

## Session 4—Act

*Following Christ by trusting in God to act in our lives*

**Principal Text:** Luke 1: 26–56

**Supportive Text:** Matthew 1:16

### **We will consider:**

- Mary’s vision of God’s mission for the whole world.
- Our role in God’s continued work of salvation.
- What it means to be powerless or to have power; to be filled or to be emptied.

**Hymn Suggestion:** (*Found in Evangelical Lutheran Worship*) “My Soul Does Magnify the Lord,” #882

### **Prayer** (*Spoken by the leader*)

God of justice and God of love, we thank you for sending your beloved son so that we can be redeemed and become the righteous of God in Christ. Help us to recognize this divine love working in our lives. Like Mary, help us to have a broader vision and a hope that is beyond our self interests and security. Open our eyes, our ears and our hearts to heed your call and to follow you faithfully. Through your Holy Spirit, move us to find our part in your plan of salvation. Strengthen the bonds of solidarity between us and encourage us into great acts of faith. In the name of Christ Jesus the saviour we pray, amen.

### **Introduction**

In Mary, the mother of Jesus, we witness the culmination of God’s plan of salvation for the whole of humankind.

For the past twenty centuries, churches have emphasized that Mary finds favour with God because she is obedient, submissive and docile and exhibits a total surrender to God’s will. But there is more to Mary than just these admirable qualities.

Living under foreign occupation, she longs for the fulfillment of God’s promised Messiah, whose kingdom would have no end. Indeed, Mary becomes the first fulfillment of her own prophetic utterance found in the Magnificat, of the lowly being lifted up.

Her ‘yes’ split history between BC (Before Christ) and AD (Anno Domini) marking the beginning of the mission of salvation that continues in and through us today.

Even after two thousand years, her song continues to be used by liberation theologians and continues to encourage the poor and the disempowered to dream of and to demand better lives for all.

But we limit the indwelling of God’s salvific work if we only think of liberation as that which secures the social and political well-being of all and do not include God’s endless reign over all humanity. Salvation not only redeems us from the powers of sin, but justifies and sanctifies us, empowering us to be signs of hope and agents of justice and peace.

## How Then Shall We Live? Following Christ in a Broken World

### Read Luke 1: 26–56

Who among us wouldn't wish and hope for a new beginning, a brighter tomorrow and happier prospects in the midst of a darker and starker spiritual, social, economic and political reality. "Most of our struggles revolve around wanting something we don't have or having something we don't want."<sup>1</sup>

For example, in this passage Elizabeth, the older cousin of Mary, is longing for a son to remove the stigma of her barrenness, while Mary, a young unmarried girl, consents to having a child that will bring upon her stigma and potential persecution.

Mary's unbridled submission to God's is not born out of passivity and fatalism, but an active and ardent desire to be part of God's salvific mission for humanity. In the Magnificat she expresses her experience of God as almighty and holy, kind and just, and she is convicted by God's plan of salvation made manifest in the Messiah who would turn the world right side up.

It is also important to keep in mind the process by which Mary came to accept her role. She was first affirmed as the favoured one, she was held in a dialogue with the angel to allay her doubts, was assured with the words 'fear not,' and was given the example of Elizabeth's miraculous pregnancy. Such accompaniment from God's side brings an equally fitting response from Mary. God goes on to assure Mary that she will be 'overshadowed' by the Holy Spirit. She will do not of it alone. It is the same for us.

We should remember as well, that God does not call Mary to submit to such an extraordinary act without knowing that she is capable. She has everything that she needs (God does not, for example, ask a man to bear a child.) God does not throw us into the deep end without equipping us adequately. As it was for Jesus at his baptism, God breathes the Holy Spirit through us, before commissioning us for life transforming tasks.

Jesus likewise tells his disciples after his resurrection, "You are witnesses of these things. And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high." (Luke 24: 48-49).

With such assurance and accompaniment, both Mary and Elizabeth break social, political and religious barriers to become agents of divine intervention.

### Discussion

1. Reread verses 26-38. What comfort or assurance do you receive from God's words to Mary?
2. When, in your own life have you turned to God for such assurance? Were you met by God? How did you know?
3. What lessons does this story offer us about how we are to cope when we feel we have been given a raw deal and others are doubly blessed?
4. What are the things in our lives that need emptying so we can be filled with the power of the Holy Spirit?

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<sup>1</sup> *Daily Bread*, reading for December 14, RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA

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5. In what ways could we forge relationships of accompaniment within our communities across the barriers of age and class?

**Closing Activity**

All are invited to share a particular verse from the Bible that has been closest to their hearts or a person who has motivated them to do a remarkable task.

**(Editor's note: The author had included a humorous anecdote about Noah here, however we have been unable to obtain copyright permission for this and have removed it.)**

We can never say that we are either too young or too old, that we are lowly or not ready for the task God will have us do. Mahatma Gandhi said, "*A small body of determined spirits fired by an unquenchable faith in their mission can alter the course of history.*"

**Closing Prayer** (*Individually, in silence.*)

**Memory verse:** Luke 1:49-50

"For the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation."