

## "Advent Faith: The Story of Mary" Luke 1:26-38

December 7, 2011

Advent 2

When we look at the picture on the bulletin – an angel appearing to Mary, we think everything is proceeding smoothly and that Mary is very happy. But that's probably not true. Something was troubling Mary.

We read about angels appearing to people in the Bible and often people are afraid. Angels have to say, "Do not be afraid." But Mary is not afraid. Seeing an angel does not trouble Mary. But the angel's message troubles her. The angel says to her, "Greetings! God has shown favor to you. The Lord is with you. You will conceive in your womb and bear a son and you will call his name Jesus...He will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father, David." That wonderful message bothered her for a couple of reasons.

First, the angel said she would become pregnant and give birth to a baby. In the past, angels had announced surprising births. Sarah, wife of Abraham, had a baby when she was 90 years old. Elizabeth, Mary's cousin, was already pregnant and would give birth to a baby even though she was very old. But this was different. Those women were married and had been with their husbands. Mary was a young girl – maybe 14 or 15 years old – and had never been with a man. She could not be pregnant.

Secondly, this baby would be special. The baby was the Son of the Most High – God becoming a person. This baby was the Messiah, the Savior, the King who would take up the kingdom of his ancestor King David. Mary was to name the baby "Jesus" – "the Lord Saves". This is the baby that would save His people from sin, death, and the power of the devil. He would earn forgiveness for all sin because sin meant death. He would overcome death because the devil uses death to make us afraid. By that, he would destroy the devil's power (Heb. 2:14). An ordinary tiny baby couldn't do all that

Yet Mary does not reject the angel's message. She does not disbelieve. She asks one simple question, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?" The angel's answer is simple, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will do this...God can do anything!" Martin Luther said that the Holy Spirit did three miracles here: First, He would make a virgin give birth, but that wasn't hard. Second, He would make God become a man. That would be harder. Thirdly, the most amazing miracle, the Holy Spirit would cause Mary to believe this Word of God. She answers, "Let it be to me according to Your Word." In other words, "I believe this promise of God."

Mary had strong faith. She would need that faith to face many upcoming challenges. How would she tell Joseph that she was pregnant, but had not been with a man. How would she tell her family? What would the people in her village think? Suppose they decided to stone her to death as the Old Testament commanded for adultery. What Mary do? Years later, when soldiers would arrest her son and nail him to a cross, how would Mary respond? Mary continued to have faith in God's promises, even as she watched those soldiers nail her Son to a cross. God had created faith in Mary. God sustained faith in Mary. God kept Mary in faith. It was truly a miracle!

We have not experienced such stunning things as Mary experienced. But maybe we have felt like she did. We, too, receive messages that trouble us. Read the newspaper. We read about war, crime, unemployment, and a bad economy. We read about marriages failing and families collapsing. We read about hatred, greed, and fighting. People will camp out in front of a store so they can shop at 4:00 AM on the day after Thanksgiving. Then they will physically fight with each other to get that special gift. Our world is completely crazy. This troubles us.

Read the Bible. There is more bad news. The Bible says that each of us is a sinner. That troubles us because we think we are pretty good. The Bible says that each of us will die because of sin. That troubles us because we live like we will never die. The Bible says that each of us deserves hell after death because of sin. That troubles us because we want God to be like a kindly grandfather who gives us stuff but is never upset with us.

Read your heart. Maybe what you see in there troubles you. Many things happen that we don't understand. We want answers from God. "Why did you let this happen to me? Why me?" "I have cancer." "My father died." "Will you deliver me? How? When?" But often we remain troubled without answers.

God sent the answer for all of these problems at Christmas time. His Son was born to deliver us from all the problems in our world, all the problems of sin in our lives, and all the worries and fears in hearts. He grew up and took all of the sin, evil, and troubles to the cross. He faced God's wrath at our sin and endured God's punishment for evil – physical suffering when He was crucified, spiritual suffering when the Father rejected Him. He experienced physical death and spiritual death.

Because of that, God forgives all sin. Evil will be done away with. Death will die. All amazing things to happen. All difficult things to believe. We may be like Mary, asking "How will all this happen?"

Then God offers us a miracle like He did for Mary. The Lord's message to you is, "Greetings! God has shown favor to you. The Lord is with you... The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will do this." The Holy Spirit came to Mary, helped her believe God's outrageous promises, and created life within her without her action or help. In the same way, the Holy Spirit comes to you, helps you believe God's outrageous promises, and creates new life in you with your action or help. He creates faith with plain water in Holy Baptism. He sustains that faith with His Holy Word. He feeds that faith with Jesus' body and blood in Holy Communion. He keeps us in faith so that we are able to face challenges – challenges in our world, challenges because of sin, and challenges in our hearts.

Living in faith is not easy for us. It was not easy for Mary who became pregnant as a virgin and gave birth to the Savior of the world. Yet we remember the angel's final words: "God can do anything." And God did! He brought His Son into the world through a virgin's womb and accomplished the salvation of the world through Him, even though it seemed impossible. He also helped Mary have faith, even though that seemed impossible, too. She rejected Satan's

temptations, overcame all doubts, and endured all suffering and rejection for living faithfully for her Lord. She didn't do that. Her faith didn't do that. God did that.

In the same way, God can do anything for us as we faithfully follow Him. We will experience temptations from Satan to fall away, but God's Word empowers our faith to reject those temptations. We will have doubts, but God's Word helps our faith overcome those doubts. We will experience teasing, persecution, rejection, and suffering if we live faithfully to God in a godless world, but God's Word gives encouragement to our faith to endure all. But it's not really our faith doing that. We are not doing that. God is doing it.

Let our response to God be the same as Mary's response: "I am a servant for the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." God will make that happen. His gift of faith allows us to believe that God can do anything. And His strength in His Word allows us to endure anything and everything until we are safely at home with Him in heaven. Amen.