

Let it Be

Luke 1:26-45

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North Decatur Presbyterian Church

Rev. David Lewicki, preaching

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 Gabriel 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^[c] 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.

³⁹In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, ⁴⁰where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit ⁴²and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. ⁴³And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? ⁴⁴For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. ⁴⁵And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord."

We read it every year. This is the story before Christmas. Because we read it every year, that means some of you have heard it 100 times! When you hear a story so often, it can begin to sound like white noise.

-yada yada Angel... yada yada girl... yada yada Holy Spirit... yada yada "let it be..."

Let's make this story weird again. That's always my agenda. Let's get into it.

Here's this girl.

What do we know about her?

- How old is she? 13. Age of betrothal. What do we know about 13 year old women?
- A betrothal is not a marriage of choice. It's an arrangement, Mary will become subject to her husband. A contract will bind them together and create their relationship. It's for economic stability, status.
- What kind of mood is she in as this story begins?

To this betrothed girl in this small town comes an angel named Gabriel:

- Angels are messengers, entrusted to communicate between God and people; they facilitate divine speech and activity
- Gabriel appears to Daniel, Enoch, Zechariah the priest earlier in Luke
- All men; now Gabriel appears here to a woman... with a message
- The angel says, “Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.” “Favored” here has same root as “charis” (grace). Literally, Mary is one to whom grace has been given.

How does Mary respond? *“She was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be.”* What do you sense from that translation?

- “Perplexed” is interesting. The word is “diatarrasso.” Troubled.
- What does it feel like to be troubled? Agitated.
- “Pondering,” suggests a kind of dreaminess. But it’s reasoning. She’s using her intelligence to solve problem.

Now the angel really gets to the point of the visit:

“Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹ And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him 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 ancestor David. ³³ He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.”

Let’s digest this:

- First of all, the Angel says, “don’t be afraid”—even though we don’t know she’s afraid yet... the angel may understand that the news should frighten her. If she is found to be pregnant without yet being married, her life is in jeopardy.
- Again the angel says, “you are “graced.” Juxtaposition of grace and fear.
- You will conceive a son named Jesus. Which means, “God rescues,” or “God saves.” Son of the “most high,” which is a place name for “the great holy mystery”
- The “throne of David”—remember the Davidic covenant? The promise of God to be with the people through God’s own ruler. This is happening in the shadow of the Roman empire. The angel is promising the child will be God’s King on earth.
- The is the declaration of a political revolution.

Mary’s response is:

- How? I haven’t “known” a man. This is knowing through experience. Is this shame? Shock? Curiosity?
- How? Explain to me how this works. Sometimes we ask “how” because we want to know. When what we mean is “why?”
- What’s the sense of the Mary who’s asking “how can this be?”

The angel gives an answer to the “how,” “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you;

- The Holy Spirit will happen to you. The Spirit will occur on you. The sense is of something irresistible.

- “Overshadow” is to envelop like a cloud; it’s Transfiguration language.

The Angel tells her that her relative Elizabeth has also conceived a son... “For nothing will be impossible with God.”

- This is a beautiful statement. But is it an answer to Mary’s concern?

What Mary says next is the most beguiling part of the story. She says, according to the translation, “Here I am, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.”

- First of all, I wonder how long Mary waited to say this. Was there a silence between “nothing is impossible with God” and “Here I am?”
- What a powerful silence. We have a 13 year old woman being told she will be pregnant so that her life will be at risk, her marriage is at risk, and her child will lead a political revolution on behalf of God...
- What do you say???
- The first thing she says is “idou,” which gets translated as “Here I am.” But it basically means: “pay attention!” “Look at me!” or “Listen to me!”
- I am the slave of God. “Doule” means female slave... we soften it to servant.
- “Let it be...” which means “let it happen.” The word often refers to natural phenomenon, like sunrise and sunset.

(Activity)

Have emotions in a hat

Have different women pick emotions out of the hat and say:

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

- *Troubled*
- *Resigned*
- *Worried*
- *Angry*

Reading Mary as a full human being helps us see the range of feelings that come to us in an encounter with God.

None of us are asked to do what Mary did. But we are asked to something that can be hard—that is to say “yes” to Jesus and the movement of the Holy Spirit.

Like Mary, you are never expected to be anything other than your full and honest self when God comes to you.

(in an angry, defiant voice)

Listen to me.

I am the slave / servant (choose one) of God.

Let it be with me according to your Word.

(in a resigned voice)

Listen to me.

I am the slave / servant (choose one) of God.

Let it be with me according to your Word.

(in a hopeful voice)

Listen to me.

I am the slave / servant (choose one) of God.

Let it be with me according to your Word.

(in a fearful/troubled voice)

Listen to me.

I am the slave / servant (choose one) of God.

Let it be with me according to your Word.