

The Angel's Message to Mary – Luke 1:26-38 Midweek Advent Service, December 18, 2014

“May It Be to Me as You Have Said”

*The blind will see, the deaf will hear, the dead will live again.
The lame will leap, the dumb will speak the praises of the Lamb – Amen.*

Maybe she was getting ready for bed. Maybe she was making herself some lunch or supper. Maybe she was just sitting in her living room quietly chuckling to herself about a funny joke someone shared with her earlier in the day. Then BOOM! – this Gabriel guy shows up out of nowhere and says, “*Mary–hello! The Lord is with you!*”

“... what???” First of all, “who are you?” “What are you doing here?” and “Please don’t hurt me.” And Mary was greatly troubled. I think we can sympathize with her sudden confusion and distress. She wasn’t expecting any visitors today. But, as we heard last week, the angel Gabriel knew the procedure when conversing with humans: “*Don’t be afraid,*” he said, as if to say, “Mary, it’s all good. I have something to share... with YOU.”

And – if this scene were part of a big-budget movie (and a biblically accurate one at that) – the camera might zoom in on the young woman’s face... as she stares at this superhuman messenger with wide eyes and trembling lips, with her heart now racing inside her. This is not the mailman. This is not some door-to-door salesman. My, oh my, something’s not totally right – could it be... is it an angel? And is he speaking to me? – *what will he say next?*

Being on this side of Christmas, having read the whole story, knowing how THE BOOK ends... I think it becomes difficult to suddenly put on our “Mary shoes” and feel the exact same way she did. For you and me, the official Christmas calendar date is barely one week away! For Mary, Christmas is... well... not on her calendar! For you and me, mixed in with a pretty sizable mess of emotions and seasonal stress is... some form of *excitement*... right? Even if you’re *not* ready for Christmas 2014, the anticipation around this time still sort of accumulates – *ready or not*. But now think: for **Mary**, nothing, nobody could prepare her for what came next. Nobody could prepare a *virgin* for a holy birth...

Nobody... except maybe Mr. Reliable, the angel *GABRIEL*... sent by God himself to shabby little Nazareth, a town less significant than Belleville. This was special mission No. 2 for Gabriel, and the message God meant for him to share was anything BUT insignificant. And even more important than the last. Last week we heard Gabriel’s stern words to stubborn Zechariah inside the temple. This time, Gabriel surprises not a dumbfounded priest, but quite practically, a teenage girl who unwittingly found favor with God. And as this angel spoke to this virgin, quite literally, plans for Christmas were taking shape. May Gabriel’s words to Mary bring to you and me not only lasting peace and joy on this night and for many more days, but also a life-long response modeled after Mary’s own reply: “I am the Lord’s servant – may it be to me as you have said.”

Wow. Easier said than done. I cannot speak completely for you, but I’m bold enough to assume we’re at least a little similar. If you ARE like me, the next week or two or three do not *feel like* the perfect time to sit back and say, “Oh! It’s Christmas; *may it be to me as you have said.*” “Not a chance,” you say, because... “Stuff’s gotta get done! Cars need to hit the road. Presents must be wrapped. Cookies have to be baked – don’t mess up the frosting, child! Ahhhh, what else? Ohhhh, that’s right! We’ll need to get over to church for a service or two. Yeah, we’ll do that, no worries. IN THE MEANTIME... I forgot to ask off work – yikes. Well, no huge deal. As long as I ask off for New Year’s – the annual party should be hilarious this year. Also: which movie are we gonna go see: The Hobbit or Hunger Games? And the kids could see Penguins of Madagascar, I suppose. Sound good? OK! Well, at least I hope it all works out, right?”

What’s the update on your Christmas plans? Are things shaping up nicely, or is it unraveling as I speak? Unless you’re looking to dethrone Martha Stewart and see your family’s Christmas celebration through to near-perfection... it’s more likely we’ll never be fully prepared to meet the expectations of now until the New Year. Instead, there’s a better throne, David’s throne, and it belongs to a baby boy named Jesus.

