

Moving to what God has called us to be

Psalm 1, Luke 1:26-38 and Luke 1:46b-55

From peasant girl to prophet, from denial to disciple, from Mary to the mother of God.¹

Today is the fourth Sunday in Advent. Advent is the time when we look to the coming of Jesus. Firstly, to his being born as a child in Bethlehem, which we will celebrate next week on Christmas day. The second is to the time when Jesus will come again.

The four Sundays in Advent call on us to focus on Hope, Peace, Joy and Love, all brought together in Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour.

As a background to the passages that we will be looking at we need to hold in our minds prophecies about the coming of Jesus.

For example, we read in Isaiah:²

“13 Then Isaiah said, “Hear now, you house of David! Is it not enough to try the patience of humans? Will you try the patience of my God also? 14 Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.”

And also, in Isaiah:³

“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. 7 Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever.”

And from Micah:

“2 “But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.””

These passages would have been well known. By way of summary:

- ✚ A virgin would conceive and give birth to a son.
- ✚ His name would be Immanuel – God with us.
- ✚ He would be born in Bethlehem and be from the house of David.
- ✚ His kingdom would continue for ever and not pass away.

The gospel readings today from Luke draw us to Mary as she hears that she is to be the mother of Jesus – referred to as the annunciation of Christ's birth.

¹ From Karoline Lewis in an article: [Commentary on Luke 1:26-38 - Working Preacher from Luther Seminary](#)

² Isaiah 7:13-14.

³ Isaiah 9:6-8

These passages reveal details about Mary, her personal circumstances, her being chosen to be the mother of Jesus, and the way she responds to the amazing news that she receives.

In order to understand the passage, we have to go back to earlier verses in chapter 1 of Luke's Gospel, where the birth of John the Baptist is foretold. We read there that an angel of the Lord appeared to Zechariah and, having told him not to be afraid, gave him the news that his wife Elizabeth was to bear a son, one to be named John.

Zechariah was informed:

"He will be a joy and a delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord."

It seems that Zechariah just could not believe what he was being told.

Elizabeth was a relative of Mary.

Luke records this:

"After this, his wife Elizabeth became pregnant and for five months remained in seclusion. "The Lord has done this for me" Said Elizabeth.

Mary came from Nazareth, a town in Galilee. Nazareth was a small town, not regarded as being of great importance. We read of the response from Nathaniel after Philip called him to come and meet the Messiah from Nazareth.⁴

"Philip found Nathanael and told him, "We have found the One Moses wrote about in the Law, the One the prophets foretold—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." 46"Can anything good come from Nazareth? Nathanael asked. "Come and see, said Philip.""

Mary was pledged to be married, she was to marry Joseph, a descendant of David.⁵ Mary and Joseph were quiet and humble. From their visit to the Temple when they met Simeon we know that they had limited finances.⁶

Just an ordinary, humble, teenage girl going about her business in her small home town.

And then she hears the extraordinary news!

The passage starts with the words "In the sixth month". This follows on our being told that Elizabeth remained in seclusion for five months.

Luke records that the messenger to Mary is the angel Gabriel, who greets Mary saying "... you are highly favoured! The Lord is with you."

⁴ John 1:46

⁵ Matthew 1:1-16.

⁶ Luke 2:24 with Leviticus 12:2-8 and see Leviticus 5:11

This must have been a greeting that startled Mary, and it is not surprising that we read:

"Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be."

Troubled, and no doubt frightened. But she is re-assured with the words:

"Do not be afraid". The same reassurance given to Zechariah when he heard the news that Elizabeth was to have a son.⁷

"Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favour with God."

Mary, as a believer would probably have found comfort in these words, but must still have been wondering what this was about. How could it be possible that she had found favour with God?

Then Mary is told that she is to be with child and that she will give birth to a son.

A son that is to be named Jesus.⁸

Mary's mind must've been reeling at this information. I'm sure she could barely process it. She was to be with child? A son? And she was to call him Jesus?

Then she is told:

"He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High."

Mary must have pondered *"The Son of the Most High"* meant that her child was to be the Son of Yahweh, the Son of God. How was this to be?

But there is more. She surely heard the words, but must've had difficulty in processing them.

"The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever; his kingdom will never end."

One thing is clear to Mary, and that is that she is a virgin, and is not yet married. She manages to get out this answer:

"How will this be," she asked, "since I am a virgin?"

Mary is not disbelieving but she needs to understand how this could be possible.⁹

Mary is then told: *"The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you."*

This will come about through the intervention of the Most High-God.

⁷ Luke 1:31.

⁸ Isaiah 7:14. In this prophecy Isaiah says: "the virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel." "Emanuel" meaning "God is with us." The coming of Jesus with his birth in Bethlehem was the final fulfilment of this prophecy, for he was "God with us" in the fullest sense. See Matthew 1:23 and Isaiah 9:6-7.

⁹ As was Zechariah as we read in Luke 1:18-21

As a result, the son to be born will be a holy one, and will be called the Son of God.

Mary is being told that she needs to be available, but the birth of the child will be through the power of God.

And then this message to Mary concludes with her being told that her relative, Elizabeth, was going to have a child, although she had been said to be barren, and that Elizabeth was already in the sixth month of her pregnancy.

