

Christmas 2011: "Immaculate Consent" 12.18.11

Scripture: [Luke 1:34-38 ESV](#)

Video: ["Be Born In Me" by Big Book Media \[6:18\]](#)

Intro: When we come to this time of the year, we are reminded of the incredible interaction that took place 2,000 years ago between Mary and God. I think we could learn from Mary's response to the angel. We see in her response an "Immaculate Consent."

Many of us on the "protestant" side of the Christian aisle struggle to remember what this word, Immaculate, means. It's really simple. It means pure, clean. I was taught the meaning of this word early in life. My mom would often look at my room and tell me how "Immaculate" it was. Not really. Usually the word immaculate would be slipped in like this: "Your room is a pig sty! Now clean it up. When I come back your room better be "immaculate!" Ha!

I married into a good Catholic family. In fact the name of the church I was married in was called Immaculate Conception... IC. We Protestants are confused about this too. It doesn't refer to Jesus' virgin birth. And it doesn't mean that Mary was born to a virgin. It refers to ancient church tradition that Mary was born without original sin. Her conception, therefore, is thought by some to be "Immaculate." This is one of those teachings we don't find in the Bible, and so we Protestants - with great reverence to Mary - and with great grace and love to our Catholic neighbors - leave behind this teaching as not a core belief of our faith.

But one thing we learn from our Scripture today - without any doubt - Mary's response to the angel, and to God, was an Immaculate Consent. It was pure. It was perfect. Imagine for a moment the shock of being told that you would soon be the mother of God's son. And you are a virgin! What a surprise!

God likes to surprise us. Our Christian faith is one of surprise. If we follow Christ, our life is guaranteed NEVER to be boring! Today we learn from Mary's interaction with the angel, HOW we respond to God's surprise.

With God we move from **SURPRISE** to **SURRENDER** .

God's ways of thinking and His knowledge and His perspective are so much higher and so much different than ours. So if we are in this relationship with God, it's not too surprising that we are often surprised. What we learn from Mary is how we respond with SURRENDER.

*And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son,
and you shall call his name Jesus. Luke 1:31 ESV*

That's the surprise Mary received. We've heard the story so often we forget how troubling it would be to hear it for the first time. We forget how difficult Mary's life was going to be because of this. The humiliation. The potential loss of her future husband. Even the possibility of a death sentence. At the very least she could expect the people she loved the most to shun her.

And yet, despite this great surprise, and despite the fear she must have been feeling from an interaction with an angel, she is remarkable in her surrender. **We can see Mary's surrender in two ways.**

1st - We surrender in our ASKING.

How do you respond when you hear something from God that doesn't make sense? Or when something doesn't fit into what you think is your life plan. Do you dismiss it? Or do you take God seriously and enter into an honest conversation with Him? **That's what Mary did... she asked...**

And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?"
Luke 1:34 ESV

God welcomes your questions. God wants a relationship with you. However, God doesn't always answer the way we think He should. After all we don't know what God knows. Sometimes His answer is an answer of silence, which requires faith on our part to hang in there. However, most of the time, after prayer and sometimes fasting, God will give us an answer. Sometimes it's directly through our prayer. Sometimes it's through other people. Sometimes it's through our dreams. Sometimes it could even be through an angel, like in Mary's case. **His answer will involve one or more (not always all 3) of the following three S's.**

The 3 S's of God's Answer

• S SUMMONS

Sometimes God simply summons us. He calls us to a task. We know it as surely as we know our own name. God told Abram to move from one place to another. He called Moses to confront the Pharaoh. God called Joshua to lead a mighty army. He called Saul in the middle of the road. **He called Mary through the voice of an angel:**

And the angel answered 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 called holy—the Son of God." Luke 1:35 ESV

The Bible is filled with stories of God summoning people to the special jobs He has for them, NOT because they are so exceptional, but because this is so normal and natural. God has created you. God knows you better than you know yourself. God not only created you but He created you for a task and He created the task! You are not an accident. God has a plan for you. You should spend your life listening for God's summons. **Sometimes God gives not only a summons...**

• S SIGN

The Bible is also filled with great signs of God showing that He has given direction. He appeared to Moses in a burning bush that refused to burn up. He gave Gideon a wool fleece wet when everything else was dry, then dry when everything else was wet. He gave Jonah the sign of the storm and the great fish. **And He gave Mary a sign...**

"And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren." Luke 1:36 ESV

God gives signs because it is in His good nature to do so. Sometimes they are of the miraculous variety. But often they are much more subtle. Things that only we would know. What might otherwise be known as a coincidence. However, with God, nothing and everything could be considered a coincidence. We choose which. Believing requires faith.

• S SURETY

This is simply the affirmation of the obvious. If you listen carefully, you can almost hear the ring of knowing authority within the angel's voice:

“For nothing will be impossible with God.” Luke 1:37 ESV

God is, after all, God. He works, thinks, lives on a whole different plane than you or I. Why should God be constrained by what to us is only “possible?” God told Mary (through the angel) what would be so (summons), gives her a sign, then reminds her of His surety. If He says it, it will be. His Word and His actions are the same.

Sometimes God gives us one, two or three of these responses. What is most important for us to learn today, though, is Mary's IMMACULATE response, her consent, which is the 2nd surrender we see from Mary:

2nd - We surrender in our ATTITUDE.

Have you ever replayed a conversation in your mind and thought later of all the things you could have said? Or of all the things you should have said? I sometimes do this with this conversation between Mary and the angel. **What would you have said? Would it be this?...**

And Mary said, “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.” Luke 1:38 ESV

This is the IMMACULATE CONSENT, and it's not something that should be kept only for those perfect saints like Mary. It should be your response and my response to God whenever He asks anything of us.

I am the servant of the Lord. We call Jesus our LORD. Sometimes though I think we think that is only a title or a name. There's meaning to the word. The Lord is the one who commands, who has the right to ask and expect consent. We are servants. Our purpose is to serve our Lord.

Do you have this part backwards? Do you expect God to serve you? Are your prayers more a list of requests of what you expect from Him? Or are they of the IMMACULATE CONSENT kind: “Lord I serve you!”

Let it be to me... This means that I agree to whatever God says. Let it be is more than just a great Beatles song. It's so much more than Que sera sera, just accepting whatever will be will be. It is a surrender to God's actions, to God's command, and - this is a key ingredient - to God's goodness and purpose. Mary knew this would involve personal hardship and embarrassment, but she was even more confident in God's goodness and purpose fulfilled in her. Is this your attitude too?

... according to your word. God's word is more than just our imagination. It is more than what we think about God. It is God's words that bring everything into motion and into being. Because of God's goodness and purpose, we delight in being a part of God's plans... even when God's plans don't fit into our plans. It would have been easy for Mary to say, “My plan is to get married first. BTW... isn't that the way YOU GOD have said it's supposed to be?” Don't we do that sometimes, trying to tie God up into knots of His own Word. Not Mary! She says simply “*according to Your Word.*” Isn't that the response we all should have? This Christmas, let's not just think of the Bethlehem story, but of our story as well. Can you say to God: “I am a servant of the Lord. Let it be to me according to your word?” **Let us pray.**