**Luke 1.26-38 Advent 4 2020**

This is one of the most amazing conversations in the history of the world. Here we have a young woman possibly only 13 or 14 years old, being chosen by God for the most important birth that would ever be, the birth of God’s own son, that leads to the reversal of the Garden of Eden, the restoration of the fall.

It portrays the perfect relationship between humanity and God, through which the maximum fruitfulness is brought about. And if you want to look at it more theologically, it is also a portrayal of the ideal relationship between God and the chosen nation of Israel, Jesus Christ and his church, and the portrayal of the action of Holy Spirit on a believer.

It is a hugely significant conversation.

So as we look at it in more detail, see where you are within it.

Imagine for a moment that you are Mary. You are living with your parents and are betrothed to the local carpenter Joseph, in a legally binding engagement. On this particular day it could be that you are doing some household chores, cleaning some dishes, or maybe you are out in a field somewhere, gathering fruit or something.

And this beautiful angel, huge angel, one of the arch angels appears in front of you. What is your reaction? This angel whose name we are told is Gabriel, gives her the standard greeting: “Hail, greetings, be you rejoicing.” Then goes on: “Favoured one, you who are full of grace, endued with grace, most highly favoured, most blessed of all women. Adonai, the Lord is with you.”

“Me, highly favoured? What are you going on about mate? I am just a normal kid, nothing special about me.” Sorry - that reply from Mary is not in the text. But it does say that she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. God highly favours me? Is that how God looks at me? Wow! God says this of me!

What is our response to God saying: “You are highly favoured, I delight in you?” Do we not ponder on this, are we not perplexed by this? Is that really what God thinks of me? Wow! Just as Mary pondered upon this statement, let it sink in: “You are highly favoured.”

Mary does not reply to the angel and Gabriel continues: “Do not be afraid Mary, for you have found favour with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.”

What an amazing list of what Jesus will be and will achieve. When you hear of someone being pregnant, it is not the norm to be told by an angel what the child will become and achieve, and in many ways that is a blessing.

Put your self once again into Mary’s shoes. This is a huge amount of information to absorb. Firstly she’s going to become pregnant - that is a shock in itself, especially to a girl whose periods have possibly only recently started.

But there is more. This child is going to be something amazing - Son of the Most High, a king like David, who will rule over the house of Jacob, forever and ever. This is way beyond her life experience so far. Nazareth is a small place of less than 500 people, not a thriving centre of Governance. Yet this child, to be conceived within her was to rule over the house of Jacob, forever.

Mary responds: “Look sunshine, this does not follow the science. I know about the birds and the bees. Joseph and I are good, faithful Jews; we have kept ourselves from each other, so dude, how can it be that I shall be pregnant?”

“The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.” The Trinity, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, are all in this together, bringing about the birth of Jesus.

“Therefore the child to be born will be Holy; he will be called Son of God.”

The full revealing, the clarification of the enormity of who this child is - God’s Son. Mary was chosen by God to bear His Son, carry His Son in her womb. Her body was to bring to birth a child fully human, yet also fully divine. What a task, what a responsibility, what an honour and how terrifying that is.

God in his grace, then provides an outside source of proof for this, that Mary can easily go and test for herself. Her dear cousin and friend Elizabeth, who has shared many things with Mary over the years, is pregnant. Nothing is impossible with God. If God can do this with elderly, barren Elizabeth who is with child in her sixth month, then God can do this with Mary. Mary knows that she can go and share her experience with Elizabeth - so important to be able to share an amazing experience of God with a close friend. You do not cast pearls before swine, but carefully choose with whom you share them.

Likewise with us, we need close friends with whom we can share our precious experiences, encounters with God; with whom we can ponder and reflect on the messages God gives to us, his promises of the future.

What a loving thoughtful God to provide that human support for Mary. Strengthened by this, Mary’s response is wholehearted, joyful, worshipful obedience: “Here am I, a servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.” God would love it if our response was the same.

This is a beautiful conversation in which God reveals his intentions, and Mary partners herself with God, to bring about the fullness of what God wants. It is a story of what happens when a human being conceives and brings to life, what God desires. There is no limit to what God can do in and through us. So this Christmas as you reflect once again on the miraculous conception, and the birth of Jesus, let Holy Spirit, the power of the Most High, come upon you, into your body, and conceive within you the fullness of God’s love, and his purposes for you. For nothing is impossible with God.

Amen.

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