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December 22, 2019  
Luke 1:26-38

## Angel-Quality Truth

It is a startling story on so many levels, this story of the announcement of Jesus' birth. Probably for many of us it has lost some of its 'startle factor' since we have heard it and reflected upon it and read about it so many times. But I imagine that, despite all that has been written about it, and all the debates about whether or not it really happened this way, for most of us this continues to be one of our favorite Bible stories, simply for the feelings it evokes.

I know that when I read it or hear it read I am flooded with precious memories of Christmas' past and special people with whom I have shared those times. The Christmas Eve service, that we will share in a few days, is always my favorite, I think because it is at that time that I get to sit and let the music and the candle light and the familiar words of scripture wash over me, and touch again those special places in my heart and my memories.

Before we get to the manger this year though our reading for this morning takes us back a few months to this story of the announcement of Jesus' birth. Luke tells us of that moment when Mary finds out she is pregnant and when the world finds out that the Messiah is coming, the Savior, God here among us. It is a beautiful and powerful story. In this story we read the words, "nothing is impossible for God". We experience those words come to life in the announcement of the coming of baby and as we hear this story again today and we are reminded that this truth is ours still in our lives, in our world. "Nothing is impossible for God."

One commentator I read this week called this, "Angel-quality truth"<sup>1</sup> I like that.

I will confess, that anticipating becoming a grandparent again in just a couple of months and considering that feeling of finding out that a baby is coming has made me to pause and wonder a little more deeply at this story of Mary and Gabriel and the announcement of the coming of *this* baby.

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<sup>1</sup> Martha Spong, Christian Century, Sunday's Coming, December 18, 2017, <http://mailchi.mp/christiancentury.org/getting-creative-with-the-creation-347891?e=8723bef394>

First, we meet the angel, Gabriel. The appearance of an angel in a Biblical story lets readers know for sure that God is there. When an angel shows up we know this is going to be a story, not as much about the actions of the people in the story, as it is a story about the activity of God. Angel quality truth is coming!

Gabriel is the angel that comes to Zachariah and Elizabeth to tell Zachariah of the coming birth of his son, who would be John the Baptist. This too was a story of a conception that no one could have imagined. Remember, the story says, Elizabeth was barren and both she and Zechariah were 'getting on in years' when she conceived.

Also, it was an angel who visited Joseph in a dream that changed his heart and his life forever when he chose to take Mary for his wife after all.

Next we meet Mary. And if the story was not startling before, with the angel and all, it is now. The story says Gabriel came to the town of Nazareth in the region of Galilee.

This week, as I reflected on this story, I kept thinking of Google Maps. You know how in all the maps of all the world over, it can find one specific, particular place. This story reminds us that God can too. And God does. God comes to particular places and times, into particular lives, just as God, through Gabriel comes to Mary.

The story says Gabriel came to the town of Nazareth to a woman named Mary. Now Mary, though she is engaged to one of royal lineage, a man named Joseph, she is simply, 'a virgin who's name was Mary.' The gospel of Matthew gives us a detailed genealogy of Jesus' lineage, how he is from the household of the great King David. But all of this comes strictly through Joseph. We know nothing of Mary at this point, other than that she is a virgin. This angel of God comes to a small out of the way town to speak to a young, very ordinary, inexperienced, girl who is engaged but not yet married.

Now the angel's words come tumbling out to Mary. "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you. Do not be afraid, for you have found favor with God. 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."

Ok, now we are beyond startled. Mary responds to all of this from what she knows about herself; “how can this be, since I am a virgin?” Now, here, in the words of the Gabriel we meet God in this story. “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you... Nothing is impossible with God.” God is here. God is coming and in you and through you God will make the impossible possible. This is the answer Mary receives.

At its very core, this is a story about God, the undeserved, unearned transformational, miraculous, grace of God. That angel-quality truth. The new out of old, life out of death, hope out of hopelessness, miraculous power of God. Mary was no one special, except to God, and that made all the difference.

The good news of this story is that the same is true for us. Jesus comes into the particulars of our lives and of the world bringing that same amazing grace. This is Christmas. This is what we celebrate this Christmas and every time God comes again into our times and places, our lives. This is the source of our hope. God so loved the world that God sent Jesus, the Christ, as a baby, to Mary and Joseph. And that makes all the difference.

And Mary, young, inexperienced from the little town of Nazareth, Mary, responds to God come to dwell in her with a statement of faith so clear and simple, “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.” Mary in faith, receives what God gives to her.

This story is indeed startling, touching our lives in so many places. For it is a story of grace, pure and amazing, reminding us again, after all our Advent waiting, that God comes again and always, bringing life and hope and love to our lives and our world. There may be times when it feels like that truth is beyond our imagination, like it did for Elizabeth and Mary for a time. But it is still here - ‘angel quality truth’. The grace of God that brings salvation and life.

Tuesday night we will move to the manger. This morning, for a few more moments we get to sit with Mary. And feel the grace of God that comes to us and to our world. Angel quality truth, that nothing is impossible for God. May we feel that truth in our lives and live that truth through our lives.

(Isaiah 9:2) The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness -- on them light has shined. For unto us a child is born, unto us a son given;  
Merry Christmas.