

**St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church – December 19, 2010
Sermon "Mary's Chapter" - The Rev. Douglas Kendall**

Lord God,

**May the words of my mouth,
and the thoughts and meditations of all of our hearts,
be acceptable to you, our God and our source of joy. AMEN**

How many of you have seen the movie the princess bride?

**Well, I am going to tell you a story I was inspired to write,
After watching that movie.**

**That movie begins with a grandfather reading an old story to his grandson.
The grandson is reluctant to hear an old story when he would rather
be playing a video game, but eventually he gives in to the story.
That got me thinking about grandparents visiting at this time of year.**

Imagine a Christmas scene.

**Grandma and Grandpa visiting for Christmas,
the whole family settled into their respective rooms.
The Christmas tree surrounded with and excess of gifts.
Children settling in for the night.**

This is a story about a little girl and her grandfather.

**The grandfather's name is Grandpa,
and the child's name is Mary.**

**Mary has reluctantly gone up to get ready for bed,
but can hear her parents and grandparents in the living room
still talking and visiting.**

**She has already called down twice, once to ask where her pajamas are,
(under her pillow of course where they are always kept)
and then once again ten minutes later
to ask if she can get a cup of water.**

Now it is the third time,

**"Mom, dad, I can't fall asleep..." Mary calls down from her room,
"can I stay up and read for a while?"**

**"No!", both of her parents say together,
a little frustrated with all of the stalling techniques.**

**"But I just wanted to read my bible for a few minutes!" Mary pleads.
Her parents look at each other somewhat in disbelief, and then call back,
"O.K. but just for a little while."**

Mary goes over to the book shelf in her room to get out her bible...
and right beside her Bible she sees another novel she has been reading.
Mary picks up both and jumps back into bed.
She holds the bible up on it's spine, and allows it to fall open where is may,
that is where she begins reading.
"A child is born to us, a son is given to us, and he will be our ruler.
His name will be wonderful counselor, mighty God, eternal Father..."
Pretty soon her eyes are wandering over to the bed beside her,
where her novel also just happens to have fallen open on the bed.
Mary glances at it at first, and then glances again for a little longer,
and then she picks it up and begins to read it instead of her bible.
As she is reading she puts it on top of her bible,
and then lifts up the two together.

The novel was so exciting, and it was at just the most crucial part...
that she didn't even notice the slow footsteps coming up the stairs.
She only heard the noise a fraction of a second before the grey head
popped around the door frame and looked into her room.
Just enough time to slip the novel out from inside her bible,
and down under the covers.

"Hi Grandpa", Mary said, as she looked up from her bible innocently.
"Hmmm." replied the old man quizzically.

"So you are reading your Bible?"

Mary only nods as her grandfather slowly comes into the room,
and looks at the passage that she has been reading.
As he slowly settles himself down onto the chair beside her bed,
Mary hands him the open Bible.

The old man begins flipping though the pages reminiscing as he goes,
not looking up from the pages in front of him,
but speaking as if to himself.

"I remember when I was your age..."

Mary knew that this was the way most of Grandpa's stories began,
They all *began* the same way,
but you were never sure where they might end up until you got there.
There was a slight grin on the wrinkled old face though this time,
a sort of sparkly grin.

"Yeah, I learned pretty early that if I were reading my bible,
my parents would let me stay up as long as I wanted,
so I would get out my bible, open it up
and then put a smaller book inside

so that my parents couldn't see what I was really reading.

I read the entire Hardy Boys series that way."

Mary let out a little giggle.

**She could not imagine this wrinkly old grey-haired man being so mischievous,
and at the same time somehow she felt a little more
like they weren't so different.**

The old man stopped flipping the pages and looked over his glasses at her,

"Can I read you a bedtime story?"

"Yeah, sure I guess so?" she answered,

"I've got a whole bookshelf of stories over there."

pointing to the big pine shelves packed with books.

Her grandfather didn't even bother looking where she was pointing,

he just looked down at the book in his hands,

and back at his granddaughter,

"I've got a whole bookshelf full of stories right here in my hands"

he replied confidently."

"I'm going to tell you a story about a young woman named Mary."

"Hey, that's my name," Mary piped up, "Was she anything like me?"

"She was a lot like you Mary," the old man replied with a smile,

"Only a little older, and she was engaged to be married."

"I'm never getting married!" Mary said definitively,

"Boys are not very nice, and they are too loud."

Mary looked up, and her grandfather had that smile again,

"We'll just have to see about that" was all he said

as he flipped through the pages of the open bible in front of him.

"Here we go, are you ready?" the old man said,

"are you sure you don't need a glass of water or anything?"

Now it was Mary's turn to have the mischievous smile.

"O.K., lets begin then.

The angel Gabriel was sent by God

to a town in Galilee called Nazareth,"

"Hey wait a minute," Mary interrupted,

"Why did God send and angel,

why didn't God do the job himself?

And who did he send the angel to speak to.

Was it to Mary?

And how did she respond?"

**Mary's grandfather put his finger on the place where he had stopped,
and tried to be patient.**

**"God likes sending Angels; people aren't as scared of them
as they are of God,
and yes he sent the Angel to speak to Mary,
and if you let me go on, you will see how Mary responds."**

Now where was I, Oh yes.

**"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.**

"What does that mean grandpa.

