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Luke 1:26-38  
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## The Angel Gabriel, Part II

A young boy desperately wanted a bicycle for Christmas, so he asked his parents for the bike.

His parents wanted to teach him the importance of prayer, so they suggested the young boy should write a letter to Jesus instead.

Not pleased with the response of his parents, he immediately threw a temper tantrum and his parents sent him to his room.

But, once he was in his room, he decided to take his parents advice and write a letter to Jesus.

So, he wrote the following:

*Dear Jesus, I've been a good boy this year and would love a new bicycle. Can you see if you can arrange that for me?*

*Your Friend, Johnny*

Now, Johnny knew that Jesus really knew what kind of boy he had been that year, so he ripped up the letter and decided to give it another try.

*Dear Jesus, I've been an OK boy this year and I really want a new bicycle.*

*Yours truly, Johnny*

Well, Johnny knew this still wasn't totally honest so he tore it up and tried again.

*Dear Jesus, I've thought about being a good boy this year, so how about that bike?*

*Johnny*

This time, Johnny was hoping he would receive the bike simply because Jesus loved him.

But, then Johnny looked deep down in his heart, which by the way, was what his parents really wanted and he realized that he probably shouldn't rely on the good graces of Jesus if he wanted the bike.

So, once again, he crumpled up the letter, threw it in the trash can and went downstairs, where his mother had a Nativity set on the fire place mantle.

He then took the statue of Mary wrapped it in a blanket and hid it under his bed.

Then he wrote the following letter:

*Dear Jesus, If you ever want to see your mother again – give me a dang bicycle.*

We have to admit, some people will try anything to get what they want for Christmas!

But, Christmas is not about getting what we want, rather Christmas is about getting what we need. And, the first Christmas, God gave us exactly what we needed most: a savior!

Last week we noted how God uses angels to communicate important messages.

And, last Sunday, it was the Angel Gabriel visiting Zechariah to inform him how his wife would bear a son, a son who would prepare the way for the coming of the Messiah.

Today, I want us to focus on another angelic message of Christmas. In the first chapter of Luke, we find the same angel coming to visit Mary.

A little background: we can assume that Mary is a teenager in love. She may have been as young as 12 or 13; she might have been as old as 17-18. If we said 15, we would not be far off the mark.

When the story opens, Mary is “pledged” to Joseph. That meant that she had formally agreed to marry him, but the “wedding” had not yet taken place.

Between the “pledge” and the “wedding feast” was a period usually lasting six months to even as long as a year.

During that period, the couple was still considered to be married and were called husband and wife but they:

- A. did not live together and
- B. did not consummate their marriage.

Following the custom of that day, Mary would live with her parents.

After the public wedding feast, Mary and Joseph would live together as husband and wife.

Everything in the first two chapters of the Gospel of Luke happens against that background. Mary is say 15 years old, living with her parents

(presumably in Nazareth), and waiting with happy anticipation for the day of her wedding.

It is right at this point, that God breaks in. He is about to ask a small town teenage girl to take part in something that is so shocking, as to be totally unbelievable.

What God asks Mary to do will change her life forever.

So, this angel, we're told his name is Gabriel, appears – probably out of nowhere. And he speaks.

“Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.”

I'm sure, Mary didn't know what to make of it. It's as if someone you've never seen came up to you and said:

“Good news. This is your lucky day. God has chosen you for a very special blessing.”

How do you respond to that? Ah ... okay?

Verse 29 tells us that “Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be.”

After all, she's fifteen years old, about to be married, and dreaming of spending her life with Joseph.

Now some stranger says something bizarre to her. No wonder she wondered about it.

But that's not the half of it. Without a pause, Gabriel proceeds to tell her something, that well, blows her mind.

He tells her she's going to have a baby. And not just any baby. She's going to give birth to the Son of God.

What do you say back to Gabriel? Remember, you're 15, maybe you're waiting to see Joseph tonight, and your life just seems perfect.

Do you argue? Do you ask for clarification? Do you call 911? Do you say, "Who are you and how did you get in my room?" Do you laugh out loud?

Mary would not be blamed for any of those responses. But she does none of those things. In fact, she passes over all the hard stuff.

When Gabriel says, "He will be called the Son of the Most High," she doesn't ask what that means or why she was picked for such a high honor.

None of those ordinary concerns seems to affect her in the least.

She only has one question, a technical matter she would like cleared up:

"How can this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"

This is a perfectly natural question. Mary is betrothed but not formally married. She has never had sexual relations with any man. How then can she become pregnant and bear a son?

Mary wants details! Mary is like many of us when it comes to being used by God.

Oft times, we want details to God's plans, we want to know how it is all going to work out, How is God going to make this happen?

Gabriel's answer is "Don't worry ... nothing is impossible with God."

It is instructive to note that Mary does not doubt the angel's word, even though it must have sounded incredible. She believed what the angel said.

Her only question had to do with how it would happen.

In essence, she was saying to Gabriel, "All right. I'm willing to do my part, but you need to explain how we'll handle this one little problem."

