

Worship for 5 December (Advent 2)

BIBLE READINGS

Luke 1:26-38

In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favoured! The Lord is with you."

Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, "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 are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

"How will this be?" Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"

The 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 will be holy; he will be called Son of God. Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. For nothing will be impossible with God."

"I am the Lord's servant" Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled." Then the angel left her.

Philippians 4:4-7

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

MESSAGE [An adventure beyond the ordinary](#)

As you heard last week, I'm changing the emphasis of this season slightly to **adventure**, which suggests an **active** response to what God is doing rather than a more passive waiting.

This week, Liz and I had our own little adventure in north east Victoria, completing our holiday from earlier this year that was cut short by Melbourne's third lockdown back in February. Part of the adventure was walking near the Murray River and through flooded redgum forest.



After so many years of drought and bushfires it felt strange to be walking through this flooded landscape. It was stranger still to see a large mob of kangaroos jumping and sloshing through the forest, two thirds disappearing under the water with each jump before emerging again. It was good to be away from home and enjoying a little of God's amazing creation.

Back to Advent and Luke's telling of the story, which focuses on the expectation of two special babies – John and Jesus – and the response of the adults to God moving among them to bring a sense of a new adventure that is about to begin. These two births are closely connected ... a point Luke highlights by noting that the **timing** of today's story – the announcement to Mary – happens in the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy with John.

God's announcement of the two impending births is remarkably similar in form and language. In each case the angel Gabriel acts as God's messenger, bringing unexpected news that Elizabeth and Mary will each have a son. In both cases the recipient of the message – Zechariah and Mary – questions how this can be and Gabriel responds before departing.

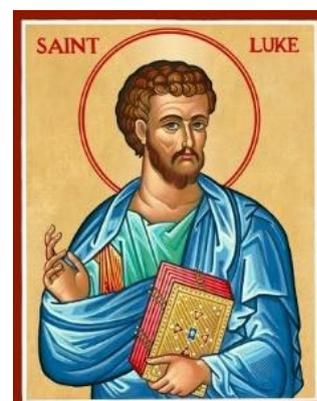
Two announcements.

Two stories of God's grace.

Two startling outcomes.

But while the two stories have been crafted and presented in a very similar way, there are major differences between their **contexts**, the **people involved**, their **responses** ... and of course the **vocation** of the sons. This is all part of Luke's storytelling craft.

If you want to understand more of Luke's background and how he presents the Jesus story, I've written a brief two page introduction that's available [here](#).



Coming back to Luke's story, you may recall that **Zechariah** was a priest, a respected person with a respected vocation. He served in the **Jerusalem temple**, the celebrated place of God's presence, the place of God's blessing.



By contrast, Mary is a nobody, a small town peasant girl. She is probably around 13 years old and engaged to be married to Joseph. She's described as a virgin ... *parthenos* in Greek ... which can mean virgin or young woman.

Mary has no status, no special family connection.

She's nobody important.

She comes from a small village in rural Galilee called Nazareth. Her life was probably somewhat similar to what we read about in Ruth a few weeks ago ... doing agricultural tasks like gleaning and domestic tasks like fetching water, grinding grain and cooking.



But one of the messages of Mary's story – and Luke's story overall – is that God works through **ordinary** people living in **ordinary** situations. God invites such people – including us – to be part of the ongoing story of God's people.

If Elizabeth and Zechariah's son, John, is to become someone quite outstanding – a powerful prophet like Elijah – then what is said about Mary's son is even more amazing. He will be called the **Son of God** and will **rule as king on David's throne**. His kingdom will never end.

These words of Gabriel are similar to the promises made to King David all the way back in 2 Samuel. In popular imagination, these words point to Mary's child as being the long awaited Messiah, the one to free Israel from foreign rule and unite the country.

Jesus, then, will be no ordinary child. His conception will not happen **after** Mary and Joseph are happily married but will be the direct result of God's Holy Spirit coming upon Mary in power – now. The same language is used at the end of Luke's Gospel and again at the start of the book of Acts to describe the Holy Spirit coming upon the disciples with power at Pentecost.



The **responses** of Zechariah and Mary to Gabriel's two announcements are at once similar – questioning how these births could come about – but also quite different. Gabriel names Zechariah's response as **unbelief**, an unwillingness to trust that God could work in this way. Mary's response is presented as **believing** and **embracing** the message – 'Here I am. May things turn out just as you have described them.'

