

Theme: - The servant of the Lord.

In verse 24 and 25 just before our reading St Luke tells us that Elizabeth, wife of Zechariah, is 5 months pregnant with John the Baptist. In verse 26 we read, "In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth", the sixth months refers to the length of Elizabeth's pregnancy; so right at the beginning Luke ties Mary's story into that of Elizabeth's. In verse 36 the angel tells Mary that her relation Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, so it is possible that Jesus and John were cousins, and that Jesus and John may well have played together as children.

Both Sarah, Abrahams wife, and Elizabeth, Zechariah's wife, gave birth in their old age when they were past childbearing age, and Mary gave birth to a child even though she was a virgin; these three miraculous events changed the course of human history.

But of course, our story today is not about Sarah or Elizabeth, but about Mary the mother of Jesus, a woman probably in her early teens at the time she gave birth, whose family we know nothing about, but what we do know is that Mary had an extraordinary faith and trust in God. From verse 27 we know that she was engaged to Joseph a descendent of King David, and that although she would still be living at home, her engagement could only be ended by divorce.

In verse 28 we are told that the angel Gabriel greeted Mary by saying, "Greetings, favoured one! The Lord is with you." From my experience knowing that the Lord is with me when I'm in trouble, or indeed at any other time, is very reassuring, and I'm sure that when she heard those words from the angel that although she may have realised that God was going to test her in some way, she was reassured, because God would be there with her. We are told that the angel again spoke to her and said, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God."

We need to Keep in mind that Mary is a female in a man's world where men dominate, that she is probably only about 13 or so, no more than a child herself in a world that reveres age and wisdom. God has not prepared her for the appearance of the angel, but instead sends the angel to prepare her for an even greater event, but before he dares to tell her he can see that she is afraid, or as verse 29 has it, 'perplexed' at what is happening and he tries to reassure her by saying, "Do not be afraid."

In verse 31 the truth comes out, "And now you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus." Jesus means saviour and is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew Joshua which means "The Lord saves" or "Salvation comes from the Lord." The angel may well have paused here for just a moment to let that news sink in, and for her to concentrate on what he was going to say next before he goes on to say, "He will be great, and will be called the Son of the most high, and the Lord God

will give to him the throne of his ancestor David.” The phrase, ‘Son of the most high’, means or equates to, ‘the Son of God’.

In St Paul’s letter to the Romans chapter 9 verse 15 we have these words, “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.” God is free to choose, and he chose Mary to be the mother of Jesus. As Mary will say in verse 52, after our reading in response to the angel’s announcement that God had chosen her to be the mother of Jesus, “He has brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted up the lowly.” Mary was not chosen because she deserved to be favoured but was favoured because she had been chosen, and that is true for all of us today, we did not choose God, God chose us, but we are given free will in the way we respond to God’s call, as indeed was Mary who clearly responded well.

Verse 32 and 33 reads, “He will be great, and will be called the Son of the most high, and the Lord God will give to 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.” This was the fulfilment of the promise that God made to David who wanted to build a temple for God, in 2 Samuel chapter 7 verses 12 and 13 we read, “When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom.” “He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever.”

Knowing that David’s son, Solomon, built a temple, we might think that the promised offspring who “shall build a house” refers to Solomon; however, the full promise was not to be found in Solomon but in Jesus. Solomon built a temple that stood for a few years, but Christ will build “a house not made with human hands, but with hands eternal in the heavens” (2 Corinthians 5:1).

God could have chosen the temple in Jerusalem as the site for the announcement of the birth of Jesus but didn’t, God chose Nazareth, which was a small village in Galilee, miles from Jerusalem and surrounded by Gentiles. God chose a lowly family in an obscure place which contrasts with the glory of the Son of God, who, the writer of Kings wrote, “will reign over the house of Jacob forever.” All this was and is Good News, of course. God was making provision for the salvation of all his people from the lowliest to the greatest by choosing ordinary folk. God has a place and plan for everyone, for all of us, not just for the religious leaders, the rich, or noble.

But God chose two poor but honourable people, Mary, and Joseph, who lived in Nazareth which, if we are to believe the apostle Nathanael, who said, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth,” wasn’t a fantastic place to live. Verse 34 starts, “Mary said to the angel. ‘How can this be since I am a virgin?’” Both Matthew in chapter 1 verse 18 and in Luke verse 35 make it clear that the child is from the Holy Spirit and that Joseph is not the father, and that Mary is a virgin.

The significance of the virgin birth is that Mary's son "will be called the Son of the Most High", or 'the Son of God,' who, we are told in verse 32', will reign as king forevermore. Jesus is the Son of God because he is God's Son, furthermore we too are God's Sons and daughters through adoption through our faith and trust in Christ as our Lord and Saviour.

It is at this point that the angel speaks to Mary and said, "And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son," "For nothing will be impossible for God." The angel had just finished telling Mary the unbelievable things which were to happen to her, and now he tells her that Elizabeth is to bear a son, which for Elizabeth is beyond childbearing age, and is also unbelievable. At this news her fears may well have changed to wonderment, and then he adds, "nothing is impossible for God." Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord, let it be with me according to your word."

Mary's bewilderment and fear had vanished she had composed herself and accepted the angel's news, and although the future could be difficult or even dangerous for an unmarried pregnant girl, her faith in the knowledge that God was with her had given her the strength and confidence to leave her future in God's hands. "Then the angel departed from her."

The whole encounter was but a few minutes, but in those few minutes Mary's life had changed never to be the same again, and that surely must be how our lives changed once we had been introduced to Jesus, never to be the same again.

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