

Advent Devotional December 20, 2023

Scripture

Luke 1:26-38

26 In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, 27 to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. 28 And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." 29 But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. 30 The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. 31 And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. 32 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. 33 He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." 34 Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" 35 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. 36 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. 37 For nothing will be impossible with God." 38 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.

Devotion

Elizabeth Baisley, Welcome Center Front Desk Coordinator

In my house hangs a tiny reproduction of a wood-and-ivory retablo that depicts the annunciation. The work of an anonymous artist of the late Middle Ages, it shows an angel in whose left hand is a lamp, and whose right hand, in a gesture of blessing, indicates the ground upon which he stands. He faces the Virgin Mary, in whose left hand is a book—the Word of God; the open palm of whose right hand indicates the same ground. Above her haloed head is a bolt-from-the-heavens: the Spirit, poised to enter into the world. Mary's facial expression is (to me, surprisingly) neutral.

In Luke's account of this event, Mary is described as perplexed, pondering the angel's greeting ("favored one!"). The angel responds with the news that God has chosen her to bear His son. Mary, no stranger to basic biology, asks for an explanation, and gets a whopper.

Both Luke and my anonymous artist have captured something extraordinarily powerful: a liminal, human moment, a moment of wonder, similar to what T.S. Eliot ponders in his poem, *Love Song of J Alfred Prufrock*: "Do I dare disturb the universe? In a minute there is time / for decisions and revisions which a minute will reverse." This moment is about possibility, rather than probability. We teeter on the edge of the world as we know it and the world as it could be.

Mary's astonishing words of assent to this announcement—"Let it be with me as you have said"—make possible all that comes after. They bring long-promised hope, wisdom, and justice crashing into the world. I look at my tiny icon and wonder how this woman is even standing up, but stand she does, in faith and love.

Prayer

God of power and mercy, we wait in joyful hope on the verge of the possible. Grant that we may hear your voice and give us the humility to do our part in the coming of your kingdom, in the company of all

your saints and in the name of your son, Jesus, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God forever. Amen.