

BELPRES CHURCH

Sermon Title: Our Story

Pastor Sergio Chavez

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Scripture: Luke 1:26-38 ESV

²⁶ In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth,
²⁷ to a virgin betrothed^[e] to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the
virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸ And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored
one, the Lord is with you!"

²⁹ But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might
be. ³⁰ And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.³¹
And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus.
³² 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 father David, ³³ and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of
his kingdom there will be no end."

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

³⁵ 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^[e] will be called holy—the Son of God.
³⁶ 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. ³⁷ For nothing will be impossible with God."
³⁸ And Mary said, "Behold, I am the servant^[e] of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word."
And the angel departed from her.

Transcript:

My name is Sergio Chavez. I'm the Director of Worship Communities here. I'm really happy to be here with you this morning as we're worshipping. Let's dive into scripture real quick.

It says, "In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to the City of Galilee named Nazareth to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph of the house of David. And

the virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, 'Greetings, oh, favored one. The Lord is with you.' But she was greatly troubled at the saying and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. And the angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary. For you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name 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 father, David. And he will reign over the house of Jacob forever. And of his kingdom, there will be no end.'

"And Mary said to the angel, 'How will this be since I am a virgin?' 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. 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. For nothing will be impossible with God.' And Mary said, 'Behold, I am the servant of the Lord. Let it be to me according to your word.' And the angel departed from her." Luke 1:26 through 38.

Let's just have another quick word of prayer before we get into today's sermon. God, thank you so much, again, for everything that you have blessed us with, Lord. Even in these crazy times, you are continually blessing us. May we not be so blinded and so distracted with everything that we don't realize that you're still at work in our lives, even while it's really hard, Lord. May today, we hear your words of encouragement from your scripture to know that we can go in tomorrow, carrying you with us in our heart to help us through. In you're beautiful and your glorious name, amen.

Now, I've been checking out on the new app here. So I'm checking you guys out while I'm preaching, if you need some little hallelujah hands and some prayers. Earlier, I said, "If you could somehow put your Presbyterian head nods in the comments, that's fine." I got no head nods. So I'm not getting any action. I'm going to give myself hearts on this whole scenario on this app, but I'm just checking you out. Thank you for joining us, Danny, whoever you are. Hey, man, maybe one day we'll meet. Albert, dude, it's good to see you here.

So we are wrapping up the sermon series of Redirected where we discuss how COVID, el covid or the rona, has interrupted everything. And our lives have been hijacked, and we are lamenting all the things that we have lost. But at the same time, it's a great opportunity to redirect our lives toward God and Jesus. And the last sermon preached was by Reverend Scott. Man, and he said in his sermon, he said this and I quote, "Redirection is our normal. It always has been." And then pastor Scott, man, went on to say how the redirection in our lives is how we mature as Christians, and I couldn't agree more. If you have not seen it, please go check it out.

And I want to expand on that idea of how redirection is our normal, but with a little bit of a twist. So let's dive into the scripture that we just read of Maria. And by the way, today I am going to use the Spanish names of these people in the Bible. Why? Just because I like the sound of them. Don't worry. In your Bible, it'll still be the same, so you should be able to follow.

So Maria is visited by an angel who tells her she is going to have the Messiah. And at first, she has to discern whether this is a good message or not because everybody in the Bible who is visited by an angel, they kind of all react the same. And that is one of fear. I've never been visited by an angel. I don't know if you have, but I'm pretty sure I would react the same way. But Mary discerns wisely, because anytime in our lives, when God shows up and we recognize that it's God, don't we all kind of react with a little bit of fear of what's going on? That's because I believe the discernment tends to follow in interaction with God because God's calling for us is usually bigger than what we would pursue.

If you read the stories of the Bible, this happens time and time again when God calls somebody. There's no way they can do this task unless they do it with God. So we continue on in Luke 1:30. "And the angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Maria, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bare a son, and you shall call his name Jesus.'"

Now scripture tells us that what Maria had intended for life at that moment was to marry Jose or Joseph. But now we see from the message of the angel Maria and Jose's journey is about to get totally redirected. And if you follow the narrative in Matthew, Luke, and some of Mark as well, I think it's some of Mark. You might double check that. Tell me in the comments. Is it in Mark? Maybe my brain is putting too many gospels together. But if you go through the narrative, you can see there's constant redirections through their journey.