That's real faith. That's believing the impossible. That's trusting God, when the "facts" argue against it.

No hesitation, no "How about if I get back to you tomorrow?"

Instead, Mary answers, "I am the Lord's servant. May your word to me be fulfilled."

Without exaggeration, we may call this one of the greatest statements of faith in all the Bible.

We read it so often that we forget how great it really is. But remember, you're 15 years old and very much in love and you're hearing all this from a man (angel) you've never seen before.

But, Mary says **Yes**. **Yes** to God. **Yes** to the impossible. **Yes** to the plan of God.

I wonder, did her heart skip a beat when she said **Yes**?

There she is, teen head tilted high, her hands trembling just a bit, wide-eyed, nervous, open-mouthed, questioning but not afraid, wondering but not terrified, unsure but not uncertain.

When the angel says, “Nothing is impossible with God,” Mary takes a deep breath and replies, “Be it unto me as you have said.”

And with those words Christmas came to the world.

Now, let’s not underestimate what it cost Mary to say **Yes** to God.

From that moment on, she faced the disbelief of her friends (“Oh Mary, how could you expect us to believe such a bizarre story?”).

The scandalous gossip of the neighborhood (“Did you hear about Mary? I really thought they were going to wait until after the wedding ceremony. That’s too bad. I expected better from them.”)

And the whispers of promiscuity, that have lasted 2,000 years.

Mary knew, or would soon realize, that saying **Yes** to God meant misunderstanding and public shame.

Gone was her pure reputation and with it her dreams of a quiet, happy life in Nazareth.

In the future, her life would at times be happy but it would never again be quiet.

And, of course, Mary had no way of knowing how Joseph would respond to her pregnancy. Would he blow his top and walk out on her? Would he humiliate her publicly? Would he divorce her?

As the story turned out, Mary had every reason to worry about Joseph. He didn’t blow his top or try to humiliate her, but he did intend to divorce her.

Only an angel's intervention kept that from happening.

That, too, was on Mary's mind. By saying Yes she risked losing the man she loved. Her whole future was on the line.

And all these things were just the beginning. Mary could not know what the future would hold.

Before it was all over, she would experience heartache, opposition, slander, confusion, anguish, despair and loneliness. And, in the end, she would face the greatest pain a mother can endure when she would watch her son die on a cross.

Mary couldn't know all those things.

This is an amazing story about an amazing event in history. An angel appears to a teen-aged girl and tells her that she will give birth to the Son of God.

It is an absurd story. It is a story that challenges our naiveté.

Even some Christians smirk when they talk about it, as if this is the only story that Mary and Joseph could come up with to explain this inconvenient pregnancy.

But this is what we believe. God came to earth at Christmas. From his birth to his baptism to his death on the cross.

In Jesus Christ, God walked the dusty plains of this small planet and experienced what it means to be human.

What it means to have family and friends.



What it is to laugh and to love and to lose.

What it is to suffer and to face death.

An angel appears to a teen-aged young woman and tells her that she will give birth to the Son of God.

Years ago Soren Kierkegaard, the great Danish theologian, explained the miracle of Christmas with a parable:

Once upon a time there lived a king who loved a poor maiden. This king was an all-powerful king. He could choose any maiden in his kingdom for his bride.

But the maiden did not know the king or suspect his love for her. This posed a problem for the king.

He knew if he approached her as the king, she would be awed by the differences between them.

She might admire him for his power and status, but she could not ever forget that he was the king and that she was but a humble maiden.

Because he truly loved her, the king wanted her to love him for himself, not for his power.

The king considered the possibility of somehow secretly elevating the maiden to the rank of a princess. Then they would be equals.

But he quickly realized the folly of this approach. She would see through his deception.

And if she did not, he feared the transformation might alter her character. And he loved her as she was.

The king grieved. How could he help his beloved to understand him as he wished to be understood, as her lover, rather than her king?

Finally, the way became clear. If their union could not be effected through the maiden's elevation to the king, it must be attempted through the king's descent to the maiden.

The king realized he must appear in the likeness of a servant, as one humble enough to serve her.

So, he clothed himself in a beggar's cloak and went out to meet the maiden. Did she accept his love? What do you think?

An angel appears to a virgin, and tells her that she will give birth to God's child.

This was God's way of seeking to woo humanity. God would humble Himself and live among us so that we might come to know His true nature.

God had no desire to overpower us, but to enter into a relationship with us. And so, God chose this young woman, a virgin.

What is it that God wants from us? Total comprehension about the future before we will trust him?

No. That's impossible. And besides, it's better that we don't know what the future holds.

Does he want us to have perfect knowledge of the Bible?

No. If that were the case, then no one would ever need faith.

Do we have to be spiritually advanced to the point of sainthood?

Thank God the answer is No. Very few of us would meet that qualification.

So, what does God want from us?

The same thing he wanted from Mary. Simple faith that he will keep his word in unlikely and unexpected ways.

May each of us embrace that faith and may it lead us through this Advent season and beyond.

*Amen*