

Luke 1:26-38

Only once in the world's history could a young woman legitimately have told her fiancé, "Honest, honey, I was not unfaithful to you; it was the Holy Spirit who made me pregnant!" Others may have tried giving this line as an excuse, but only the Virgin Mary could say these words truthfully. And she most likely did. What else would she have told Joseph... "I'm getting fat?" She would have told him the truth, the same words the angel spoke to her.

Everything about this story in Luke is simply amazing, and as we look into it we find that it is not just a story to cause wonderment within us. It's a story that grabs us, that speaks to us. A story not just about Mary, but also about you and me.

But we begin with Mary. If the angel Gabriel could speak gracious words to her, and he did: "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you," then we today can, and should, speak such words about her. We should honor her, and we do. But there must be a limit. The largest Christian church in the world has concocted legends about her--claiming that she was born without sin, even placing her as co-redemptrix with her Son.

But Gabriel did not call her, "O sinless one." He said, "O favored one." Mary herself, later in Luke, speaks with joy of her Savior. She was no different from any other sinner. She was favored by God not because she lived without sin, but because she lived with faith in the coming Savior.

For this same reason you, too, are the Lord's favored ones. At the conclusion of each service your pastor speaks the words of benediction..."The Lord look upon you with favor, and give you peace." His favor rests upon you for the same reason it rested upon Mary--because of Jesus who is your Savior, and in whom you trust.

So this sinful, yet favored young woman was told by the angel of God that she would bear the Savior into the world. God had chosen her. She was to be Solomon's temple in which God Himself would dwell. At first, upon hearing these words, she was troubled. A little later she was puzzled. Then as the angel was about to depart, she was calm and at peace. And what you and I are going to see today is that God, in His grace, brings us also from being troubled, and puzzled, to calm and peaceful submission and resignation.

What happened to Mary happened also to each one of you. As Gabriel spoke the Word of God, the Holy Spirit fell upon Mary and Jesus was conceived within her. In your baptism, as the Word of God joined with the water, Jesus also came to live within you. This was not your choice. Mary did not approach God; He approached her. He chose her to be the mother of God. She had no say about it whatsoever. Gabriel did not come to her and say, "Mary, God sent me to ask you if you would like to be the one to bear the Christ into the world." Nothing of the sort! He said, "You *will* conceive in your womb." Not, "This could be you," but "This *will* take place within you."

This is exactly what happened to you in your baptism. Your mother and father did not wait to get your permission. They...actually God, through them, chose to bring you to Jesus in Holy Baptism. And there, without your decision or action, He came, as He did for Mary, to live within you.

She was troubled at first, and then puzzled. And so are we. Life is a whole lot more complicated because Jesus lives within us. If you have acquaintances or friends who are not Christians, and I'm sure that you do, you may notice they do not have the same struggles that you have. They do not

battle each day with their sinful flesh. Since Jesus does not live within them, they do not struggle with trying to live for Him. They have more time than you have. Sunday morning always, for them, is a time to get things done, or just relax. Not so with you. Because Jesus lives in you, you put His Word and His Sacrament on Sunday morning as the highest priority in your life. They also do not struggle with church commitments...making it to meetings, giving a tithe of their income each month, helping out as needed around the church. They may have a better lifestyle than you because making a living, for you, is not first on your list. Jesus is. But for them, the material world is at their disposal. Family and work come before everything else.

Don't you think Mary struggled as well? Whatever plans she had for her future went down the drain. God stepped into her life, and from now on everything in her life would focus on Jesus. You think it's tough raising sinful children? She had to raise a perfect Child. She was always inferior to her Son. And when she and Joseph had children, (and they did, as the Scriptures conclude for us), imagine the troubles in that household. "Who do you think you are!" the other children would have yelled at Jesus..."You think you're better than us?" Mary would have forever been dealing with jealousy and strife between her other children against Jesus.

Now when Gabriel came to her with God's announcement, all these future struggles would not have entered into her mind. But certainly it was clear that her entire life would now be very different, and challenging, and beyond her control. She was troubled at the angel's greeting, and then she was puzzled by it all. "How can this be?" She had no answer for what was about to take place in her.

We also become puzzled. "How can these things be?" We are always wondering why God allows us to struggle; why He lets troubles come into our life. "I'm a Christian. I go to church and read my Bible. With Jesus in my life, things should be better, not worse." But this is hardly the case...anywhere in the world. If Christmas was only about Santa Claus, the world would be a nicer place. Atheist groups do not get angry and threaten to sue over Santa figures displayed in front of county courthouses; but they do get mad when nativity scenes are set up. If Christmas was only Santa, gifts, and get-togethers, there would be no argument over which Christmas songs could be played over the radio waves. There would be no battle over whether, "In God We Trust," could be stamped on our coins, or whether, "One nation *under God*" should be left in our pledge, or whether NFL quarterbacks could pray on the football field.

It's true. When God's angel came to Mary that day, not just her life, but the lives of many people in the world, and yours too, would be a whole lot more complicated. So why is it that Mary then said to the angel, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word?" Not, "But wait a minute!" Not, "Let me think it over," or "Let me first speak with Joseph." Her response can be summed up with one word..."Amen!" "Yes, Lord, let Thy will be done."

Today as we honor Mary we do so by asking God to let us be more like her. We need to say "Amen" more in our life. Because instead of "Amen," we resist His will for us. We doubt His words. We get upset over the struggles He sends our way. We do not say "Amen" as much as we say, "No, Lord, this is not to my liking." "No, Lord, change Your will to be more like mine."

From the lips of Mary nothing of that was ever mentioned. And the prayer on her lips would, thirty-four years later, be the prayer on the lips of her Son. "Not My will, but Thine be done." Jesus said "Amen" to the soldiers in Gethsemane. He said "Amen" to the Chief Priests and Scribes who spoke falsely about Him. He said "Amen" to Pilate's verdict: Let him be crucified! And friend, Jesus said "Amen" from start to "It is finished!" for you. Jesus' life was a whole lot more complicated than

yours. And that's because He was living, and suffering, and dying for you. Jesus never told His Father, "No, Father, let Me think it over first." No, Father, You're asking too much of Me...why do you allow Me to struggle, to suffer so much!" His whole life was one big "Amen" for you. As His mother said, "Amen"... "Let it be to me according to your word," so Jesus said "Amen."

And that's why we celebrate Christmas. That's why we come to church rejoicing. It's why we come to His Holy Supper with grateful hearts. Because Jesus lived the "Amen" for you, God declares you forgiven right here and now. All your doubting and resisting He forgives. For every time you said, "No, Lord" instead of, "Amen," He forgives you. And because the great Amen lives within you--He who was born for you--He helps you to say with Mary, "Amen, Lord...I am Your servant; let Your will be done in my life." Amen.