First one already, their marriage has been hijacked. And Jose, if you read in it, when he finds out about this, he tried to hide away Mary, but fortunately an angel visits him to let them know, no, this is the path that we're going in. And then a census is called where they now have to leave where they are currently and go to Bethlehem. So already the birth that they maybe had expectations for to be there has now been redirected to Bethlehem. And when they show up, they end up essentially in Section 8 housing or a basement or a cave or whatever word you want to use, but not an ideal location to have a baby.

And then King Herod hears about baby Jesus and is threatened by him, so he wants to kill them. So now Maria and Jose have to immigrate to Egypt as refugees and now our redirected again. And then they roll deep in Egypt for a while until King Herod dies, and then they finally get to come back home. What started out to be a normal marriage has been totally hijacked by God.

Now right now, in this current times of COVID or the rona, does some of this sound familiar to you? Now, there's not really any prophecy of what's going on right now connected to Mary's story. But the idea of these constant unexpected redirections in our lives, do you feel me with that right now? A year ago, you didn't realize that school would be this way, your work would be this way, church would be this way, all these things that have been redirected, all these things that are just causing so many issues in our lives and anxiety, the racial issues in our country, even the conversation of the freedom of religion right now, politics, all these redirections and unexpected paths.

I think that we can at least relate to maybe what Maria and Jose kept on feeling when these things kept on happening. And if we look at the story of Maria, of how her life was going one way, but now that God has stepped in it has redirected her down unexpected paths, well, I think we need to take a second look at it. Although I agree much of these things, to them, may have been unexpected, I don't think it was redirected.

So a friend of mine invited us, back in my early 20s, to her parents' house in Montana. I'm an inner-city kid from Seattle. I'd never been to Montana. So we're like, cool. So a group of us go to her parents' house, and they suggest to us, "Hey, why don't you guys go horseback riding?" At that point, I think the biggest thing I had ever done was ride a burro in Mexico. That's a whole different story for a whole other sermon sometime.

So I'm like, "Fine, let's let's do this horseback riding." And her dad points to me and is like, "All right, you're going to help me prep the horses." I'm like, "Sweet." I don't know what I'm doing. "Sure. Let's go do this." So we go outside. There's this big barn, and in front of the barn, there's this huge field. To the left of it is a cage or a fencing, a corral. I don't know horse language, so whatever, a place where we're supposed to take the horses into. And in my mind, I thought we were going to walk these horses on reins into this corral, but no. Biscuits tells me, "Go stand there in the opening, and you're going to help direct the horses in." I'm like, "Okay."

This cat opens these doors, and these horses come flying out of this barn directly at me. And I'm like, "What is going on?" And clearly he could see the fear in my face. And he was like, "Just put your arms out and stand your ground. They won't run you over. They'll turn." I'm like, "What?" And I'm just standing there waiting for my life to be over. And all I can think about is, "Who's going to tell my immigrant parents that they risked their lives to get us to US and their son was stampeded by horses in Montana?" My life was flashing before my eyes.

So I'm there, and sure enough, a few feet in front of me, I think, I don't know, my eyes were closed, the horses just turned left and went right into the corral. They actually did what they were supposed to, and I needed a new pair of clothes for the rest of that trip. But in my mind, I just thought about these horses, seeing this open field and what it might look to them from their perspective. These doors fly open. They fly out of there like Braveheart, like freedom. They see this field and all of a sudden they see me, and they're like, "Oh no, Mexican boy. Turn left," and they had to go in.

And I wonder how that message hit the horses in the back. Like Mexican boy, what is he talking about? Oh my goodness. And they go into the corral. Now from their perspective, they were redirected. But from our perspective, we were directing them the entire time. Those horses could have run me over, but thank goodness that they had a good master who had taught them well, and they went into where they were supposed to.

I don't think God was redirecting Maria. I think he was directing her. If we read in scripture, we can find that there's over 40 predictive prophecies that point to Jesus, and today I just want to talk about the ones that are connected to the birth of Jesus. First, there was a prophecy, a predictive prophecy, given by Nathan long before in a Jerusalem far, far away to King David.

And it says this in 2 Samuel 7:12-14. It says, "When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body." First of all, I don't think we needed this information. We know where it's coming from, Nathaniel. Now you give me this mental image that I cannot get rid of. Either way, I didn't write the Bible. I'm just reading it. And it goes on. It says, "I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son." So we have the first building blocks of this predictive prophecy of who Jesus will come to be from the house of David, the descendant of David.

