

Virtual Services Weds/Thurs 25th/26th March 2020
The Annunciation - Luke 1:26-38

Luke 1:26-38

In the sixth month (of Elizabeth's pregnancy) 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 the 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.' The 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.

Talk

A prayer to start:

Father, may these spoken words be faithful to the written word and lead us to the living Word, Jesus Christ our Lord. Come, Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our lectionary, the programme of Bible readings we follow in the Church of England, today takes us back to the time before Christmas and we hear again how Mary found out that she was to have a special baby. This isn't as odd as it might seem for we are in Lent now, the period before Easter which is when we remember the end of Jesus' earthly life and his resurrection. It's a good time to remind ourselves about the beginning of that life.

We are told that Mary had found favour with God as the angel greets her as 'favoured one' and tells her the Lord is with her. We read that these first words perplexed Mary – in fact probably the whole thing perplexed her as it isn't every day the angel Gabriel comes to have a chat with you – and that then she pondered what sort of greeting this might be. Perhaps Mary's pondering was a sort of prayerful response, a moment of reflection, although this may have ceased abruptly with the news the angel gave her that she was to bear the Son of God. But that moment of realisation that she was favoured by God gave rise to the song of praise, which Mary shared later with her relative Elizabeth and which has

become known to us as the Magnificat. In that song Mary acknowledges how she feels herself to have been blessed by God.

We may have all kinds of mixed emotions at the moment, confusion, fear, concern for others, and Mary's mind too must have been in a turmoil. It wasn't great in Palestine 2,000 years ago to find yourself pregnant out of wedlock, and yet, such was Mary's faith in God, that she praised him, thanking him for his presence and acknowledging what she owed him.

Is it possible for us to praise God in our present circumstances? Are there things we can thank him for? It may take a bit of an effort but maybe we can find something. There are signs of spring and new life round about us; the air is clearer without the constant traffic by air, road and rail; most of us have enough to eat and a good place to live, even if we are spending slightly more time in our homes than we would wish. One thing we can always be thankful for is God's promise that he is with us, always.

The words of the angel and her acceptance of her mission – '.... let it be with me according to your word,' brought about a big change for Mary. We're not always good with change, are we, and this past fortnight changes have been coming thick and fast. It's been so hard to keep up with things, get clarity about what we are supposed to do, and work out what the new restrictions mean for us and those we love. A huge change for me and for many of my brothers and sisters has been no longer going into our church buildings for our services, and worse than that, no longer meeting with our church family to worship God and have fellowship together. Someone who is with us through all this change and upset is God; Mary knew God was with her, so she had peace about the great change that was to happen in her life; let's pray that we too can have peace about what is happening to us.

Dear Lord, we pray for your peace to enter our hearts, to work within us, to calm us, to remind us of your love for us. Show us how, like Mary we can continue to be your servants even when we are not together, and help us to bring your peace to others. **Amen**

Prayers

Let it be to me according to your word. Luke 1.38.

Thank you, God, for all those Gabriels who delight and astound us with your good news. We praise you for the richness and complexity of the world in which surprise and joy constantly await us.

For we too have found favour with God

Too often we close our minds to new or fresh starts. Too often we bring your Kingdom down to our level. Too often we fail to grasp how much you cherish us.

[For we too have found favour with God](#)

We pray for those who live in conditions of such want, exclusion, fear or bigotry that they have little chance of being surprised or of living in hope. We pray for those overwhelmed with fear and confusion at this time. We pray for those in difficulty financially, with getting supplies, or who are lonely in isolation. We pray for those who are ill. We pray for ourselves when we are tetchy or feel sorry for ourselves.

[For we too have found favour with God](#)

We resolve to take nothing for granted, to see nothing as unchangeable; not people, not systems, not your Kingdom. Give us a passion for your Gospel and a vision of your Kingdom in which all are included.

[For we too have found favour with God](#)

Dear God, help us to remember that you have no body but ours here on earth, no hands but ours to do your work, no feet but ours to go where we are needed. Ours are the eyes through which you must look out on the world. Help us to know what you want us to do to help and support others at this time. Give us the courage to do it with love. [Amen](#)

Loving Jesus, you are compassionate to those in need and heal the sick in body and mind. Look kindly on those who are fearful at this time. Help us all to put away all thoughts and actions that separate us from you and from one another. Give us grace to live our lives confident in your promise that you are with us always. [Amen](#)