

Ordinary People  
St. Luke 1:26-38

Sixty-one years ago Christmas appeared simpler to me. Our Sunday school class would go caroling, singing Christmas carols just a tad off key, to the shut-ins and perhaps a nursing home too. I would find some way to let my parents know what I wanted in the way of gifts.

The Christmas Eve service was always the highlight of the season for me. Soft candlelight glowing with heavenly warmth fills the sanctuary. The choral music (from a choir of nine) sang wonderfully of hope and promise. If I ran faster than the other children, I could blow out the candles after the service.

On Christmas day, after the gifts and a special breakfast, our family would drive to an uncle's house for dinner, with loads of sugary treats, and playtime with my cousins. Gifts were exchanged and we children would go home filled, fatigued, and sleepy.

When I became an adult the celebration and meaning of Christmas changed. Shopping during the season was an activity to be sidestepped (except shopping for Sylvia, of course!). I had worked in retail long enough to understand that! Materialism increases as each Christmas goes by. And the pressure, Oye Vey! Promises made, worship experiences to plan, all that driving and the list goes on. In dialog with my peers, I discovered that sometimes we long for the season to just end.

The truth is combining Christmas joy and personal pressures didn't begin in the twenty-first century. Protestants tend not to spend much time mulling over the significance of Mary. For a moment try to visualize Mary and her experience. It's springtime and flowers are in bloom. Mary, a young teenager recently engaged, is cooking something in a pot, humming as she daydreams.

Suddenly, a strange light appears. Was it an instantaneous flash or a steady warm glow? A shining glory like the disciples saw on Mt. Transfiguration? We don't

know. And what did she hear? A clash of cymbals, trumpets blaring or choirs singing? Or was there absolute silence? We do not know this, either.

Whatever the sights and sounds were, the angel Gabriel comes a'callin' and Mary's life, as she knew it, was transformed. Please note that Mary is not given a choice, no time to ponder the announcement. I kind of imagine that Mary's answer, unlike the historic interpretation of stoic resignation, "*I am the Lord's servant. Let it be with me just as you have said,*" might have been more in line with "*Really? I think you have the wrong address!*"

Have you sometimes spent time trying to sense Mary's emotions and her feelings? Does she think her life is going to resemble a medieval painting or Icon? Does she believe her life will remain peaceful and composed? As a young teen, engaged and pregnant, what questions must run through her mind. What do I tell mom and dad? How do I tell Joe and will he dump me? Will the church leaders kill me? No one will believe me! What will I do?

Perhaps these are not the questions she would ponder but, O my goodness, she has the Son of God in her womb! I see her sitting in a room, stunned, attempting find some way to cope with what has happened to her. Our gospel lesson stops with the words of Mary: "*Let it be.*" Not the Beatles' song but Mary's song. But there is more to the story.

Mary leaves her home and visits her cousin Elizabeth, who is pregnant with John the Baptist. It's alluring to consider Mary visiting her cousin to help her, but I am not buying it. She goes to find a place to process what has happen to her.

Mary's cousin has been pregnant for six months. We know that since Gabriel tells us. Mary stays for the last trimester, and leaves before John the Baptist is born. I admit that I have never been '*with child,*' even though I may look like it, but I was in the delivery room for our daughter Julia's birth. And, while I like to think I was helpful, it was the sisters and brothers in the faith who visited after Julia's birth that really mattered. This is why I think the real reason Mary visited Elizabeth was for herself.

But there is shift in the story. When Mary's cousin pronounced that Mary was "*Blessed among women*," something in Mary changed. She began to understand that Emmanuel, God with us, wasn't just a revelation. God would live in her life all of her life.

Mary was beginning to see her life as larger than herself. What she agreed to do had meaning beyond simply an additional burden. This is not the miracle on 34<sup>th</sup> street but the miracle of Christmas. God in Christ enfleshed. Just like us that we might know God and our salvation comes from Jesus, the God-man. Mary got it that God continues to use ordinary people like you and me. Christmas may not be as simple as it used to be, but it is always a blessing. Alleluia. Amen.