

**Advent IV- 2017**

The Rev. Timothy Kingsley

Luke 1:26-38

*In the sixth month 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. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." But she was much perplexed 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. 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?" 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. And 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. For nothing will be impossible with God." Then 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.*

This story is full mysteries, supernatural acts and filled with wonder awe; perhaps even fear.

The courage of a young woman from Nazareth, who in her yes ...sets the tone all of us.

The Lord is coming, are you prepared to do what he asks of you?

A leap of faith and a lesson in discipleship, a window into Mary's soul and perhaps a glimpse in God's hope for all our souls. Hands down and no debate, she was Jesus' first follower and disciple before he was born if you think about it.

I wonder what motivated her response to God. in the way she did?

What is our response as disciples when God asks something difficult of us?

The passage tells us four things about Mary: The facts of Mary's life, the fear in Mary's heart, the wonder in Mary's mind, and the submission in Mary's spirit.

### **The Facts of Mary's Life (1:26-28)**

"In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary."

The Angel's announcement takes place six months after Elizabeth's pregnancy with John the Baptist. Mary lived in the village of Nazareth, in the hilly area southwest of the Sea of Galilee. We're also told that Mary was a virgin, betrothed but not yet married. **How scary it must have been!**

"Mary was *perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be* ", But the angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God.'" (1:29-30)

As a teenager, Mary listening to the Angel Gabriel's words: "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you." Luke says that Mary was perplexed and ponders the words; I have to believe she was greatly confused.

Was Mary afraid? Sometimes, when we meet up with something new and strange, we get confused. When the normative patterns of our life are disrupted, little alarms go off in our head; To encourage us to question, is this okay? , or is this even safe? That's the way God made us to respond to change; it's a kind of built-in defense mechanism.

This alarm system is good for us, it informs us about threat and if we need to do anything about it. Have you heard of freeze, flee or fight? Every animal has it.. a part of our brain, the limbic system, the simplest part of our brain, that informs us when danger is near or imminent.

In my life as a security professional, when I train people, I encourage them to pay attention to this function in all of us--to be mindful in the face of threats, to recognize the right opportunity and response.

Think of an animal in the wild — a rabbit, for example. It may be calmly eating one moment at the edge of a meadow, and running for its life from a wolf the next. Imagine if that happened to you! That would be pretty traumatic, having a hungry animal determined to catch, kill, and eat you! Yet if the rabbit escapes, then within minutes it will be back to normal life.

Those who have been able to closely observe wild animals notice that during the time immediately following such a chase, a prey animal will “discharge” that powerful “flight-fight” energy by twitching, shaking, jumping, running around vigorously, even making some noise or head-butting some of its own kind in mock-battle. After such discharge, the animal returns to normal.

Were it not for this ability to rapidly discharge adrenalin and excess survival energy, the animal's ability to meet future threats would be reduced and they would not long survive in the wild.

Or the animal might freeze, if I don't move, the wolf may not see me ...the rabbit may or may not be eaten at that point.

People respond the same, we can run away, we can fight and we can get “frozen” any of these responses may be perfectly acceptable to a given situation. A situation of something that we don't understand, that is perplexing or scary ...it is biological response to an unavoidable possible threat. I don't know about you, but I can assure you I would have many initial reactions and emotions if the Arch Angel Gabriel just appeared and started telling me about God's plan.

Sometimes we respond to situations out of fear rather than out of faith. And as much as fear can inform us what is a safe response, fear makes for poor discipleship. We must pay attention to what scares us, but must resist being or becoming entrenched by fear so that it doesn't become the breeding ground for unbelief. God knew that, Gabriel knew that. It seems that Mary did too. I believe that God chose her because she was tough. She listened, she pondered, and we see that Mary accepted the angel's "Fear not" at face value.

### **The Wonder in Mary's Mind**

Gabriel explains that Mary will become pregnant and give birth to Jesus, the Messiah. Consider her question: "How will this be, since I am a virgin?"

How will God accomplish this, since the normal means of pregnancy isn't available? What the Angel announced was supernatural. A miracle. The response can be either (1) miracles just don't happen, so prove it to me... the response of unbelief, or (2) Wow! That's amazing! How will it happen? the response of wonder and faith.

Some people say we shouldn't question God, but Mary did,... I think this is demonstrating her toughness. Think about it ... It must have taken amazing courage to ask the question. "Okay, I hear you, but really? How?"

When we are asked to do the tough--even impossible--things, questions cause us to grow and learn. Questions stretch our minds and hearts and increase our understanding. Questions and the exploration for their answers contribute to our faith, even if the questions themselves may ultimately go unanswered. Mary's question arose from faith, not doubt; and her questions and Gabriel's reassurance allowed her to accept the mystery.

What would your response to the Angel be? Faith or Fear/unbelief?

## **The Submission in Mary's Spirit**

Every time I read Mary's response to the Angel's announcement and explanation, I am awed: "I am the Lord's servant. "Hear am I"

Here is a teenager facing misunderstanding and rejection from her family, her betrothed, and her townspeople. [worse, still: she risked being stoned to death for adultery!]. And yet she agrees. Mary affirms the bedrock truth that undergirds our discipleship: "Hear am I , the Lord's servant." After all is said and done, after we have explored all the possibilities, we still must decide: am I a servant or a master? Is my allegiance to the Lord or to my own desires? Do I accept the mysteries of faith or do I succumb to fear of the unknown? ... [Do I trust in God?]

Sometimes it takes great turmoil in our souls to come to the place of submission, but come to it we must. Even before Jesus was conceived, Mary was faced with the decision: Will I obey and take part in this miracle of God [make way for this King]? Or... Will I take the easy way that avoids difficulty and pain?

To her everlasting credit. Mary's response of faith showed all us what our response must be: "Hear am I" Lord's servant.

## **Prayer**

Lord, do you ask of me a hard thing? Help me to count it an honor to be your servant, and an honor to be asked to serve you in a particular way. Help me to serve with joy and not with a grudging or complaining attitude. Help me to be a servant of whom you can be proud. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.