

**Waiting**  
**Luke 1:46-55**

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Waiting. Waiting for the test scores to come back, test results, the election results, the weather to change, Christmas to come, an answer, the water to heat up, school to be out, school to start, my slow-running computer, the new movie to hit the theaters, the book to be published, a new job, retirement, vacation, surgery, a ride, the money to hit your bank account, your pet to get better or not, all the kids to move out of the house, the first day of college, a better day, this old mood to pass, the war to be over, my loved one to come home, for better times, clarity. Waiting.

If we are waiting for all these things and more, Mary was waiting in the most unusual way and for the most unexpected thing. An angel appears and she is overcome with awe and humility, waiting for God's plan to unfold. She waits all during her pregnancy for the promise to become reality.

She waits to arrive in Bethlehem. She waits to hear the baby's cry. And now we know that all earth was waiting with her.

What she didn't and couldn't know was all of the waiting that would be demanded of her later: She waited for Jesus to grow and become what he was meant to be. She waited for him to go out, teach and heal, and come back on his way through town. She waited for his trial to be over and waited for him to come down off the cross. She waited for God's light to shine out of the darkness and for a new world to dawn. She waited for all this and all these.

So it's one thing to wait for something we anticipate, an object we desire, a moment to arrive, but quite another to wait for that which we don't know and even more importantly to wait for what God will provide. And that is what hope is all about, waiting with trust because God is trustworthy. Of the many things Mary teaches us one of the most important is *spiritual waiting*.

Spiritual waiting recognizes that all time is God's time. Spiritual waiting watches expectantly for the next outbreak of the Spirit. Spiritual waiting looks with eyes of the heart, for the unseen as well as the seen. Spiritual waiting knows that some things cannot be forced but must come in their own time. Spiritual waiting knows how to quietly hold the difficult situation in the light.

Truth be told, we're usually not so good at waiting. Back in the 1600s Blaise Pascal said, "All of humanity's problems stem from the inability to sit quietly in a room alone." And I have to agree. We have difficulty sitting quietly and waiting. We are always driven to something else, to thumb through something else, the impulse to turn to something else – the TV, gadgets, games, texts, tweets and more. We're just fairly compulsive because we don't know how to listen and how to be alone with ourselves.

Not too long ago researchers at Harvard conducted a test on exactly this.

They left individuals alone in a room for about fifteen minutes without music, reading material, and electronic devices. They were left only with silence and their own thoughts. The participants were all ages drawn from many backgrounds. And the results were the same regardless – most were very uncomfortable and reported it was difficult to concentrate even though they were never interrupted.

They took the study one step further in order to see if people would rather do something highly unpleasant than sit in the silence alone. So they were given a button that would administer an electric shock which they experienced in advance, so they knew what they were in for. What was so striking was that being alone for fifteen minutes was so uncomfortable for some "that it drove many participants to self-administer an electric shock just to flee it." One of them pushed the electric shock button 190 times.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Silence in the Age of Noise*, Erling Kagge (Pantheon, 2017, 41-44)

I don't think Pascal would have been surprised. We have difficulty just being with ourselves, especially alone in silence.

All this means that we stink at waiting, and not just because of boredom. It is our inner world we fear, or the outer one that seems out of our control. So to do what Mary did in the way she did it is far from passive. She was courageous in accepting her life and waiting for God to move. And that is heroic.

Of course, the culture around us fosters none of this, in fact, just the opposite. Saying "Merry Christmas" to people neither insures that it is merry nor Christ-filled. It often means something anti-Christmas like, "I've almost finished the marathon of shopping and rushing so I can collapse at the finish line."

Since we live in an entertainment culture in which somebody is trying to get your attention or sell you something every minute of every day, many churches are seduced into becoming entertainment churches.

Some churches resemble religious Disney, or worse, religious Walmarts with goods to hawk. But they don't do what Mary has taught us.

Sure, we have things to do. But choosing less may give us more. Simplifying may bring greater contentment. And the most important thing may have to do with the inner life, with the way we wait.

Can we sit in a church with ourselves and others, pray and sing, hold silence, hear the ancient story, slowly take bread and wine in our hands, and just think about God coming to us? Can we focus our minds and hearts there for a few minutes? And I don't mean this as a rhetorical question. I mean can you actually do it without hitting the electric shock button?

Can you do it without compulsively watching the clock, feeding your obsession to check texts, or looking ahead in your imagination to something you have to do next? Can you be where you are right now?

In the spirit of Mary, I invite you to enter a time of hopeful, quiet waiting. Close your eyes, take a deep breath, and be where you are. Place yourself before and within the presence of God. Do nothing, strive for nothing, release both past and future. Simply provide room into which the light may shine.

“My soul magnifies the Lord ... and rejoices in God, my savior.”

Receive the Christ. Carry the Christ. Follow the Christ. Wait on the Christ. Christ be born in you. Christ live in you.

To the glory of God, wait.