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B-Advent 4
Luke 1:26-38

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“Be Mary”

Can you imagine being Mary, standing there in the presence of an angel?

Can you imagine what she was thinking?

She KNEW she was NOT an important person.

In a society that valued males, she was female.

In a society that venerated age, she was young.

In a society wholly centered on the capital city of Jerusalem,
she was from the countryside of Galilee.

A young girl from the sticks, Mary couldn't have been less powerful or less respected.

In that patriarchal culture, where men never approached or spoke directly to a single woman

Mary finds herself approached by not just a man, but by a wondrous heavenly being,

who says, "*Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.*"! [Lk 2.28]

She must have wondered to whom he was speaking & turned around to find out!

But there was no one else there.

No wonder she was greatly perplexed! Who was she to be visited by an angel?!

She must have been terrified, because the angel's very next words are,

"Do not be afraid, Mary...", [Lk 2.30]

he reiterates, *"...you have found favor with God!"* [Lk 2.30],

and then before she even has a chance breathe, he continues,

"...you will conceive...& bear a child" of God who will grow up to be king forever! [Lk 2.31]

Can you imagine being Mary?

How would you respond to an angel?

How would you respond to being told that you were special to God?

How would you respond to God's call to do

something that was beyond anything you had ever imagined,

something that you felt you had no qualifications to do,

something way outside your comfort zone?

If you're like me and most people, you probably would respond the way Mary did initially,

by exclaiming, "And just HOW do you think that's going to happen, when..."

and then listing all the reasons why it can't.

It's such a conditioned response.

From our earliest years, most of us are taught not to aim too high.

by parents who are trying to protect us from disappointment,

and by others who are trying to teach us about the "real" world.

"You can't be a pastor – you're a girl."

"You'll never be a singer – you can't carry a tune."

"Don't expect too much from Santa this year."

We learn the lesson so well that no sooner does someone suggest an idea

than everyone in the group starts coming up with reasons why it won't work!

"How can you start a new business? You don't have the money...."

"How can you commit to such a big project? You'll never get the volunteers...."

"How can you take on another volunteer activity? You don't have the time...."

"Mary said to the angel, 'How can this be, since I am a virgin?'" [Lk 2.34]

Her initial response is our conditioned human one: How? It's not possible....

I sometimes wonder how many women Gabriel visited before he found Mary.

How many had he visited who couldn't believe their eyes or ears?

How many had gotten stuck on the question of how and all the reasons it just couldn't be.

How many had seen & heard & gotten the message but in the end said, "I don't think so...."

And what about us?

How many times has God come into our lives and we haven't noticed?

How many times has God asked us to do give up our old way of doing something and try something new, and we've responded with all the reasons we don't want to and all the reasons it wouldn't work?

How many times has God called us to do something outside of our comfort zone, and we've said, "I don't think so"?

How many times has God given us the opportunity to become more than who we've been, to grow more fully into our God-given potential, to impact the world in a far greater way than we ever dreamed?

The importance of today's reading is not that God called an ordinary person named Mary to become more than who she had been before, more than who she was, more than who she had ever dreamed of being, to be the bearer of God's Word, God's Light, God's Love, God's Saving Grace.

The importance of today's reading is that God has called you and me to that same task – to be more & do more & become more, to be the bearer of God's Word, God's Light, God's Love, God's saving Grace.

It doesn't matter what we've accomplished or failed to accomplish in the past.

It doesn't matter what we have or don't have

in terms of physical or emotional or intellectual or spiritual or material resources now.

What matters is that right now – in this very moment – the angel of God stands before us telling us that we have been called to be the bearers of Christ.

Your life, your calling, your purpose is as important as Mary's.

You can let fear blind you from it, distract you from it, deter you from it, but you are called.

Mary could have said no and she would have been swallowed up in the anonymity of history.

We can say no, also, but then we will never have fulfilled the purpose of our lives.

To say yes to God takes faith & courage and trust, & the way won't be easy, but it will be worth it.

So how do we summon up such faith and courage and trust? By hearing how the angel responded to Mary's fears.

"The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you...."

³⁶*And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son;*

& this is the 6th month for her who was said to be barren. ³⁷For nothing will be impossible with God."

As the angel promised Mary, so does God promise you 3 things:

1. The Holy Spirit will come upon you.
2. The power of the Most High will overshadow you.
3. God will show you and teach you that nothing is impossible with God.

You have been called to carry within you the very being of God's own self.

But God does not call you to bear this weight alone.

1. The Holy Spirit will come upon you.

In other words, God promises to be with you and to accompany you in this work – to guide you and sustain you and comfort you along the way.

2. The Holy Spirit will not just come upon you, but God's power will overwhelm you.

In other words, the Holy Spirit will not only guide and sustain and comfort you, but will protect you and strengthen you and embolden you with a power not your own.

3. And as the angel pointed out to Mary God's work in Elizabeth's life,

God will also send you signs that will show you and teach you that nothing is impossible with God.

If you are still alive and breathing then God is not done with you yet.

No matter how ordinary or extraordinary your life may have been up to this point, your journey is not yet over.

The rest of your life can truly be the best of your life.

But in order to fulfill our life's purpose, we must respond as Mary did.

"Here am I, the servant of the Lord, let it be with me according to your word."

Like Mary, we, too, must allow God's Spirit to overshadow us.

Like Mary, we must let God's power become the driving force in our lives.

Like Mary, we have to get out of the driver's seat, and let God behind the wheel.

Like Mary, we have to get out of the way, hand over the reins, let go & let God, and live by faith and faith alone.

Each one of us is called to be what Mary was: the bearer of God's Word, God's Light, God's Love, God's Saving Grace.

It's an overwhelming responsibility, but we do not have to undertake it alone.

God is with us. The Holy Spirit can empower us.

And when we get discouraged God will find ways to remind us of this amazing truth:

that even you – and even I – can bear within us a love that saves – for nothing is impossible with God. **Amen**