

Advent 4 B
Luke 1:26-38
December 24, 2023

“Model Mary”
Rev. Dr. Brandon S. Perrine

²⁶In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, ²⁷to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. ²⁸And he came to her and said, “Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.” ²⁹But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰The angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. ³²He 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. ³³He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.” ³⁴Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I am a virgin?” ³⁵The angel said to 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 holy; he will be called Son of God. ³⁶And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. ³⁷For nothing will be impossible with God.” ³⁸Then Mary said, “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.” Then the angel departed from her.

~o~

Finally! A lectionary text in Advent that actually sounds Christmassy! We’ve waited for four weeks for our Sunday morning readings to point to the holiday that Advent is ultimately leading up to and this morning’s

reading reminds us that Christmas is just around the corner—tomorrow in fact!

The angel in our story, Gabriel, found Mary alone in a house in Nazareth. I imagine a room with sand-colored walls – Mary seated on a rough wooden stool near a window when the heavenly messenger entered the room. “Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you,” they said, interrupting what I imagine to be the deeply pious personal musings of this would-be mother of the messiah.

The look on her face must have given away her confusion, shock, even fear, because the angel quickly said, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.” Perhaps she felt relief hearing the angel’s words. However, it would have been shortlived as Gabriel continued by saying, “And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus.” Panic set in.

The angel went on, “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.” *Impossible*, she may have thought. *Impossible that I’m sitting here talking to an angel. Impossible that God picked me for such an important task. Impossible that I could be pregnant because I’ve never even...* “How can this be, since I am a virgin?” she finally said aloud. Gabriel responded, “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 holy; he will be called Son of God . . . For nothing will be impossible with God.”

Did Mary wish she hadn’t bothered to ask? Did she wonder what people would think, what Joseph would think? How could she not? And yet she responds, “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.” Then the angel departed from her.

What an epic beginning to such an epic story! Luke had my attention from the word “angel” and held it, leaving me wanting more. Perhaps more amazing than the heavenly messenger, or the news that this virgin would be found with child, or that the child would be God’s own child – perhaps more amazing than all this is the simple fact that a 13-to-14- year-old child was willing to go along with this hair-brained heavenly scheme!

While only her simple reply is recorded by Luke’s author, there must have been no small amount of inner dialogue in the spaces between the angel’s words and Mary’s response. She must have considered how her parents, her fiancé, her community would react to the news of a pregnancy – must have wondered if they would love her, believe her, protect her, or stone her. She must have at least considered that any dream of a quiet, long, and useful life might be utterly forfeit. She must have considered the consequences before her simple and profound reply: “Let it be with me according to your word.”

However it is that we hear this story – as myth, or metaphor, or merely as fact recorded by Luke’s own hand – one thing is abundantly clear, Mary is portrayed as the perfect disciple. She’s the model Christian. She hears the good news of God’s plan to plant a special child in her womb – a child who would one day take up the throne of his ancestor David and save his people – and she responds as only the truest of disciples could – by accepting Christ into herself, literally into her body, regardless of the costs. And there are costs for all who follow in her footsteps.

For Luke’s author, and for the early Christian community, Jesus had an important role to play in making God’s dream for the world into a reality. What was God’s dream for the world? Authors John Dominic Crossan and Marcus Borg refer to it as “the great cosmic cleanup.” This is the transformation from the world as human beings have made it to the world as God has dreamed it to be – a world of right relationship, of peace through justice, of generosity, and goodwill, and love – the realm of heaven, the kingdom of God. Jesus would grow up to champion this good

news of God's dream, inspiring his followers to catch his vision and take up the cause of making that dream a reality, here and now and for all.

Truth be told, that's still the work to which Jesus' followers are called. In his book *Crazy Christians*, episcopal bishop Michael Curry writes, "Being a Christian is not essentially about joining a church or being a nice person, but about following in the footsteps of Jesus, taking his teachings seriously, letting his Spirit take the lead in our lives, and in so doing helping to change the world from our nightmare into God's dream."¹

The Mary of Luke's gospel willingly participated in birthing God's dream in the world. Shouldn't we? After all, that's exactly the message Jesus preached to his hearers, illustrated through parables, showed through wonders, and died to spark a revolution that would make God's dream come true. As Christians, as little Christs, this is what we are called to do too – to birth God's dream in the world, here and now and for all. As Crossan and Borg also said, "God will not change the world without our participation."² That is the cost of Jesus' dream.

Today, may we join Mary in saying, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word."

Amen.

¹ Michael B. Curry. *Crazy Christians: A Call to Follow Jesus*. New York: Morehouse Publishing, 2013.

² John Dominic Crossan and Marcus Borg. *The First Christmas*. San Francisco: HarperOne, 2009.