And then in the book of Isaiah, another prophet also gives a predictive prophecy pointing to Jesus. And we see this in Isaiah 7:14. It says, "Therefore, the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son and shall call his name Emmanuel, meaning God with us." Well, now we see just from these two predictive prophecies that God was not redirecting Maria, but calling her into the direction she was always intended to go.

We can see through predictive prophecies that there was clear direction. One, in the beginning of the book of Matthew and Luke chapter three, it goes through the genealogy of Jesus, coming from the line of David, leading all the way back to even Adam. Second Samuel, check. Born of a virgin, Isaiah 7:14, check. Born in Bethlehem because of a census, prophecy in the book of Micah, check. Fleeing to Egypt because of King Herod, prophecy found in the book of Hosea 11:1. When Israel was a child, then I loved him and called him my son out of Egypt, check.

The story of Maria is not one of redirection, but one of clear direction by God. Although a painful story, when you read the story and narrative of Maria's and Jose's in the Bible, we have romanticized it a little bit with our Christmas celebration. And it's something to celebrate, but when you really read into it, you realize how painful and how tough a story it was for them. And we have to remind you that she was chosen to do this. But if we remember Maria's response, she said, "Let it be to me according to your word." Maria chose to follow God's direction, and it just showed her trust in God.

If I could challenge us today, what I would say is COVID, the Rona, COVID, although it maybe redirecting your physical life, it is not redirecting your spiritual directions from God. God's direction in our lives does not change because our physical situation. Our call to be disciples adapts to whatever situation we are in. And remember what disciple means. It's a follower or a student. And in this context, it means that we believe in Jesus and seek to follow him in our daily lives.

So where do we start? Okay. If God is giving us directions all the time, how do I know this? Where do I start? Well, one place, I want to give you just a small list. It's not an exhaustive list, but this is a place to start. This is things that God calls us to pre, during and post COVID. A great place to start is in Ephesians 6 there in your Bibles. Most likely in Ephesians 6 is a section that says, "putting on the full armor of God." If you've ever wondering, what am I supposed to be doing as a Christian? Read Ephesians 6 in there.

The first place to start is prayer. Always the place to start in Ephesians 6:8, because that is our connection with God. And sometimes we need to stop asking and we need to start listening. Second, share the good news. Yet again, something in Ephesians 6:19. In times of oppressions, Christians, especially in times of oppressions, Christians led by the Holy Spirit share the gospel. We are to bring hope in a time of darkness. And right now, for some people, there is a lot of darkness. They need you. Third, regardless of our physical situations, we are called to serve, Philippians 2:4. Even at times when we feel like we are the one who needs to be served, still God through his might and through the Holy Spirit, we can still serve others.

And last, again, just in my list, not the exhaustive list, is trust and follow God, Deuteronomy 31:8. Keep on working on your relationship with God to know where God is leading. A few weeks back, Dr. Dudley preached on how God made the covenant with Abram. And he told him, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to a land I will show you." And even Dr. Dudley said, "If I was Abram, I would have maybe asked a few more questions." Well, let me tell you, professor, you could have asked all the questions you want, but I'm pretty sure God would give you the same answer. Just go. Trust in me. I will show you.

And in this time of COVID, what I believe, this is my opinion, whether you agree or just take it as it comes, I agree that what we really are lamenting is that we have lost our delusion of safety for the expectations of tomorrow. We expected tomorrow to go to work. We expected school to be the same way. We expected our lives to be the same way tomorrow. But when we read scripture, we know, especially in James 4, it is very clear, we do not know what tomorrow brings. So don't boast in it. Just simply trust in God. What we do know, if we allow God to direct us, then we know who and what we take into tomorrow.

Now, many of you who know me here at BelPres, you know that I started out in the audio department. And I felt that God led me to the audio industry, and I went to school in Arizona at this trade school back early on in my career. And well, my career hadn't started yet, just going to school. And before I graduated, my live sound teacher pulled me aside and said, "Hey, there is a church here in Arizona who is going to be hiring their first audio person full-time, full benefits, and I thought of you as being the perfect candidate, perfect fit." Because everybody knew I was a Christian there.

But at the time being in school, I started listening to conventional wisdom to be in the music industry, and that was you needed to go to one of these music cities. So you need to move to York, Nashville or Los Angeles. And I had already secured my internship at a studio, well-known studio, in Los Angeles, and I already secured housing. So although I was very thankful, I told my live sound teacher, "Thank you, but no thank you." Was that God trying to direct me? I think so. And I redirected myself.