How is this possible? Mary is told that all of this will happen: *"For nothing is impossible with God."*¹⁰

Mary's reaction is calm and strong – really remarkable given the message that has just been conveyed to her. Hear what she says:

"May it be to me as you have said,"

"May it be to me as you have said."

As Mary hears the call, and understands that what is to be done will be through the power of God, she accepts this unconditionally. She moves to become the person that God has called her to be.

There are no excuses given as to why she can't accept, and nor does she suggest that someone else should fulfil the call.

Do you remember the response given by Moses when he was called to go to Pharaoh to bring the Israelites out of Egypt?

"Moses answered, "What if they do not believe me or listen to me and say, 'The Lord did not appear to you'?"¹¹

"¹⁰ Moses said to the Lord, "Pardon your servant, Lord. I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue."¹²

And finally:

"¹³ But Moses said, "Pardon your servant, Lord. Please send someone else."¹³

Mary doesn't say this, she says:

"May it be to me as you have said."

What is your response when you hear a call on your life to live out your faith?

¹⁰ A statement that Jesus would repeat as we read in Matthew 19:26. "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

¹¹ Exodus 4:1

¹² Exodus 4:10

¹³ Exodus 4:13.

What is my response when I hear a call on my life to live out my faith?

We read then that Mary got ready and hurried to the town where Zechariah and Elizabeth lived.

We don't know why she did this. It may well have been that she decided to visit Elizabeth in order to get out of her own small town, knowing that she was with child and that this would soon show. Doing this to get away from those gossips who no doubt would soon be raising their eyebrows and whispering about her and Joseph, behind their backs.

When Elizabeth heard Mary greeting her, Elizabeth's baby leaped in her womb, and we read that Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.

By inspiration, Elizabeth knows of the child that Mary is expecting and she asks Mary:

"But why am I so favoured, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?"

And she says to Mary *"Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished!"*

What an amazing interchange. We read that as Mary greeted Elizabeth her unborn child to be named John "leaped for joy". The footnote in my Bible¹⁴ says that "In some mysterious way, the Holy Spirit produced this remarkable response in the unborn baby." There was an immediate and direct connection.

At the same time Elizabeth, without having been told, addresses Mary as *"the mother of my Lord,"*

Luke then records Mary's song known as the Magnificat. Peter has prepared a version of this song that we will listen to after the sermon. It is a song of praise to God for what he has done for Mary, for what he has done those who revere Him and live in harmony with His will, and for what He has done for Israel.

"My soul glorifies the Lord." Some versions record this as *"My soul doth magnify the Lord."* Mary goes on to say that her spirit rejoices in her God and Saviour.

Why? Because he has been mindful of her even in her humble state.

She sings that from then on, all generations will call her blessed because the Mighty One has done great things for her – holy is his name.

She continues singing that God's mercy extends to all of those who fear him through the generations while he has brought down those who are proud and have ruled over others.

He has lifted up the humble, like her, providing for those who are hungry and without resources.

¹⁴ NIV Study Bible page 1535

Finally, she sings with thanksgiving that God has helped Israel, and that the people of Israel have the assurance that God will be true to his promises to his people: *"To Abraham and his descendants, forever, even as he said to our fathers."*

It is important that we look again at these passages. It is important to be reminded that what was to happen with the birth of Jesus was to be the fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecies.

Not a random happening, but part of God's pre-ordained plan.

Jesus being born to be God with us here on this earth, to share and explain the gospel message.

And it is important because we are drawn to focus on Mary's response.

"May it be to me as you have said."

Total and unconditional acceptance. An author¹⁵ points out that Mary's radical transformation is described in only three or four verses. From peasant girl to prophet, from denial to discipleship, from Mary to the mother of God.

And she writes:

"In a very real way, this is the appropriate transition from Advent to Christmas. Mary's story moves us all from who we think we are to what God has called us to be, from observant believer to confessing apostle."

All of this made possible not through our own strength, but through the empowering of the Holy Spirit as we respond to God's call.

What does this mean for you and what does this mean for me? Four points.

1. We are to celebrate the birth of Jesus. To contemplate that this was foretold, and that this happened. We are to do so with Hope, Peace, Joy and Love. Read through Luke, chapter 1 in your own time, and meditate on the true wonder of Christmas, the birth of Jesus as child to Mary.
2. We need to contemplate how we are moving to be what God has called us to be. Both as a congregation, and as individuals. Living our faith is a journey – a journey that continues throughout our life here on earth. We are not to be static. We are not to think of excuses and ask that others undertake what needs to be done.
No "Here am I Lord, please send Aaron."
3. We are to listen for a call to action. Pray for the call to come. This may come in different ways. It may be a quiet prompting or through identifying a neighbour's need – a need that needs more than "I hear you, I will pray for you."

Don't misunderstand me, prayer is absolutely vital, but remember the words of James¹⁶:

¹⁵ Karoline Lewis in an article: [Commentary on Luke 1:26-38 - Working Preacher from Luther Seminary](#)

¹⁶ James 2:14-17

“14 What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? 15 Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. 16 If one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? 17 In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.”

4. Review your journey of faith as you celebrate the birth of Jesus. Pray about where you are and what lies ahead. Pray about how Mary's story will move you from who you think you are to what God is calling you to be, from interested believer to active disciple journeying on. Pray for encouragement and empowering from the Holy Spirit so that when the call comes you will be able to say:

“May it be to me Lord as you have said.”

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