

Sunday December 10, 2023  
Lesson 2: Mary Says Yes!  
Scripture: Luke 1:26-38

**Context:**

We continue our new winter curriculum, “God Abides,” focusing on how the Holy Spirit reminds us of God’s constant presence with humanity. The first unit is titled “Transforming Spirit,” with lessons on the gospel of Luke in the story of Jesus’ birth tying into the season of Advent. Today’s lesson takes us to the beginning of the story of Mary, the mother of Jesus. The focus of today’s lesson will be to believe with God nothing is impossible.

The story we read today is very different from the one we read last week as we looked at the miraculous child coming to an old couple advanced in age. Today we read of someone in a very different stage of life who will also experience a miracle. Yet both stories hold a powerful theme: God’s initiative of grace and power as God will work through an unable, old couple and a young, unmarried girl.<sup>1</sup> God will act again and continue to reveal good news to the world.

The story begins once again with the angel Gabriel who was also given the task of presenting to Zechariah the news of a child to be born. What is unusual about this narrative from other biblical accounts is how the messenger is not sent to a man. Instead, the choice is a young, betrothed woman who will be given this big news from God. Betrothals were legal and binding agreements usually arranged between families when women were quite young, still only girls.<sup>2</sup> Joseph will still play an important role though as he will provide a legal connection to the throne of David as found in the gospel of Matthew.<sup>3</sup> Gabriel’s focus and task is to deliver the news to Mary, this young woman with no other biographical information given beyond being in the village of Nazareth.

The visit of the angel is met with both fear and questions, with the angel being attentive to what Mary asks of what is to come. The visit is fourfold: Mary will have a son named Jesus (v.31); the child will be the Son of God (Ps. 2:7), and will occupy forever the throne of David (v. 32-33); the birth of the child will be affected by the overshadowing descent of the Holy Spirit (v. 35); and as a sign this will come to pass, Gabriel informs Mary of the pregnancy of her kinswoman Elizabeth (v.36-37).<sup>4</sup> What is interesting is we never hear of the reasons God chose Mary; the reason lies tucked away with the purposes of God.<sup>5</sup> Instead, just as Gabriel states, “For nothing will be impossible,” Mary accepts the news and says “I am the Lord’s servant. Let it be with me just as you have said.” And thus, the narrative continues with the coming of the Christ child.

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<sup>1</sup> Craddock, Fred B. “Luke.” *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2009), 27.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. 28.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

## **Application**

If you ever visit the Church of the Annunciation in Nazareth, you will initially be marveled by the magnificent cathedral which contains numerous architectural feats and rich symbols everywhere you turn. Over the centuries, the Christian tradition has paid particular attention to Mary and her story in the birth of Jesus. Of particular note at the Church of the Annunciation is the depiction of Mary and child in various murals and paintings sent in from all over the world, making one aware of the humanity of Mary, as well as the Christ child.

Yet the most humbling aspect is getting to the grotto, a cave where according to legend, the Annunciation happened. There is nothing spectacular about it in some ways. It is just a cave-like room with the later additions of the church celebrating this as the place where the angel Gabriel showed up with the message to Mary. It is simple; recalling to us the idea of how this story did not take place in palaces or large elaborate kingdom halls. The angel Gabriel visited in even the most mundane of places including the tiny village of Nazareth.

While I am not sure one can prove the veracity of if this is indeed the place where Mary lived and the angel Gabriel showed up, I am struck by the reminder of how God shows up in ordinary places to everyday people with extraordinary news. With God, not only are things not impossible, but these things can also take place wherever God chooses for these things to come to light. God will show up and God will do amazing things.

I still think I marvel at the response of Mary as she is approached by this news. We never really hear of the full inner monologue of Mary with only a few concerns or observations rising to the top such as her initial fear or question about the how and the final acceptance of it all. Yet when you think of it, God truly gave her something which could have blown everything she knew apart, for better or worse. And she accepted it all with the saying, "Lord, I am your servant. Let it be with me just as you have said."

Imagine if you were just going through your check-list of daily activities. You know the things in front of you and what your role is in society. And then suddenly a messenger from the Lord shows up and tells you your whole life is going to be changed and not just with ordinary life challenges. No, in this case the biological normality will be thrown out the window and God will use you to bear a child to the world who will change everything. There is no new normal; your life has been turned upside down.

While Protestants sometimes downplay the role of Mary, I wonder if it's because we are somewhat scared and thrown off by her willingness to say yes unabashedly to God. We never get Mary's play by play after the angel left and she had to go to talk to Joseph or her parents/guardians about what had just happened. We can only imagine the courage and grit she had to bear in taking the next steps forward.

Some of it has to come with this idea of believing with God all things are possible and nothing is impossible. Often in life, we live with our feet straddling two lines. On one side is our rational, thinking ability where we can analyze things and see what is possible and what is predictable. The other side is our more feeling or whimsical element where maybe we have dreams or ideas which seem distant, impossible even. We live with both feet straddling the line, wondering which one we need to be firmly planted in.

And then there is God who at times does not seem to care where we want to put our feet. God doesn't consider where we might feel most comfortable or what we think or feel needs to happen. God can come and turn it all upside down with just a few swift moves and we stand back wondering how it all happened. We get the choice to say "no" and fight pushing back, or we can "yes" and just go for the ride.

Mary's story is all about seeing how God makes all things possible and the factors we might put in for how God operates isn't always necessarily in the mix. God has an uncanny way of showing up and moving in ways we never would have dreamed on our own. And God will always surprise us along the way, inviting us to see the lines between possible and impossible may not be as straight or predictable as we might imagine.

How have you seen God at work in "ordinary" places? Why do you think Mary said, "Yes Lord, let it be with your servant"? Who are people who exemplify the humility of Mary in your experience? Why do you think it is important to say yes to God? How have you seen God do "impossible things?"

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