

Luke 1:38 "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May it be to me as you have said."

Over the last month we have spent these weeks of Advent preparing ourselves. We have looked at preparing ourselves by understanding that Jesus will come again both to destroy and to save. We have looked at preparing ourselves through repentance and confidence in our Savior's forgiveness. We have prepared ourselves by proclaiming the Good News that the Savior has come and will come again.

So now I ask you, do you feel prepared? Are you all set? If Jesus were to come in the next 5 minutes are you ready to lift up your head with joy as the King of Glory comes in?

I wonder if Mary was ready for what she would experience that day. Surely she would have known the prophecies, including the promise to David we heard in our first lesson today. (She sang about them in her *Magnificat*.) Her name comes from the Hebrew name Miriam which means *bitter myrrh*. Since most Jewish children were named for the circumstances of their birth, it is likely that she grew up with an acute sense of the downtrodden bitterness of the Lord's chosen people. She would have longed for that glory that had been promised so long ago to her own house of David. So much so that Luther speculates that Mary may even have been praying for the redemption of Israel when the angel appeared in "answer" to her prayer and the prayers of millions before her. But was she prepared for the redemption to happen in her lifetime?

This poor, humble handmaiden, named for the poverty and bitterness of her people, living in the lowest of conditions, was suddenly hailed like royalty, ***Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you. Literally he said, Hail, favored one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!*** The angel greeted her as if to say "*O Mary, you are so blessed. You*

have such a gracious God. No woman has ever lived on earth to whom God has shown such grace." (Luther) So overwhelmed was she, that Luke seems to indicate that either Mary may not have even known it was an angel at first and couldn't figure out what this stranger meant, or that she was so overcome by the arrival of the heavenly messenger that she became almost disoriented and fearful. Was she prepared for such dizzying circumstances?

And if that wasn't amazing enough, then she heard even more amazing things from the angel. Gabriel announced to her that God was fulfilling a promise that reached back beyond her parents and grandparents, back beyond the Romans and the Babylonians, back beyond Great King David and even back beyond Abraham himself, a promise reaching all the way back to fallen Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. This was the pivot point of all of human history being announced to her and she knew it. The Messiah, the Savior, was to be conceived in her. Was she prepared to experience this fulfillment of promise?

And in such a miraculous way. The child, the Messiah, the Savior, would be conceived in her not through natural means but by ***the Holy Spirit as the power of the most-high God would overshadow her.*** The child would be a King like none before him. He would ascend the throne of David only to eclipse David's rule with the promised eternal kingdom. God would be made flesh in her womb and he would be called the very ***Son of God.*** She, a virgin, would ***conceive and give birth to a son,*** and not just any son, but the son of promise. She, the lowly handmaiden would be the mother of God. Mother of God...how do you prepare for such a responsibility?

But let's go back to our original question? After hearing what Mary experienced, do you feel any more prepared? Now I grant you, that Mary's visit by an angel is far more spectacular than anything you or I have ever experienced or probably ever even imagined. But let's face it, there are plenty of similarities.

Like Mary and her people, we are a downtrodden spiritual people, struggling to

let our lights shine in a sin-darkened world. We long for deliverance on our best days (even if we don't give it a thought on our worst). We pray, but are we prepared for God's answers?

The scriptures greet us with words like **royal priesthood, chosen nation, people of God** and with such greetings come equally lofty expectations of the sacrificial offering of our blessings, being set apart from the unbelieving world, living for our Savior as he lives in us. But are we prepared for such seemingly, overwhelmingly, dizzying dedication?

We have been promised hope and healing, light and salvation, joy and jubilation. But are we prepared to leave this world behind and welcome him who comes to judge the world with righteousness and justice? Are you prepared? Do you feel ready? Do you...believe?

St. Bernard of Clairvaux wrote that there are three miracles in this account of the Annunciation: 1) the Incarnation itself - that God and man should be joined in this child; 2) that a mother conceives while yet a virgin; 3) that Mary should have such faith as to believe that this mystery of the incarnation would be accomplished in her.

And you know what? The last is not the least of the three. As Luther put it, "*The Virgin birth is a mere trifle for God; that God should become man is a greater miracle; but most amazing of all is that this maiden should [believe] the announcement that she...had been chosen to be the mother of God...Had she not believed, she could not have conceived.*" In other words, the greatest miracle in this account is that the Holy Spirit had already worked in her the faith to believe what was about to be worked in her.

I suppose one could argue that it wasn't exactly surprising news that a Savior would come. It isn't really news today, either - most know the story of Jesus. Mary knew the Messiah would come - not surprising. The surprise was that he was going to come to *her*. The surprise is that he has come to *you*. For "**To us a son is born, to us a son is given...**" (Isaiah 9:6) "*This is for us the hardest point, not so much to believe that He is the son of the Virgin and*

God himself, as to believe that this Son of God is ours." (Luther) and with him has come to *you* and to *me* every good and perfect gift to prepare us for when he will come again.

Not feeling prepared for what God has in store for you? Just look at how our Savior has, again and again, been mindful of "**the lowly state of his servant,**" working **all things for the good of those who love him.** Not feeling prepared to live and give for him with all that you have and all that you are? **Do not be afraid. You have found favor with God.** Doubting your readiness and ability to face Jesus when he comes again in truth and grace? **Lift up your heads as the King of Glory comes in for the Holy Spirit [has] come upon you** through the waters of Holy Baptism, **the power of the Most High...overshadow[s] you** through his living Word. This very child of promise comes to you in the intimacy of hand and mouth, as you internalize him not in some kind of biological and digestive function, but in a spiritual and miraculous strengthening through the promise, assurance and fulfillment connected with his very body and blood. **Therefore,** Paul so boldly declares, **you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed.** (1 Corinthians 1:7)

Now to him who is able to establish you by [the] gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past,²⁶ but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all nations might believe and obey him--²⁷ to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! (Romans 16:25-27 – Second Lesson) Are you prepared? In all joy and confidence, let us say with Mary, "**I am the Lord's servant. May it be to me as you have said.**" Amen.

Everlasting God, in whom we live and move and have our being: You have made us for yourself, so that our hearts are restless until they rest in you. (Augustine) Come, Lord Jesus. Quickly come. Amen.