph to come around to the truth and understand what was happening to them.

As the good Jewish girl she was, I am sure Mary was aware of the prophecies concerning the Messiah, and at some level, she understood that some woman would have to be his mother, but she certainly didn’t expect it to be her. But without hesitation, when she knew, she welcomed her purpose and followed it.

This is an excellent example of a great woman of faith who acts on it with incredible courage and confidence. Mary is the true Wonder Woman if you ask me. Just consider this one sentence: “I am the Lord servant, may it be as you have said.”

I find this fascinating. Mary didn’t have to think about it. She didn’t tell the angel that she would get back to him or that she needed to sleep on it. She didn’t try to negotiate the terms or limitations; she agreed without hesitation and simply answered, “may it be as you have said.” This tells me that she gave no thought to herself, her plans, and the hardships that would come her way—if God asked, she was willing.

I know this is not an easy practice, that is, to say “yes” to God when we know God is speaking to us. I am talking about saying “yes” without negotiating the terms and fully accepting whatever God wants for and from us. I understand that often that may even feel unnatural because we often think we know better and we want to bargain with God, or, as soon as we realize what we committed to we get scared and begin to cut corners or make concessions for ourselves.

Can you relate? You don’t need to answer me, I know we all do, and that is why we continue to struggle with different issues in our lives.

That is why Mary’s story teaches us so much about welcoming God and God’s purpose in our lives. Mary’s story teaches us that trusting and obeying God’s Word leads to blessing and we become vessels of such blessing to many others. She was blessed not because of grudging, reluctant obedience but a joyful willingness to allow God to accomplish God’s purposes in her life.

Now, here is a critical understanding about obedience: it is not a duty, we don’t have to do anything, but we get to do what God invites us to do. Although everyone is invited, no one is forced.

Just look at Mary’s obedience, it was not a dutiful one, but one in which she saw herself privileged and honored to do so—so are we.

With this, I want to invite you right now to ask yourself this question, and I will give you a moment to think about it: Am I saying “yes” to God?

Perhaps the only person holding you back from receiving God’s blessing is yourself. Maybe you have yet to receive God’s gift because you have never said “yes” to God, and if you did say “yes,” perhaps you have not kept your word or just keep procrastinating. Often, that is why we continue to struggle with some issues in our lives like broken relationships, unhealthy behaviors, and poor life decisions that keep you down and drain the blessings out of your life. Perhaps that is where all your frustration, stress, and misery is coming from.

The issue here is that we can say “yes” to God all day, but if we don’t follow through with what we know God asks us to do, we void the blessing.

I can hear God saying to us: Do you trust me enough that if I interrupt your plans to bring forth my purpose, that you will be willing to participate? Do you trust me enough that if I speak to you, you will listen? Do you trust me enough, that if I show you the way, you will follow?

My friends, our “yes” to God matters a great deal, perhaps these days more than ever because of what we all have suffered this year. I believe that our faith can give us the strength and resources to overcome the challenges we face right now, for it plays a massive role in what happens to us, our family, and the people around us.

Consider this: obedience changes us and positions us to be blessed and be a blessing.

For example, we become more conscious of the things we say and how we say them (and we know a great deal of bitterness plagues our conversations nowadays due to politics and other factors, and people don’t care how they hurt others); also, our behavior and approach to life’s challenges improves as we learn wisdom from God (we make better decisions); and, we move from things like resentment to gratitude, from envy to being happy for other people’s success.

As you can see, saying “yes” to God and keeping our word brings light into our hearts and minds and changes us in such a way that we change the world too—just like Mary did.

Throughout my years of ministry, one of the most consequential lessons I have learned is that obedience, along with faithfulness, is the key that unlocks the blessings of God that make us a blessing to others. I also have learned that the blessing rarely is the stuff we get, but the things get to do alongside God to bless others.

Therefore, the best gift you can give to yourself and your family and everyone else in your life is saying “yes” to God. Just think about it, by saying “yes” to God, you allow God to work in and through you and become a source of blessings instead of hardship—there is enough gloom going on; let’s not contribute to it.

I finish with this: Have you said “yes” to God? How good are you at following directions?

I know that for me, I often want step by step instructions and as much detail as I can get. If an angel appeared to me saying I was going to give birth to the Son of God, I would have some questions. Yet Mary had a question and was concerned, but she said, “okay.”

This is what moves us from “Gloom to Hope.” Saying “yes” and staying on that path.