“***She Who Believed***” by S. Finlan. The First Church, Dec. 20, 2020

[**Romans 16:25-27**](https://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu/texts.php?id=51)

25Now to God who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages 26but is now disclosed, and through the prophetic writings is made known to all the Gentiles, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith— 27to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever! Amen.

**Luke 1:35–45**

35The angel said to her Mary, “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. 36And now, 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 barren. 37For nothing will be impossible with God.” 38Then Mary said, “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.” Then the angel departed from her.

39 In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, 40where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. 41When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the child leapt in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit 42and exclaimed with a loud cry, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. 43And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? 44For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leapt for joy. 45And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.”

Imagine being in Mary’s position. You receive a visit from a radiant angel who announces that you will be pregnant with the child of promise. The Most High will overshadow her, and she will give birth to the Son of God. No pressure. But she’s not alone. Her relative Elizabeth in her old age is also pregnant with an important child. Before Gabriel appeared to Mary, he had appeared to Elizabeth’s husband, Zechariah, and said that Elizabeth was going to conceive and bear a son who “will be great in the sight of the Lord. . . He will turn many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God” (Luke 1:15–16). Mary knows she needs to visit her relative, even though it means a trip into the hills about four or five days journey away.

Something amazing happens as soon as Mary arrives. The baby leaps in Elizabeth’s womb, as though it knows who Mary’s baby is. Elizabeth also knows, by the Holy Spirit, that the baby in Mary’s womb is her lord, and she is honored by his and her visit. She says “why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me?” (1:43).

Besides this story of the connections between the two moms and the two babies, another major theme is Mary’s faithfulness. When Mary gets the message from Gabriel, she shows her acceptance by saying “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word” (1:38). Elizabeth acknowledges Mary’s cooperation and faith when she says “blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord” (1:45). Believing the promise is an important sign of faith.

Similarly, Paul speaks of the “obedience of faith” (Rom 16:26). For Paul, Christ was a “mystery that was kept secret for long ages, but is now disclosed . . . made known to all the Gentiles” (Rom 16:25–26). The mystery about the Messiah has now been revealed. And along with the Messiah came a new way of living, that is, living by faith. The new way of living is not a mystery; it starts being learned as soon as it is tried. So what *is* the obedience of faith, for us? I think it means doing the will of God as best you are able to understand it. You will make mistakes along the way, but your understanding will grow. If you believe you are receiving spiritual guidance, and if you follow that guidance, then you are practicing the obedience of faith. You will need to pray, to receive clearer understanding of what God’s will is, and you will get better at perceiving that will. Your trust will grow as you practice your faith.

Mary is praised for believing what the angel spoke to her, and for saying “let it be,” that is, “let it be with me according to your word” (Luke 1:38). She is known for trusting the will of God, spoken through the angel. Her cooperative attitude is admirable.

There is a Roman Catholic nun named Sr. Faustina who says that too many people feel separated from God when they are suffering for one of two reasons; either they think God is cruel to let them suffer so, or they think that God is punishing them for something they did in the past. Sr. Faustina tells them that God is a loving Father who forgives them and wants to draw them closer to his Divine Heart. She wrote a prayer called “Litany of Trust” which she printed up and hands out to people when they share their pain with her. The prayer reads, in part:

*“From the belief that I have to earn Your love … Deliver me, Jesus.
From the fear that I am unlovable … Deliver me, Jesus.
From the false security that I have what it takes … Deliver me, Jesus.
From the fear that trusting You will leave me more destitute … Deliver me, Jesus.
From all suspicion of Your words and promises … Deliver me, Jesus.
From the rebellion against childlike dependency on You … Deliver me, Jesus.
From refusals and reluctances in accepting Your will … Deliver me, Jesus.
From anxiety about the future … Deliver me, Jesus.
From resentment or excessive preoccupation with the past … Deliver me, Jesus. . .*

*“That Your love goes deeper than my sins and failings, and transforms me …Jesus, I trust in you.
That not knowing what tomorrow brings is an invitation to lean on You … Jesus, I trust in you.
That You are with me in my suffering … Jesus, I trust in you. . .
That You give me the grace to accept forgiveness and to forgive others …Jesus, I trust in you. . .
That You will teach me to trust You … Jesus, I trust in you.”*(https://catholicreview.org/the-litany-of-trust-a-prayer-for-our-times/)

It is a message about trust and the good fight of faith. Fight *for* what’s good and true. Fight for your spiritual connection to the best that you know. Fight for the love of God in your heart. Don’t worry about the future or obsess about the past. Trust God, as Mary did.