

“Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you” (Luke 1:26).

Mary’s story opens quietly in Scripture as a Jewish teenager probably 14-16 years old engaged to a carpenter. She was embarking on one of life’s major adventures: marriage. No doubt she and Joseph, like other young couples, had discussed their wedding plans and dreamed about the rest of their lives together as husband and wife.

Then suddenly, on an ordinary day, God sent an unmistakable message to Mary. God sent the angel Gabriel to Mary with startling news. It was a disturbing surprise, to say the least, in the middle of all the plans she was making with Joseph. God spoke directly to her ears and to her heart while she listened intently to every single word.

The angel announces the will of God for Mary’s life. He tells her that she will conceive a son, that his name is to be Jesus, and that he will be great. I’m sure this was a bit confusing for Mary. She felt confused and afraid as she focused on the very question that any virgin would have asked, "How can I have a baby without a husband? This is a physical impossibility."

And don’t you just love Gabriel’s answer? "This is God’s work in you, Mary. Nothing is impossible with God (v.37)." A ten-year old, who was becoming quite knowledgeable about the Bible because of her grandmother’s teaching, asked her grandmother: "Which Virgin was the mother of Jesus? The Virgin Mary or the King James Virgin?"

Consider for a moment the ramifications of Mary’s response.
By her willingness to serve the Lord:

- According to Jewish Law, Joseph had the right to divorce Mary and she would be stoned to death at the city gates for having a baby.
- Mary was willing to be the gossip of the town because she was pregnant before marriage. Either she would have been ridiculed for being with Joseph in their betrothal period, or if Joseph divorced her, she would have been compared with a prostitute, because it meant she had an affair during her betrothal to Joseph. Imagine the gossip in the sleepy little town of Nazareth where everybody knew everybody. (Example of the portrayal of the friends of Mary and Joseph and the townspeople shunning them in “The Nativity Story”) No matter what way you look at it, it was going to be tough for Mary, but because of her faith in God, that he would work it out, she was willing to put her faith in action.

The Bible says, “The angel went to her and said, “Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you (Luke 1:28); Gabriel greeted her: “Good morning! You’re beautiful with God’s beauty, Beautiful inside and out! God be with you” (Luke 1:28, *The Message Bible*);

Mary's life and faith journey is dramatic and even dangerous; she might have been miserable upon hearing the angel's message that she would have a baby, but she was highly favored and deeply loved by God the Father. She could have been fearful because of her unexpected pregnancy, but instead, was hopeful. She might have remained in seclusion because of this shameful incident, but, instead, she joined in a communal relationship with her cousin Elizabeth. Her faith in God enabled her to be blessed, hopeful, and communal. Furthermore, in the midst of her disturbed circumstances, she was prayerful, grateful, and joyful as she sang with praise: the "Magnificat."

Mary praised God in faith: "My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me – holy is his name" (Luke 1:46-49).

Mary's inner beauty was so powerful that she was chosen to become the mother of the most important person of all time: God's own Son, Jesus. Her inner beauty impressed God and should inspire us as a role model, whether we are teens or adults; Mary was a woman of faith and obedience to God.

God's favor rests upon those who respond in faith. As we meditate on Mary's response, we can learn what genuine faith is. Let's take a look at verse 38: "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May it be to me as you have said." Then the angel left her." What trust! What commitment! What faith! Oh that there would be that type of trust in the church today. Mary's response was that she lived to do God's will. There was no argument, no complaining, no "But what will the neighbors say?" or "How will Joseph take the news?" Just reckless abandon.

When was the last time you trusted God enough to live in reckless abandon? When was the last time that you felt tugging at your heart to help someone in need and you did so without a thought?

When was the last time your soul yearned for you to speak or sing God's praises in public and with reckless abandon you sang "Great is thy faithfulness, Oh God my Father."

Mary's trust grew even greater, as she expressed her gratitude to him before Jesus was even born. Turning quickly to an older, wiser woman of God who, without question, would understand and be able to share in her joy. She remembered her cousin Elizabeth and poured out her faith and her gratitude as she sang the song of her heart recorded in verses 46-55: the "Magnificat."

Mary had kept God's Word in her heart for many years. She knew his promises. And here she was, an ordinary young woman, the one chosen by God to help accomplish his purpose in the world. Of course, Mary sang a song of joy.

Mary's faith which was shown through her trust, obedience, and commitment changed her life from misery to blessedness; from fearfulness to hopeful; from private to communal. What a

powerful example of faith that touches as well as teaches you and me on this Sunday. God desires us to learn from Mary. Amen.