

“Do not be afraid”



Week 2

The reading this week is from Luke chapter 1 verses 26-38 and is the story of the angel visit to Mary, who brings her a message from God. Remember that Mary was a teenage girl and her cousin Elizabeth and her husband who are of advanced years are also expecting a baby in three months' time.

The Birth of Jesus Foretold

In the sixth month 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, favoured one! The Lord is with you. But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered 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 will name him Jesus. 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 forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.” Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, 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. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God.” Then Mary said, “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.” Then the angel departed from her.

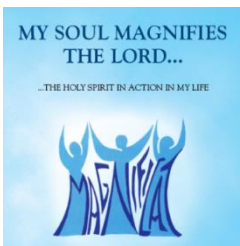
Until this point in the story we haven't met Mary. We knew nothing about her before this meeting. Just imagine yourself in Mary's shoes. She is going about her chores, and suddenly there in front of her is an angel who begins to communicate with her. The first thing we are told is Mary is a virgin, and is engaged to a man called Joseph. The angel tells Mary she is a favoured and that if she was in any doubt where this angel came from, the angel continues by telling her that “the Lord is with you”. It is easy to see why Mary was perplexed by this opening statement, and she pondered on the words and what they might mean. It is almost normal human behaviour that when you are told “not to be afraid”, you wonder if you are not getting the situation and that you should by now be terrified. But if Mary was terrified by the opening sentence from the angel, the next one might probably have put her into shock. “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 will name him Jesus. 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 forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.” Oh my goodness, what is this angel talking about. How is this possible because I am a virgin. What are my parents going to say? What shall I tell Joseph? What about the people of the village? Etc.



The angel goes on to tell Mary of the most unusual way that she will conceive this baby – through the Holy Spirit, no mention of her husband to be, which in those days could have meant abandonment by her fiancé and possible public punishment. The angel even gave Mary the name that she was to give to her child when it was born. As well as telling Mary how highly exalted this baby was to be; the one who was to be the Son of the Most High, and whose kingdom would never come to an end.

Whilst Mary takes a moment to think through all this information, the angel veers off to talk about her cousin Elizabeth who is six months pregnant, and she had been told that she would never be able to conceive. Mary was a young woman, and Elizabeth an old woman? Do you think there was any reason why one was young and one was old? Perhaps there is a clue in the next words of the angel to Mary. “For nothing will be impossible with God.” Perhaps this was the method that the angel used to calm Mary, to show her that she was indeed favoured by God, who had a plan, and she should not be afraid. It must have worked because Mary’s next words before the angel departed were words of acceptance “I am the Lord’s servant, may your word to me be fulfilled. Mary is the first person to say the powerful words that Jesus will teach his disciples to pray “Thy will be done”

When Mary goes to visit Elizabeth they are both very excited about what God has done for them and Mary sings a song of thanksgiving. Perhaps you could commit it to heart and use it yourself when you are thankful for God’s love and protection over you.



My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,
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 .
His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation.
(Luke ch 1 verses 46-55)

Prayer

God of Mary, you gave her the patience to wait with hope for your birth. Help us to make room in our lives for your joy as we wait for your coming again in glory. Amen



How can we wait in hope and not be afraid? Some suggestions.

1. Make a short list of no more than 3 occasions when you were very much afraid.
2. Now write alongside these times, how you felt. Sad, alone, lonely, shaky, trembling, tearful, anxious?
3. Now write how you tried to deal with your fear.
4. Did you include talking to God and sharing your fear? If not, why not?
5. Learn one or two Bible verses, that might help you in the future when you are afraid.
6. Make a short list of no more than 3 occasions when you were overcome with joy.
7. Write alongside these times, how you felt. Emotional, tearful, very giggly, unable to sit still, thankful?
8. Now write down how you dealt with that overwhelming happiness.
9. Did you include God in your happiness? If not why not?
10. Why not look up some of these verses and learn them?

Luke ch 1 v 30; Luke ch 1 v 46-48; Matt ch 6 v 9-13; Matt ch 6 v25-27
Matt ch 11 v 28 Isaiah ch 43 v 1-3; Isaiah ch 41v 10; Jeremiah ch 29v11



Further resources from the church porch as well as

www.nasebygroup.org

www.churchofengland.org/resources/preparing-advent-christmas-2020-comfort-and-joy

www.facebook.com/AdventonlineFaith/