

THE WORD FOR TODAY

Luke 1, 26—38

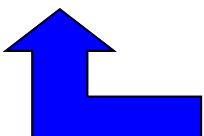
“In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin’s name was Mary.”

This Bible passage comes after the story of Elizabeth, wife of Zechariah the priest, who was pregnant, miraculously at her advanced age. “In the sixth month” at the beginning of our reading, refers to her pregnancy. Elizabeth’s baby was to grow up to be John the Baptist, the forerunner to the Messiah, the promised Saviour, and how this Saviour is to come into the world is now to be revealed.

Mary is at the centre of the story—a teenager, promised in marriage to Joseph, living with her family in Nazareth, not far from the Sea of Galilee. A normal life in a God-fearing Jewish family which was soon to change dramatically.



Follow the words of this passage round the church, beginning on the north wall of this little building. It is in the New International Version of the Bible, which you can find on the internet under Bible Gateway, and the whole “Word for Today” is on the church website, which is www.libertonkirk.net You can also find meditations and prayers on other Bible passages there in previous “Words for Today”.



Turn immediately left to find the first verses of the Bible passage on the bench

“In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, ‘Greetings, you who are highly favoured! The Lord is with you.’”

1



Mary was, as far as we know, a normal teenager living with her family with her future mapped out. She was going to marry Joseph before too long, and then would be thinking about a family of her own. God interrupted this peaceful scenario with news which would turn Mary’s world upside down. How scary must it have been to have an angel appear beside you telling you that you were special and assuring you that God was with you?

Our lives are sometimes disrupted in ways which scare us or turn our world upside down. Perhaps it’s something that life throws at us. Perhaps it’s God putting us on to a new track—we need to be open to this possibility. Mary’s reaction will help us with our own.

***Lord, help me to remember your presence with me always,
and to be open to your guidance.
Teach me through your Word how to deal with life’s crises.***

(No. 2 is on the bench facing us at the corner of the church building)



THE WORD FOR TODAY

“ Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, ‘Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favour with God’.”

2

No wonder Mary was troubled—teenagers don't expect to have visits from angels. We hear again words of reassurance which occur many times in the Bible: ***“Do not be afraid”***. These are words to hold on to when life gets frightening, when we don't know what's coming next, when we doubt our ability to cope. God knows how we feel, and he's telling us not to fear because he is there with us.



***Lord, when I am scared let me hear your voice saying
“Do not be afraid”.
Let me know that you are with me.***

(Turn round the side of the church to find No. 3)



THE WORD FOR TODAY

3

“You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever; his kingdom will never end.”

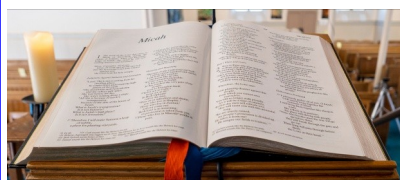
I don't suppose Mary could take this in. After the first few words: *“You will be with child and give birth to a son”* the rest was probably a blur. Her planned marriage was perhaps a year away, and she was a well brought-up girl. How was a pregnancy going to fit in? What on earth was this person saying—she just didn't understand.

We don't always understand or indeed hear God speaking to us—is that perhaps because we don't take the time to listen?



*Lord, sometimes it's difficult to understand if you are speaking to me.
Help me to draw closer to you day by day,
and to learn to hear your voice as I read and as I pray.*

(No. 4 is further along this side of the church)



THE WORD FOR TODAY

***“ ‘How will this be,’ Mary asked the angel,
‘since I am a virgin?’ ”***

4

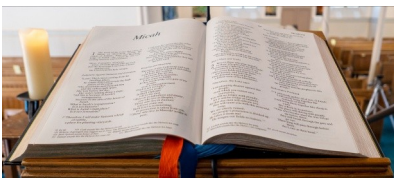
Mary knew the facts of life and clearly wanted clarification. Gabriel’s words about God’s Son and a King from the great King David’s line had passed her by for the moment—she just wanted to know how she could possibly have a baby in her present circumstances.

Sometimes we wonder about God and how he works. Does he really listen to prayers? Why doesn’t he do something about wars? Why doesn’t he stop natural disasters? This is where we have to realise we may never fully understand his ways, and simply trust in him.



***Lord, how I sympathise with Mary!
Sometimes I wonder what you are doing.
Help me to trust that you have a plan for this world.***

(Walk along the back of the church and turn left to find No. 5)



THE WORD FOR TODAY

“The angel answered, ‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.’ ”

5

It was all getting even more unreal. Perhaps the thing that stood out for Mary was the phrase “the power of the Most High”. She could cling on to that—God had all the power and she knew she could trust him.

We are so privileged to have the immense power of God watching over each one of us. We can trust that we are safe.



*Lord, I praise you for being the Most High God.
Your power is beyond my understanding.
I pray for faith to know that I am safe in your care.*

(Walk towards the front of the church, past the cairn, and turn left—No. 6 is on the first bench.)



THE WORD FOR TODAY

“ ‘Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month. For nothing is impossible with God.’ “

6

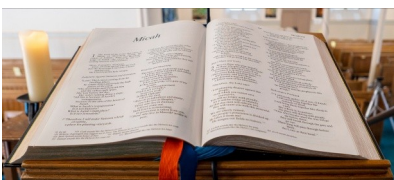
Those wonderful words “nothing is impossible with God” must have brought great reassurance to Mary. Also the knowledge that she was not the only one to be asked by God to do something extraordinary—in fact somebody she knew in her own family was already involved. Perhaps she could talk to Elizabeth about this whole business. Did God understand her need for someone to talk to?

Do we really believe that nothing is impossible with God? Or are our prayers tempered by our human limitations?



Lord, thank you for your understanding and your ability to point me in the right direction. Lord, help me to believe that with you nothing is impossible, and let that encourage me to pray big prayers.

(Walk to the centre of the front of the church to find No. 7 on the central bench.)



THE WORD FOR TODAY

***“ ‘I am the Lord’s servant,’ Mary answered.
‘May it be to me as you have said.’ Then the
angel left her.”***

7

It’s a sobering thought that, without Mary’s willingness to accept what God was telling her, we might not have had the first Christmas! She seems to have realised that God would not ask her to do more than she could cope with, and that he would always be with her. Reality would dawn—she would need to tell family and Joseph and face the music—but God would not desert her. He would be with her all the way.

God needs us now to help to sort out the world’s problems—to stand up and be counted among those who want peace, those who want to preserve the planet, those who fight injustice. What will our response be?



***Lord, thank you for Mary and her trust in you.
Give me the same unwavering trust and
a willingness to follow in your paths,
no matter how difficult that may be.***

If anything you have read has prompted questions you would like to discuss, please contact John Young on 664 3067 or jyoung@churchofscotland.org.uk



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