But, I’m sorry... if you’re like me, you’re *still reluctant* to let the ‘Son of the Most High’ take center stage. I can’t kid myself. I heard Pastor read Gabriel’s words five minutes ago, and I’ve read these words over and over again the last week or two, and it’s almost like I’m expecting the words to change and for Gabriel to announce something totally different. Something more normal, maybe? Something I’m used to, perhaps? There’s a week to go, and my heart is still stuck in this strange gear, yearning for the sentiments of the season, and barely anything more. We can pretend that Gabriel said to Mary: “Don’t be afraid, Mary. From this day forward,

people will commemorate this time of year in a jolly spirit of generosity and love. Around this time, people will sing happy songs and feel warm and fuzzy inside. Yes, Mary, you'll have this baby boy, which is special enough, but the main thing to keep in mind: the world will be a better place, and people will call these few months the most wonderful time of the year... the hap-happiest season of all.

Gabriel, may we try again??? ***"Mary, you have found favor with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end."***

Dear friends, these are the words we need to get Christmas rolling. The very words of God are the only ones with which we ought to sit back and smile. May it be now just as it was then. May it be just as God said – days and months leading up to that first Christmas. God has given these words to all people to *define* the first Christmas. To announce the *MAIN EVENT!* Hundreds of Christmases gone by, we are privileged to review what Gabriel was so honored to announce to Mary:

Her child's name: **Jesus**, which means: **The LORD saves**. Yes! This is amazing news! And in such an amazing way, a way that only God could think up! Is this baby conceived by the Holy Spirit and not by a human father? Yes. Is this baby supposed to be the very Son of God? If we take that crazy angel Gabriel at his word – yes. Can this baby be the promised one of old, the one destined to crush the serpent's head? No way – but yes! He's the same one. Is this baby supposed to save the world from its sin? Yes, and it would. Is this baby the same Jesus who lived among us, who died on the cross, who rose again, who will come to judge all people? Yes, yes, yes, and yes again.

Of course, Gabriel's announcement came to fruition. Jesus would be born. Christmas would begin. The Apostle Paul is just one source who confirmed the LORD's original Christmas miracle, when he wrote: ***"when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive the full rights of sons."***

Amazing! May it be as the LORD has said. God knew what he was doing when he sent an angel to a virgin. Christmas was his idea. There is no need to freak out.

A final observation: if anybody would have the right to freak out concerning Christmas... wouldn't that be Mary? To suddenly sprout this baby bump without feasible explanation... she would be the laughingstock of Nazareth, the town lunatic. Gabriel's announcement to Mary had all the makings of a dramatic daytime talk show. "Joseph, you are NOT the father." No one would know what to believe. Christmas might end up a big ball of shame.

But, by God's grace, Mary's reply is a model of peace for every other Christian around Christmastime. She rolled right along with God's plan, and she said, finally: ***"I am the Lord's servant. May it be to me as you have said."***

Beautiful. Beautiful because God's Christmas plan is so beautiful. Beautiful because Mary was totally fine with God's plan. And as for us, we too may be totally *fine* with His plan – it's sufficient and beautiful.

You know... how do you think Mary would answer if we could ask her?

"Mary, did you know that your baby boy would some day walk on water?"

"Mary, did you know that your baby boy would save our sons and daughters?"

"Did you know that your baby boy has come to make you new?"

"This child that you delivered... will soon deliver you."

For all we know, Mary might have said, "Well, I sort of figured. Gabriel gave me a pretty good hint. All I could say at the time was... 'May it be to me as you have said.'" I bet Mary couldn't wait for her God-son (literally!) to be born, and she didn't even know how the story would end! But we do. Gabriel's announcement to Mary therefore brings us joy and fills us with anticipation and awe as Christmas comes 'round again. To this we say: *AMEN*.