

Dear Friends,

Luke 1: 29-38

God has sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth. There he meets Mary. He greets her with the words, "Rejoice highly favoured one, the Lord is with you". Not surprisingly Mary is perplexed and disturbed. She ponders what sort of greeting this might be. Mary is a thoughtful person. On other occasions she is described as treasuring things in her heart and pondering them; that is, she asks questions about them; she wonders what they might mean; she is ready for them to say new things to her; She doesn't just accept things, even if they come from an angel.

Gabriel sees that Mary is disturbed. To calm her, he says what he said to Zechariah and what will be said to the shepherds, "Do not be afraid". God does not want you to be frightened. God does not want you to be afraid.

Gabriel goes on to tell Mary that she will have a child, she will name him Jesus and he will be the son of God. Usually the father named the child but Mary is to do that herself.

Gabriel had greeted Mary with the words "The Lord is with you". In the past these words had often been spoken to prophets. In my last letter, I suggested that this is a sign that Mary too is a prophet. Prophets were given insights into the heart and mind of God. They shared these insights through their messages. Sometimes their messages were given in words and sometimes in actions. Mary will show herself to be a prophet in her words. But even more Mary's message is the child that she carries and to whom she gives birth. Through this child God's message is made known. He is God's word. In him the heart and mind of God are made known.

Mary however is still pondering and she puts her thoughts into a question. "How can this be since I do not know a man?" That is, I have not had sexual intercourse with a man. When Zechariah was told that Elizabeth was going to have a baby, he also questioned it. He said "How will I know that this is so, for I am an old man, and my wife is getting on in years?" Zechariah got punished for not believing Gabriel's words. His power of speech was taken from him until the baby was born. Mary by contrast receives no reprimand. I wonder what the difference is between their responses.

Gabriel's approach with Mary is not to punish her but to try to nurture her belief. He tells her not to worry about the details because God will see to everything. To encourage her belief, he tells her that her relative Elizabeth has become pregnant. This has been a secret. Elizabeth hid her pregnancy. But the secret is revealed to Mary. Gabriel is saying if it's possible for her to have a child then it's possible for you too. And Gabriel ends by saying "For nothing will be impossible with God."

Often these kinds of stories end at that point. The message has been delivered. The person knows what they need to do. They just have to quietly get on and do it. No more needs to be said. This story however, is different. Mary has the last word.

She speaks her words of wisdom saying, "Behold, the servant of the Lord. Let it be with me according to your word." Mary has been asked to offer herself as a living sacrifice. To give herself that Jesus might come to life in her body and be born into the world. Through what she says, she gives her consent. She says "Yes" to God.

And God asks you to offer yourself as a living sacrifice, that Jesus might come to life in your body and be born again into the world. Heaven and earth hold their breath waiting for you to give your consent, for you to say "Yes" to God.

God bless you,

Tony