



PONDERING A
TREASURE

1ST WEEK OF
ADVENT

LUKE 1:26-38

²⁶ In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, ²⁷ to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸ And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" ²⁹ But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰ And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹ And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. ³² 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 father David, ³³ and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

³⁴ And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?"

³⁵ And the angel answered 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 called holy—the Son of God. ³⁶ And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. ³⁷ For nothing will be impossible with God." ³⁸ And Mary said, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.

DAY 1

LUKE 1:26-27

²⁶ In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, ²⁷ to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary.

Today we begin our series on Mary's Advent, in other words, the coming of the Messiah as experienced by the mother of Jesus. These verses from Luke introduce us to the person of concern, Mary. We are told three things about her: that she lives in Nazareth, that she is betrothed to a man named Joseph, and that she is a virgin.

At this point in the narrative we don't know much about the kind of person she was, but what we are told is revealing. Her being a virgin, aside from the sexual sense, specifies her as a lady of marriageable age which in that day meant 12-13 years old. Also, we are told where she is from. Nazareth, a small town in the northern reaches of Palestine, was located just off the beaten path of an important Roman trade route stretching from Damascus to Egypt. For a modern local analogy, maybe you can imagine a small town along I-96 between Grand Rapids and Detroit that you may or may not stop in to get gas at. Not an insignificant town, but certainly ordinary. Mary of Nazareth is an ordinary girl, from an ordinary town.

These small details are important to the story not because they are interesting in and of themselves, but because their contrast to the developing plot is arresting. God has sent Gabriel to deliver the news that young Mary and little Nazareth would be center stage for the most important epoch of all redemptive history—the life of Jesus the Christ.

This is surprising and at the same time to be expected. God has always been in the business of using the poor, the lowly, the unexpected, the ordinary, to accomplish his purposes of honor and beauty and glory. Whether it be Joseph who was despised and destined to be a slave, Ruth the Moabite daughter-in-law, or David the shepherd boy, this has been God's M.O. all along. Here again we see the same pattern of the upside-down Kingdom of God.

What are some other people or events from Scripture where you see this dynamic at play?

Take a moment now to ask the Lord to humble you before him, that our community may too be fertile ground to see the mighty works of God displayed.

PRAYER

Father in heaven, thank you for our sister Mary of Nazareth. How amazing it is that we are able to witness your mighty purposes at work in such ordinary circumstances. God give us humble hearts this Advent season, that we may long to find our satisfaction in the gift of your son, Jesus. O may his glory be proclaimed, Amen.

~ Masakuni Hotta

DAY 2

LUKE 1:28-30

²⁸ And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" ²⁹ But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰ And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.

What do you do when your world is rocked? For surely this is what is happening to Mary as we pick up the narrative today. As we saw yesterday, Mary is an ordinary girl from humble origins, but today her world is rocked by a visit from the archangel Gabriel. We are not told much about the appearance of Gabriel here in this passage, but we know from other passages that people who come into contact with angels are tempted to worship them (Rev. 22:8-9). Surely Mary was not expecting this encounter and thus her spirit is troubled and Gabriel comforts her by encouraging her to not be afraid.

Mary's reaction and Gabriel's encouragement are not surprising to us. When the unexpected comes into our life, fear is a natural reaction. For Mary, a controlled, day-to-day existence has suddenly been disrupted and unease begins to sprout. Whether we are going through this type of disruption right now or not, we can surely relate to Mary's troubled spirit.

But that is not the whole story for Mary in this moment. The text tells us that she "tried to discern" what is happening. Literally this means to "work through logically," to reason it out. Here we meet a side to Mary that we will observe throughout the Gospel portrayals of her. Mary is a thinker, a ponderer (cf. Lk. 2:19). She takes the circumstances of her life and brings them in line with what she knows to be true and tries to make sense of what is happening. Her follow up question, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?" betrays this thoughtful endeavor to penetrate deeper truth, not with cynical doubt, but with hungry longing for understanding. This hunger to make sense of her world is an admirable trait of Mary's and one that we are invited to emulate. In the end Mary trusts the Lord, even when her world is rocked, because she knows that the Lord is trustworthy and she is willing to press into that truth.

PRAYER

Father, we confess that from time to time we are staggered by the unexpected in our lives. We question. We wonder. We are afraid. Spirit, help us in those moments to press into what we know is true, about you, about the world we live in, about your care for us. Holy Spirit, help us to hear that oft repeated invitation in scripture, "Do not be afraid" and may we find our rest in you. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

~ Andrew VanderMaas

DAY 3

LUKE 1:31-33

³¹ And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. ³² 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 father David, ³³ and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.”

This declaration made to Mary provides a foreshadowing of the redemptive history that will unfold in the gospels and be expounded in the New Testament. So let's look at the various elements of the promise made to Mary about her son. First, Mary is going to bear a son. The first prophecy ever made is about the seed or offspring of the woman.

“I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.” Genesis 3:15

This child is going to be the one who will free his people from bondage as her child will crush the serpent's head. This connection is strengthened in the name that she is to give him, Jesus, which means “Yahweh saves.” But how is this child going to save his people? Zechariah reveals this later in the chapter in that his son, John, will teach the people that their salvation will come in the forgiveness of their sins.

Second, Jesus will be called “the Son of the Most High.” While we certainly acknowledge that Jesus is the second person of the Trinity, in this context, it is more about Jesus the human son, the obedient, human son, as opposed to the disobedient son in Adam. It is through the obedient son that we gained redemption.

Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him.
Hebrews 5:8-9

Third, Jesus is also the obedient David who fulfills the promise God made to David.