What does it mean he was of the house of David."

Mary didn't want to interrupt, but she had to know everything.

**"I means that David, who was a great king
a long time before Joseph was born,
was Joseph's great great great great great great grandpa."**

This seemed to satisfy her for now, so he went on.

"The virgin's name was Mary."

**Out of the corner of his eye he could see his granddaughter wriggling around,
trying not to say anything.**

**"What is it Mary," said the old man
fearing he knew the answer before he even asked the question.**

**"I know I keep interrupting grandpa,
but when I don't understand things I ask questions,
and there is a word that I don't understand
and you have used it twice now,
and I want to know what it means."**

**"What is it Mary?" her grandfather said
as he put his finger in the book once again.**

"Grandpa, what's a virgin?"

**He was silent. At that moment there was a part of him that wanted to say,
"Go ask your parents", the same way he had always said
"Go ask you mother", when Mary's father
had asked difficult questions growing up.**

But he resisted that temptation.

**"A virgin is someone who is not married yet so they don't have children yet."
Grandpa thought he was quite clever with his answer,**

but Mary still had a quizzical look on her face.
"Sarah Lefnesky down the street isn't married,
and she is going to have a baby any day now?"
Somehow the innocent young grandchild didn't seem so innocent anymore.
"Did you mean grandpa that a virgin is someone who has never had sex?
Mom and dad have told me all about that stuff,
though by the way they described it,
I'm not sure why anyone would want to do that sort of thing."

Grandpa was a little flushed now, and looking back at the Bible.
He nodded, "Yes a virgin is someone who has never had sex."
Anyway, the angel came to Mary and said,
"Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you."
But she was much perplexed,
she was confused 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,
God is very happy with you.

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?"

"Good question Mary, that's what I would ask too..
I am a bit like Mary aren't I Grandpa?"
"Very much like her, her grandfather agreed."
Well, 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.

"So Mary was going to be the mother of this little baby...
who was going to be the father?"
Mary was looking very confused now.
"Because I know it takes a man and a woman to make a baby."

**Her grandfather for the first time in his life
was beginning to wonder if the Bible was really appropriate for children.
It seems to be all about sex, and unmarried mothers,
and he knew that there was a lot of violence in it too.
Maybe his granddaughter would be better off
playing video games or watching T.V.?**

**He thought for a moment and then said,
"God was going to be the father of the baby,
and this was going to happen by the power of the Holy Spirit,
and that would make Jesus like his father and like his mother,
so Jesus would be both human and God."**

**"You mean like the way I have Mom's eyes and Dad's hair,
and I am kind of like both of them put together?"
Mary seemed to be understanding this even better than her Grandpa,
"Yeah, that's exactly right Mary."**

"You can go on now Grandpa, I get it.."

***O.K. The Angel said to Mary, your relative Elizabeth
in her old age has also conceived a son;
and this is the sixth month for her
who was said to be unable to have children.
For nothing will be impossible with God."***

**"Yeah, it seems like God can do anything.
Do you think Elizabeth was as old as you and grandma?"
Mary asked, lying down on her bed now, and beginning to look tired.**

**Her grandfather looked around and said quietly,
"Oh, at least as old as me, but probably not as old as your grandmother."
He chuckled to himself.**

**"Do you think you and Grandma will have any more children than Grandpa?"
there was that mischievous smile again.**

**"Only if God has a really good sense of humour."
Grandpa replied with the same smile on his face,
"I think we are finished with raising our own children,
now we have to help raise you ! "**

**"What happened next in the story Grandpa?"
Mary asked, trying to hold back the sleep that was pulling at her eyelids.**

**"Mary told God that she would do whatever God asked her to do,
even if it was really hard."**

"Did she keep asking God questions?" Young Mary asked.

**"I don't think she ever stopped asking questions Mary."
her grandfather replied.**

"How does the story end Grandpa?"

**"The story still hasn't ended,
this book is just the beginning of the story, then it goes on and on,
and we all have a chapter to write in the story.**

"My chapter is going to have lots of questions in it,"

**Mary said as she began to drift off to sleep,
"I like asking questions."**

As Mary drifted off to sleep,

her grandfather continued to read the story quietly beside her bed.

And as he read it, he thought about his own chapter.

**He thought about what it was like to bring another life into the world,
and what it must have been like for Mary the mother of Jesus.**

**Scared to death, filled with questions,
and yet willing to do whatever God asked.**

**Going from fear and anxiety, the joy of feeling the first kick
of a new life inside her**

***And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.***

***Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;
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.

He has shown strength with his arm;

he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.

***He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly;
he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty.***

***He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy,
according to the promise he made to our ancestors,***

to Abraham and to his descendants forever."

**May all of our souls magnify the Lord, thought Mary's grandfather,
as he closed the bible in his lap.**

**He leaned over and kissed his granddaughter on the forehead,
thanked God for all his blessings, and stood up to leave the room.**

Just then he thought of something.

**He leaned over again and very gently pull the covers back just slightly;
then he pickup up the novel from under the covers,
and with a grin put both it and the bible back
on the big pine book shelves.**

**Just before he turned off the light,
he looked back at the child fast asleep in her bed,
and thought to himself, that's my granddaughter.**

What a chapter she will write.

IN Jesus name, AMEN.