

## A Big Announcement: [Luke 1:26-38](#)

If you were going to announce something which would change the world utterly, where and how would you choose to do it? Set up a carefully-staged office in London or another major world capital city with reassuringly old-fashioned looking scenery in the background to give your message authority? A series of news briefings to which all the major reporters and channels are invited? Swamp the TV channels and all of social media with soundbites and comments? You would want to have people with a certain level of expertise, acumen and gravitas on hand to both deliver the announcement and to receive it. This wouldn't be a job for your rookie journalist or office junior.

However, the account of the angel Gabriel bringing the news to Mary that she would be the mother of God's son doesn't fit that picture at all. It doesn't take place in a prominent city, but in the remote, small town of Nazareth. Mary is a young woman, engaged to Joseph, which had a legally binding commitment attached. She is not of high social status, and we can picture her in a domestic setting. Some paintings of this meeting suggest that she's looking up in surprise at the sudden arrival of this stranger as she goes about her task of hanging out the washing.

And who was this Gabriel person? Luke calls him an angel, but does this mean that he was a huge, glowing being with sweeping wings and a halo? Probably not. The word "angel" means "messenger". We don't know anything about the tone of voice in which he addresses her, but there's something breezy and cheerful in the words: "Greetings, you who are highly favoured." The Message version of the Bible interprets this in very domesticated terms, with Gabriel simply saying, "Good morning!"

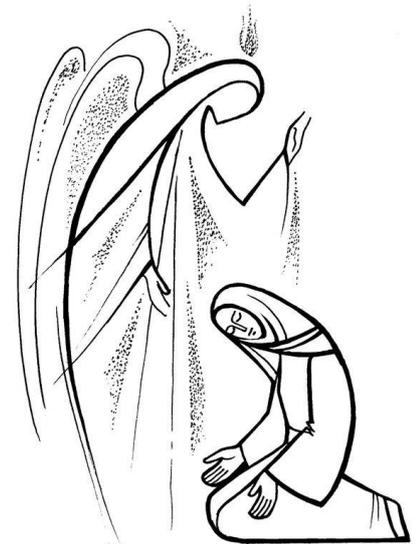
Yet this scene is not a chance happening. The angel was sent by God to Nazareth, to this backwater, to visit this young woman who was pledged to be married to a carpenter, a descendant of David. God chose to move in humble surroundings, amongst individuals who wouldn't warrant a mention in the history books if this were an account of human endeavour.

This young woman is "highly favoured" by God. Other people would not have valued her in this way, but God has picked her out.

He has picked her out to bear a son, who she will call Jesus.

Unlike Zechariah, who was also visited by an angel who told him the equally improbable news that his elderly wife was to bear him a son and that he was called John, Mary does not doubt the angel's words. She doesn't pause at their improbability. Rather, she wants to learn how this will come about, as she has had no sexual relationship with her husband-to-be.

It all sounds staggering: the creative inspiration of the Holy Spirit will be upon her and the power of God the Father will overshadow her. And this child will be "the Son of God." All this for a young girl from Nazareth!



Her response is one of quiet acceptance: “I am the Lord’s servant. May it be to me as you have said.”

There is no clamour of questions, a desire for further and better particulars, or a sharp word to make the angel leave. She doesn’t go and ask for her betrothed’s permission to accept. She doesn’t call others to see this angel who has come to her. There is just a simple act of offering herself up in quiet service.

Mary is not a noblewoman to be pampered in any way. Her life also will be a struggle, and for all the joy of this announcement and of being mother to Jesus, she will suffer agonising pain, too.

God appears as fully human, in amongst the mess and bustle of ordinary human lives. The Saviour of the world is born nine months after this celebration of the Annunciation (25<sup>th</sup> March – 25<sup>th</sup> December). His birth will also be in an obscure backwater, in amongst the crowds of people gathering in Bethlehem to register for the census as ordered by Caesar Augustus. He will carry his cross through the steep streets of Jerusalem whilst the rest of the city carries on its daily round, and be crucified amongst common criminals with soldiers, hardened to the cruelty and suffering of this form of execution looking on.

God meets us in our ordinary lives, as he met Mary. Jesus knows our humanity because he has been one of us, even as he is the Son of God. We, like Mary, are called to be his people in the world. He chooses us to share his love with others, even when we may feel deeply inadequate or frightened. And perhaps at the moment as we face the growing concern of the coronavirus both nationally and around the world, those are feelings which will resonate with you. Nevertheless, all he asks is for us to trust him enough to say “yes”.

Our Collect for today puts this beautifully:

We beseech you, O Lord,  
pour your grace into our hearts,  
that as we have known the incarnation  
of your Son Jesus Christ  
by the message of an angel,  
so by his cross and passion  
we may be brought to the glory of his resurrection;  
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,  
who is alive and reigns with you,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Rev’d Vicky Barrett