

Mary's Obedient Faith

Text: 2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16

Roman 16:25-27 (Series B, 4th Sunday in Advent) Ps.89:1-4, 19-26

Luke 1:26-35

***The angel said to her, "Don't be afraid, Mary; God has been gracious to you.
The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and God's power will rest upon
you. For this reason the holy child will be called the Son of God".
" I am the Lord's servant", said Mary; "may it happen to me as you have said".***

Let us pray:

Christmas is a wonderful time of year. So many wonderful things happen at this time of the year – family, and friends getting together for the celebration. It is a great time - a wonderful time, a time of promise. Christmas is a fun time of the year.

But there is more than this to Christmas. There is a serious side, the side that makes it all meaningful, the side that was promised thousands of years ago to Adam and Eve, to Abraham, to David, and to the prophets.

The promise of God about this season came long before Jesus was born. God had promised centuries before the birth of Jesus that evil would be defeated. He promised that there would be a time of lasting peace, of hope, joy and love.

God promised that a king would be born... an everlasting king, who would rule his people with justice and truth, a king like David, but greater yet. A king whose reign would never end, a king who would look after the poor and give justice to the widow and orphan.

And all of this goodness, all of this hope, rested upon a young girl, barely a woman, who was engaged to a simple carpenter in the Land of Israel. Neither Mary nor Joseph were people of any note. Just ordinary people going about the ordinary task of surviving during times that were difficult.

In the midst of all that, Mary was visited by angel Gabriel. We don't know what Mary was doing at the time - perhaps carrying water from the village well...perhaps doing some mending, or cleaning up after a meal. Gabriel suddenly appears and greets Mary, "*Peace be with you. The Lord is with you and has greatly blessed you.*"

Luke tells us she was "deeply troubled" or "perplexed" by the sudden appearance of the angel. I don't know if Luke is being polite here in describing Mary's reaction but most of us would be scared out of our wits if an angel suddenly appeared in front of us out of nowhere. Even the opening words of the angel are perplexing and troubled Mary. More accurately Gabriel says, "*Greetings, O favoured one.*

The Lord is with you!" We have lost the meaning of what the angel is saying to Mary through our translation. Gabriel is saying, "Greetings, you the recipient of a gift" or "Greetings, privileged one". No wonder Mary was troubled – what gift had she received? Why would an angel call her privileged?

If that wasn't enough what Gabriel was about to tell her was even more "perplexing". The young teenager was told that she was about to become pregnant, and that she would give birth to a son and the name that she is to give him is "Jesus".

Her son is the promised Messiah, whom God foretold. He is God's own Son. And Mary's first reaction is, say what? "*I am a virgin. How, then, can this be?*" Mary wanted to make sense out of what made no sense at all.

How can she an ordinary girl possibly give birth to "*the Son of the God Most High*"? How is it that God has decided to become flesh and blood and now needed her help to bring this about, needed her to *surrender* to his will in order to carry out the plan?

I'm sure if we were in the same situation, we would be asking Gabriel more than, "*How can this be?*" We would have whole string of questions. Will Joseph stick around when he finds out that I'm pregnant? Who is going to believe that an angel visited me and from that time on I was pregnant? Who is going to believe when I say that the baby is God's Son?

If such questions occurred to Mary, she didn't voice them. She simple asked, "*How can this be?*" and then angel said: "*The Holy Spirit will come on you, and God's power will rest upon you.*

For this reason, the holy child will be called the Son of God. This is entirely the creative working of God. Through the Word, by the Holy Spirit, a young woman conceives without a man and gives birth to a Son, who is the Holy One, Immanuel, God with us.

The child she will bear will be different – he will not only be a boy like her brothers and cousins, but he will also be Lord of the universe, the eternal Word of God through whom all things were made. The infinite Son of God is contained in the finite womb of a virgin. Almighty God has chosen to come to earth in the smallness of a fetus.

The fact that Jesus' mother was a virgin and that his conception is a complete mystery as far as human understanding is concerned is difficult enough in itself. But the fact that the God of the universe reduces himself to a growing fetus inside Mary's womb is even harder to grasp.

There are those who regard the virgin birth as so impossible that it is an insult to their intelligence. We can't even attempt to fathom this out. We may not understand, you see my friends God is God and nothing is impossible to him.

During the darkest hours of World War II in England, a gloom and gloom swept over the nation as the German Luftwaffe dropped tons and tons of bombs on London. There was a concern for the safety of the King, George VI, and his family.

His staff, made secret arrangements to transport the king and his family to safety in Canada, for the duration of the war. Despite the urgings of his staff, George refused to leave his country in its darkest hour.

Shortly there after an incident was reported in a London newspaper in which the king was inspecting a bombed out section of London after an air raid. While walking through the rubbles an elderly man walked up to King George and said, "You, here, in the midst of this. You are indeed a good King".

Into our world of tragedies, of broken dreams, of crushed hopes, and of merciless demands, God came so that he could heal all of our pain and give us hope. "For nothing is impossible with God." We do not know everything that lies in the future for us, whether next year, or in the years ahead. We don't know what suffering, trials, temptations are in store for us.

That is the message of God for us who became a baby in Mary's womb and was then born in a cowshed and laid in a manger. We may not understand the mystery that surrounds the Christmas events but we do know that he is Immanuel, God with us. God is with us in the ugly part of our lives as well as the good.

He does not desert us in the darkest hour of our despair. He is there in the midst of the rubble of our broken dreams and the ruin of our tangled lives. Our God has come into the rubble of our lives to give help and support.

We don't know everything that lies in the future for us, whether next year, or in the years ahead. But we can be sure that at some time we will have our fair share of trouble. There will be times of sickness and health, success and failure. Things will happen that will test our faith and loyalty to God.

Lots of things will cause our heads to spin but we can be sure of this one thing - God has become one of us. A virgin conceives and bears a son. Mary gave birth to a Son who was crucified, raised, and glorified. The same body and blood born of Mary are given out in the Lord's Supper for sinners to eat and to drink.

Sins are forgiven in the name of Jesus, Spring renew. Mary's baby is truly Immanuel – God with us. He has come to earth for us and in the midst of our troubles he brings us hope, inner peace, and love beyond measure.

As we go from here today may our "*Merry Christmas*" be a gratitude for our faith and an openness to live our vocations in Christ with greater faithfulness and commitment. God came down to earth for you and me. I would like to wish you all a blessed Christmas and a Happy New Year. Amen.

December 20, 2020

NOTE:

CHRISTMAS EVE SERVICES

As you know all, we are planning two services on Christmas Eve, one at 3pm and one at 5pm. We are taking reservations for these services as the current regulations only allow for 25 people to be in the Sanctuary. At this point, 3:00 p.m. the service is totally full.

There are free spots for the 5:00 p.m. service. Those wishing to secure a place should contact me, either by email or by phone. (Await confirmation. Email will be confirmed. Do not rely on a phone message until I have gotten back to confirm).

We are not taking reservations for the Christmas Day service at 11:00 a.m. because this service is not traditionally well attended. People should plan to arrive a bit earlier than usual, in case something changes. It would not be good to be the 26th person at the door.