He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. 2 Samuel 7:13

Jesus is exalted because of his obedience (Phil. 2), but he is exalted to an even greater throne than David's. Certainly, he rules over Israel but his reign is extended to the whole creation, both the heavens and the earth. Furthermore, because Jesus has been resurrected, this is a kingdom that will never end. In a couple sentences the angel sets the stage for the redemption that is going to come through Jesus.

PRAYER

*Praise the Lord!
Sing to the Lord a new song,
his praise in the assembly of the godly!
Let Israel be glad in his Maker;
let the children of Zion rejoice in their King!
Let them praise his name with dancing,
making melody to him with tambourine and lyre!
For the Lord takes pleasure in his people;
he adorns the humble with salvation.*

Psalm 149:1-4

~Jerry Stutzman

DAY 4

LUKE 1:35-37

³⁵And the angel answered 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 called holy—the Son of God. ³⁶And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. ³⁷For nothing will be impossible with God.”

When Mary was given the most shocking, sacred, and terrifying news of her entire life up until then, God gave her assurity of his presence in three ways: the miraculous information that her elderly cousin Elizabeth was with child, a messenger straight from heaven, and the Holy Spirit himself.

Elizabeth had been marked with the pain and grief of being a married woman with no children. She had lived past the age of bearing a child, so that dream was over for her. All of Elizabeth’s community and family knew her story. But here she was, six months pregnant. It was physically impossible, but “Nothing will be impossible with God.” It was a sign of God’s presence.

In Daniel, the Angel Gabriel first appeared and explained Daniel’s vision to him, speaking of the Anointed One who was to come. In Luke 1, a few months before our passage for today, Gabriel had come to earth again and appeared to Elizabeth’s husband, Zechariah, who was in the temple. He announced that they would have a child. He gave his credentials, as it were, saying “I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I was sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news” (Luke 1:19). Even though Zechariah couldn’t speak for the remaining months of Elizabeth’s pregnancy, he communicated what the angel had said to him at some point in some way, because we know the words today. Mary would have learned that the same messenger who had assured her that “the Lord is with you” had been sent by God from his very presence. Comparing their experiences with the very same angel must have been thrilling and encouraging. Nothing was impossible with God; it was another sign of his presence.

Gabriel said the Holy Spirit would come upon Mary, and that the power of the Most High would overshadow her. In this gospel teaching from Tim Mackie of the Bible Project he explains that the words translated *genealogy* and *birth* in Matthew 1:1 and 18 are both the Greek word *genesis*. Thus, “The book of the genesis of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham” and “Now the *genesis* of Jesus Christ took place in this way.” So here, in Luke’s account of the same events, when we read about the presence of the Holy Spirit, it calls to mind another genesis story we know: “The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters” (Genesis 1:2). Nothing will be impossible with God. Just as he was present at the very creation of the world, he is present personally with Mary as he calls her to this hard journey.

Whatever God is calling us to today, he promises to be near. But that doesn't mean an easy life. For Mary, it meant shame and confusion, but it also meant growth, trust in God and faith. She was called to be part of an amazing plan that had been in God's heart a long, long time, "...he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel" (Genesis 3:15b). God showed her he was near. He shows us also that he is near to us--through his Holy Word, through prayer, through the community of the saints. We also are part of his amazing plan. Let's help each other remember that nothing is impossible with God, and encourage each other to be strong, faithful, and obedient in our callings. Let's help each remember that God is near.

PRAYER

Father, Son and Holy Spirit, your plan is a mystery in plain sight. It's more than we can imagine, and at the same time completely possible because it comes from your heart, not ours. May we together, as a family of believers, see you in your word as you hover over and within us. Amen.

~ Susan Guerra

DAY 5

LUKE 1:34, 38

³⁴ And Mary said to the angel, “How will this be, since I am a virgin?” ...
³⁸ And Mary said, “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.” And the angel departed from her.

Luke 1:38 records the most significant event in Mary’s life. Her place in the biblical narrative and in God’s plan can be traced back to this momentous decision to be God’s willing fully obedient servant. One could argue that no human has ever made a more far-reaching decision than Mary did in her response to Gabriel’s visit.

Her life in Nazareth was forever changed with that decision. Her reputation was seriously damaged permanently as her community assumed her pregnancy had a human origin. She likely endured many disapproving looks for years. No doubt she was the object of gossip every time she went anywhere with Jesus.

That decision shaped everything about her future relationships. It determined who her family would be. The disciples and the church became her family. The last we hear of her in scripture is her presence in the upper room after the ascension. Tradition has it that she lived out her later life in John’s household in Ephesus.

Her decision bound her to suffer in tandem with Jesus. From that Sabbath in Nazareth when Jesus stood up and read from Isaiah and almost got thrown off a cliff to her presence at the cross, she observed Jesus and suffered right along with the Lord, wondering why people so violently opposed Him.

Most scholars think she was probably 13-15 years old when she had Jesus. Suddenly she had to cope with challenges that would have overwhelmed anyone. In all of her experience she had to trust God at a level few could ever imagine. She experienced as much uncertainty as anyone has ever experienced while at the same time she was at the center of the most important events in human history.

Perhaps what is most important, is that her obedience meant that God used her to have his plan go forward. Jesus became the Messiah and rescued us from sin. Our faith is in part a result of this great faith that Mary lived out in her life.

PRAYER

Father, teach us this Mary kind of faith. Help us to understand the importance of obedience. Help us to embrace your plan for us no matter what it entails. Help us to know that a future with you is well worth anything we have to endure in this present life. Amen.

~ Richard Malone