And I did end up going to Los Angeles, and I finished. I even got a job at a studio so my career was starting. But at the same time, I also found a church family there in Los Angeles. And of course, they found out that I did audio, and so they asked if I could help. So I started doing a

little side freelancing to help with audio there, but Los Angeles was not good for my soul. I know some people are called there as Christians, but I was not. It was really detrimental to my well-being.

And on top of that, I also woke up one day with a pain in my side, not knowing what it is. Drove myself to the hospital. They took a look at me, did some tests and they're like, "There's things going on in your body that should not be going on in your body." They're like, "You got kidney stones." I was like, "Are you serious?" I had no insurance. So like, "Well, the best we can do to you just prescribe you some Vicodin."

And I listened to Mrs. Reagan back in the '80s, and I said no to drugs. So I didn't take any Vicodin. I just had to do that shenanigans au naturel. I pulled one of those 2 Samuel 7:14s. What came from my body, just a lot of prayer and a lot of time on my own to get rid of those bad boys. And that was kind of the final straw. I was somewhat miserable, somewhat depressed, my body hurt. And finally, I came home back to Seattle. I got my old job fortunately back when I got here, and then I was doing live sound gigs on the side. I was contracting.

Now fast forward six years, and I'd been freelancing live sound and actually was a contractor here at Bellevue Presbyterian Church. And in 2007, BelPres finally decided to hire its first full-time audio person, full benefits. And they asked me, would I be interested in taking the job now? Now, I know I am not the sharpest sandwich in the lunchbox, but when God calls you twice to the same thing, I know better than to not say no. And I said, yes. And I came this full circle, and I learned so much from that experience of going where I think I should be going, trying to direct myself, in comparison to what God was directing me. And all this pain and all this struggle and all these puzzle pieces that I couldn't see at the time now was coming to fruition.

I was now coming back to the direction that God was calling me so many years before. And even that, God was not done with me. I've had such great experiences here at BelPres. Thank you for your support, from the pastors here. Not only did I do audio, I worked in communications and now, I get to use all of my struggles, all of my innercity immigrant kid stories and experiences in poverty to help BelPres interact with our multiethnic communities as a director of worship communities. God continually was leading me, but I had to find out for myself the hard way what happens when you don't listen to his directions. I can tell you firsthand our direction to follow God will lead us through fires and storms, but it will bring glory to God in the process. We will become the salt and light of the earth.

Now I know many of you are in pain right now. I know that we've lost jobs. We've lost loved ones. We've lost so many things right now, and I know that right now is so tough for you. But remember what was in scripture, who was born through the story of Maria, Jesus, Emmanuel, God with us. The Bible does not promise you that comfort will always be in your life. What it promises you that regardless of your physical situation, the spiritual agenda is always the same. That God will be with us. If we follow God's direction, amazing things can happen.

I hope you hear this word today to give you a little bit of encouragement that COVID is going to one day be gone, but our call is still going to be the same. Because some of us were struggling before COVID ever came, and some of us will be struggling for awhile after COVID leaves. We need hope from God's people. Bow your heads with me.

God in heaven, thank you so much again for this story of Maria. And although the prophecies are directly linked to Maria, her calling the direction you had in her life, that guidance is not unique to hers. We see that in all the prophets' stories in the Bible. And not only that, it goes beyond that. We also see that her story and the prophets' story is really our story as well. You are continually calling us, Lord. I ask today by the power of your Holy Spirit, you send us signs and wonders to know that you are with us, that promise you have given us, Emmanuel. Whatever may be distracting us now, whatever may be scaring us now, whatever the devil may be putting in our lives to pull us away from you.

Lord, may you shine some light in our lives to know where you want us to go, Lord, even though it may be difficult in this time, Lord. So many others have gone through things like COVID, pandemics, lost of loved ones, lost of jobs, moving from one place to another, refugees, immigrants, homeless, so many things, God. But you are so faithful to us, Lord. Thank you so much for that promise. In your beautiful and your glorious name, and together we all said, amen.

Discussion Questions: Please read Luke 1:5-38

1. In Luke 1:13 is God redirecting Elizabeth and Zachariah or directing them?
2. In Luke 1:18 Zachariah's response doesn't seem out of hand to the world's perspective, but Gabriel's response is quite harsh? Any thoughts on why?
3. In Luke 1:29, what is the difference of Mary's response as opposed to Zachariah?
4. In these two examples of Zachariah and Mary, God is calling, one was asked for the other was not, the responses are different but the outcome the same. What does this tell us about our responses to God's calling?