Mary's response is a little like Ruth ... she is young, but is courageous, faithful and willing to try daring things. Her response, unlike that of Zechariah, is to embrace this gift and this moment despite its cost in terms of reputation, innuendo and social scandal. She says 'yes'!

So what might we learn from Mary's invitation to an adventure with God?

She is an **ordinary** girl living an ordinary life in a small backwater of a village.

Surely her life and her actions cannot do much to bring God's kingdom here on earth?

I wonder how often **we** play that tape in our heads?

I'm really a nobody. What can I do to further God's kingdom here?

Surely not much ...

But Mary's faith and her response suggest that **yes!** her positive embracing of God's surprising message will bring great blessing – and will result in ripples of blessing spreading out through Galilee and all Israel and eventually through the whole world. This is similar but greater than the ripples of blessing that spread out from Ruth and her decisions.

There will also be great **heartache** and **hardship** for Mary – and Joseph – before the story gets too far. There will be other challenges later on, unknown to Mary when she says 'yes' to God. It's all part of the adventure that starts in Advent.

In a way it's like the vows made at a wedding when two people promise to love each other no matter



what happens in their future lives – the joys and pain they will experience that are unknown when they say the words ‘I do’.

Mary’s is called to an adventure **beyond an ordinary person living an ordinary life.**

God can and will do extraordinary things through her and her offspring.

But make no mistake. It’s no small thing to embrace such an adventure ... whether it’s Ruth leaving her country to go back with Naomi to Bethlehem or Mary laying aside her plans and dreams – and her reputation – to become the mother of Israel’s future king and God’s Son.

So a question to leave you with today ... what might God be wanting to do through my life or through the lives of the people sitting around us today or through people we are connected with? As we saw last week, the adventure begins with saying yes!

Let’s hear the story again, as told from Mary’s perspective ... ‘Mary – why me?’

Who am I?

No one special.

Just a girl from a small town that you’ve never heard of.

From a family that you’ve never heard of.

Just an ordinary girl engaged to an ordinary guy.

OK, he’s not ordinary to me! But he’s no one special either.

Yes he’s descended from King David, but so are half the country!

Like I said, Joseph and I aren’t anyone special. Just a happy couple.

Well, we were ...

I’m minding my own business, just trying to prepare for our wedding, excited about our future together. And then on this one night, just like any other night, a light appears, dazzling me.

A voice speaks in my mind, ‘You are favoured by God. Don’t be afraid!’

Afraid? I was terrified! Scared out of my mind.

Then a voice, this messenger from God says, ‘You will have a child, a son.’

And I go, ‘Just wait a minute, we’re not even married yet.’

But the voice just keeps going ... ‘You will name him Jesus. He will be the Son of God and he will rule over the house of Jacob forever.’

I was speechless. And then I got angry.

‘What are you talking about? I’m barely a teenager and I’m not even married yet!’

And then this messenger, this angel, says ‘God’s Spirit will make all this happen.’

I felt confused, scared. I cried until I couldn’t cry any more. Then I was still for a long time.

I thought of Joseph and my love for him. I knew the problems this would cause. I thought of the God who I have known all my life. And then I wept again – this time, not with fear, but crying and laughing at the same time.

A child?! THIS child is a gift! A gift from God alone.

Look at me. Why would God choose me?

Look at me. Why would God bless me?



Who am I?

No one special. No one special at all.

Just the mother of God's Son. The one who will change everything for good.

So I said to the angel. 'Yes. Here I am.'

SONG TiS 287 No wind at the window

No wind at the window, no knock on the door;
no light from the lampstand, no foot on the floor;
no dream born of tiredness, no ghost raised by fear;
just an angel and a woman and a voice in her ear.

O Mary, O Mary, don't hide from my face,
be glad that you're favoured and filled with God's grace.
The time for redeeming the world has begun;
and you are requested to mother God's son.

This child must be born that the kingdom might come;
salvation for many, destruction for some;
both end and beginning, both message and sign;
both victor and victim, both yours and divine.

No payment was promised, no promises made;
no wedding was dated, no blueprint displayed.
Yet Mary, consenting to what none could guess,
replied with conviction, "Tell God, I say Yes."

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