

And Mary said, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word" (Luke 1:38)

While Jesus Christ is naturally the protagonist of Christmas, the supporting characters in the Christmas story are equally significant. Leading up to Christmas, several speakers at our Sunday services coincidentally mentioned Mary and Elizabeth. These two women played vital roles in God's great plan, yet their circumstances were vastly different.

Elizabeth was likely over 50, an age where pregnancy is naturally impossible. She had longed for a child and prayed for years, yet God had not granted her request—until now. This long period of waiting was an exercise in faith and serves as an example for us. Mary, however, was the complete opposite. Only about 12 to 16 years old, she had asked for nothing, yet an angel told her she would conceive.

When we slow down to consider what this meant, we realize it was a bombshell. Being betrothed, Mary's pregnancy could be viewed as "adultery," an act of infidelity punishable by stoning. Even Joseph, aware of the situation, considered divorcing her quietly. This was a life-threatening calling. Yet, Mary replied, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." What a difficult decision that must have been. An angel later revealed to Joseph in a dream and told him to marry Mary without hesitation. Mary likely still faced immense social pressure and slander.

During a discussion time after the sermon, someone asked: "What if Mary had refused? Why did the call seem so sudden, leaving her no room to decline?" My immediate thought was that if she had said no, God might have chosen someone else. But reflecting on Mary's reaction a bit more later, I see a woman of profound obedience and trust. Despite the immense pressure and misunderstanding she would face, she held onto a simple, unwavering faith.

Their stories remind me that God's will will be fulfilled, whether we ask for it or not. Our role is to respond with simple faith and execute the task faithfully if chosen. I began to wonder: how does this relate to missions in Japan? Since WWII, immense resources have been poured into Japan—perhaps more than most countries—yet the number of Christians remains small. From a pragmatic Chinese perspective, some might see this as a "low return on investment" and suggest moving elsewhere. I've even heard of churches withdrawing support for missionaries in Japan because the same funds could support three or four in Southeast Asia.

Ultimately, we must all give an account to God. What the Lord cares about is our faithfulness and obedience to His calling. Like Mary and Elizabeth—one who asked and one who didn't—both received God's call and accepted it with obedience to fulfill His will. Japan is indeed "hard soil" for the Gospel. Though we may feel uncertain at times, we trust in God's timing. We do not know when the seeds will sprout, but we wait in obedience for the Lord's season to come.



Prayer Items:

Japan's Shifting Social Landscape. Please pray for the numerous social changes currently unfolding in Japan:

Political Shift: As mentioned in the previous newsletter, Japan has recently shown a more exclusionary (xenophobic) tendency. On October 21, Japan's first female Prime Minister, Sanae Takaichi, took office. Her approval ratings have remained high over the past few months. Her core policy emphasizes "national security and social order as absolute priorities," which includes strict limits on immigration and a cautious approach to introducing foreign labor.

Stricter & Costlier Visas: Consequently, visa issuance is expected to become more stringent, and fees are significantly increasing. For example, some fees that were previously around 6,000 JPY are set to rise to approximately 30,000–40,000 JPY—a 5 to 7-fold increase. While we are still observing whether the approval process itself will become more difficult, the price hike is confirmed.

Impact on Mission Work: We are closely monitoring how these shifts in Japanese society will affect mission work. Please pray for stability in Japan and for the new government to implement fair and reasonable policies.

Ministry Prayer Requests

- Christmas Outreach: A couple who are seekers (non-believers) attended our Christmas celebration. They have never heard the Gospel or stepped into a church before. Please pray that the Lord will work in their hearts and that the seeds of the Gospel will take root.
- Bible Study Groups: Please pray for our three Bible study groups:
- Seekers K and her daughter: They have shown great interest in studying the Bible. May the Holy Spirit move in their hearts as they seek the truth.
- One-on-one Study with Ms. Y: Please pray for her and her entire family to come to know the Lord.
- Discipleship Group: As we enter the new year, pray that the Lord blesses each member with significant spiritual growth and a deeper walk with Him.
- Leadership Transition: Our team leader is scheduled to return to Japan in May 2026. Until then, I remain responsible for leading the church. Please continue to pray for me, asking for wisdom and strength in this leadership role.
- Permanent Residency Application: We have applied for Permanent Residency (PR) in Japan, and the outcome will significantly influence the future direction of our ministry. We have been waiting for over 18 months now. We are uncertain if the recent changes in Japanese policy will affect the process, but we place this entirely in the Lord's hands, waiting and obeying His perfect guidance.



Financial Update

- Budget Adjustments: Our mission agency conducts budget reviews twice a year. Due to various factors, our monthly insurance premium will increase by **USD \$160**. Additionally, due to broader economic shifts, the agency has decided to transition to a percentage-based fee structure, which impacts our overall budget. We thank the Lord that the JPY remains weak against the USD, which helps mitigate some of the local costs for now.
- Monthly Support Need: Despite these adjustments, we currently have a monthly shortfall of **USD \$350**. We invite you to partner with us in this ministry. If you feel led to support us financially, please visit the following website: <https://give.worldventure.com/> (Credit card donations are available for those outside the U.S.)
- You can also send in checks please make payable to
- **WorldVenture**, and **memo #4000-275**
WorldVenture
20 INVERNESS PL. E
ENGLEWOOD CO 80112-5622

Family update and prayer request:

- Our Children: Please pray for our children's education and their spiritual growth. In this new year, may the Lord help each of them draw closer to Him and develop a deeper, personal relationship with Christ.
- Family Well-being: Please pray for the physical, mental, and spiritual health of our entire family. May we remain strong and find rest in the Lord as we serve Him together.

Contact us:

<http://www.chang4japan.org>

<https://www.facebook.com/Chang4Japan>

E-mail: chang4japan@gmail.com (Personal)
g.chang@worldventure.com (Official)

