

## Expectation: Being Called to Hope

Isaiah 61:1-4  
Luke 1:26-38

December 10, 2017  
Faith Community

Today's New Testament passage is loaded, packed, stuffed, saturated, filled to overflowing with information, attitudes, emotions and lessons for anyone who takes the time to spend time reading, praying, and being silent in the presence of such magnificence as we have here. How's that for a preview?

This story comes on the heels of one that describes the surprising pregnancy of an elderly couple who should've been spending their Social Security on Metamucil and Depends but instead were stocking up on pacifiers and Pampers. The mother to be was Elizabeth, a relative of Mary's.

Mary herself is described as a virgin pledged to be married. This was much more binding than a modern engagement, so much so that it could only be broken by a formal divorce. That set the stage for the craziness that was to come.

An angel shows up. His name is Gabriel, and we've heard that name before. This time around he begins with an impressive greeting:

***Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.*** (Luke 1:28, TNIV)

Mary hears this, and the passage says she was 'greatly troubled.' I think that's because she knew a thing or two about what happens when angels show up. Gabriel picks up on that and immediately says, 'Don't be afraid.' Friends, do not fall for the lie that angels are cute little baby-type creatures with wings, harps and halos, especially when one of the first things they regularly say is, 'Don't be afraid.'

Gabriel jumps into the second part of what has to be one of the most contradictory statements a person can possibly hear, especially a betrothed virgin.

***Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God.***

So far, so good. But then there's this:

***You will conceive and give birth to a son.*** (vv. 30-31)

Wait! What?

Finding favor with God means I become spontaneously pregnant? Really? So let me get this right:

- My life will never be the same.
- I'll be the talk of the town and beyond.
- Joseph will dump me for sure.
- I might even die, since adultery is a capital offense, since it usually takes two to tango, if you know what I mean.
- The best I can hope for is to be on my own as a single mom, and you tell me to not be afraid and I've found favor with God.

But Gabriel continues:

***....you are to call him 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 forever; his kingdom will never end.*** (vv. 31-33)

This is where Mary reaches a critical point in her own life. How will she respond to all this? You've been there many times, right? Oh, not with Mary's situation, but you've had to deal with challenges, roadblocks and detours that may have appeared catastrophic at the time but in reality were opportunities in disguise.

One thing is sure:

You have no chance for success or healing when you deny reality. Actually, it's been said, "All of the great leaders have had one characteristic in common: it was the willingness to confront unequivocally the major anxiety of their people in their time."<sup>1</sup>

You don't deny it. You don't look for excuses or someone to blame. You don't tough it out on your own. You don't work, drink, or smoke yourself to death, and neither do you wait helplessly for the big break that never comes or expectantly for the disappointment that's always just around the corner.

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<sup>1</sup> John Kenneth Galbraith, as cited in Leadership Wired, Issue 2, July 2011

Instead, you affirm reality while clinging to a deeper reality. That's what Mary did upon hearing the news that changed everything:

***“I am the Lord’s servant,” Mary answered. “May it be to me according to your word.”*** (v. 38)

In the midst of all the uncertainty of life, you nevertheless have choices. There are things that you can be sure of and that can serve as anchors for your soul.

James Bryan Smith offers an affirmation that whatever else may be happening, however worried or anxious you may feel, these two things are incontrovertible:

***“I am a child of God, one in whom Christ dwells, and I am living in the unshakable kingdom of God.”***<sup>2</sup>

Friends, hope is not a feeling. Before anything else, hope is a choice, a decision, one that's made continually.

So listen, friends. Pay attention. What might God be saying to you, in you and through you? Listen to your life. In the midst of the very thing that feels like it's trying to drag you down, you could actually find God's purpose for your life. Mary did.

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<sup>2</sup> James Bryan Smith: *The Good and Beautiful Life: Putting On the Character of Christ*. (Downers Grove, IL, IVP Books, 2009), p. 181.