

<sup>26</sup> In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, <sup>27</sup> to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. <sup>28</sup> The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favoured! The Lord is with you."

<sup>29</sup> Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. <sup>30</sup> But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favour with God. <sup>31</sup> You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. <sup>32</sup> 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, <sup>33</sup> and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end."

<sup>34</sup> "How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"

<sup>35</sup> The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called <sup>1</sup> the Son of God. <sup>36</sup> Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. <sup>37</sup> For no word from God will ever fail."

<sup>38</sup> "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled." Then the angel left her

**How did the first Christmas begin? We might think that it all began with a young woman called Mary – and we will come back to her in a minute. But actually Luke tells us it began not with Mary but with God. God had a plan and he sent one of his most important angels, Gabriel to start the ball rolling. Now when we hear the news, we have got used to it taking place in important places: 10 Downing Street, the Whitehouse, Brussels or Berlin; But God did not send his top angel to any important city of the day – not Rome, nor Jerusalem, but a little town called Nazareth up in the north of Israel in Galilee a region known for being rough, uncultured and unruly – To be quite honest it sounds as if Nazareth was a bit of a dump **S19** Nathaniel: Can anything good come out of Nazareth ?**

And Gabriel was sent not to a local important leader, the mayor or the head of the synagogue but to an ordinary teenage girl *Mary Smith – engaged to local carpenter*

**Greetings you who are highly favoured -**

*I can imagine Mary looking over shoulder to see who Gabriel is talking to.*

*Highly Favoured? I'm just Mary – I think I'm lucky to be betrothed to Jo – he's kind and reliable – but he's not a Benedict Cumberbatch or a Leonardo di Caprio*

**So why does Gabriel think Mary is so highly favoured**

***The Lord is with you.*** God chosen you – singled you out.

Wonder of the Christmas story – that God has not forgotten us

What's true of Mary is true for all of us: the angels song to the shepherds (some more very ordinary people) "*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favour rests.*"

Knowing that we are highly favoured – comforting; encouraging

but being singled out by God is not always very comfortable and can be quite unnerving: v. 29

*Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be....*

Maybe you feel a bit afraid at the idea that God is deeply interested in you.

*What does He want?*

*The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid"*

could be because Mary acting afraid or **maybe**

because of what Gabriel was about to tell her: *You're going to have a baby*

Now in those days the culture was in some ways like the more traditional Muslim societies of today, and to have a baby outside of marriage was to disgrace yourself in the eyes of everyone around you.

But Gabriel also tells Mary that this baby will be the most amazing, important person in history: *He will be great – Son of the Most High God; Son of David, He will be King – and his kingdom will last for ever.*

Mary not stupid – would realize Gabriel talking about none other than Messiah, *ie. the royal descendant of great King David, whom down through the ages God had promised would come and rescue his people;*

God Himself wants to become a human being and He chooses Mary.

This the amazing truth of Christmas that the infinite Creator God had a plan to rescue our world from all its mess and to bring his plan into being, He needed to come into the life of a very ordinary human beings, like Mary

Still true today. God wants to come into lives of ordinary people like Mary, like you and me.

This might seem to be impossible to you – it certainly seemed impossible to Mary:

*"How will this be since I am a virgin?" i.e. "It's physically impossible for me to have a baby"*

*Gabriel tells Mary: You are not expected to do it by yourself. The Holy Spirit will **come upon you**. The power of the Most High will **overshadow** you.*

Of *course* Mary could not conceive a child by herself, by wishful thinking, by any amount of physical exercises or spiritual disciplines.

But God says I will enter the situation – enter you and transform you

Later Jesus would use same phrase to his disciples. *But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses*

The crucial thing, however, was the response of Mary's heart

### **1. She believed God's message**

When Gabriel first tells her – she doesn't argue - simply asks *how will happen?*

### **2. She put herself at God's disposal**

*"I am the Lord's servant... May it be to me as you have said."*

Not easy: what would her parents say?

what would friends and neighbours say?

what would Joseph say? – divorce possibly even a stoning for adultery

Because of Mary's response not only was her life changed but the world changed. God's purpose was fulfilled. Jesus came into the world.

Because of Mary's response, Christmas happened

and we are here today more than 2000 years later worshipping

the Son of God who has come into our lives and touched our hearts

Now God might not send you the angel Gabriel to speak to you but the word angel, simply means *Messenger*

This morning he has sent you at several messengers –angels if you like: *Luke* through the reading of his gospel, and me through this talk and Alex and the person who invited you to come to this service

And through his messengers, his angels, He says to you

*"YOU are God's highly favoured one, YOU are one of God's favourites"*

He wants to bless you and transform your life as He comes upon you with his Holy Spirit and maybe even use you in some way for his plans to bless those around you.

The question is: *How will you respond ?*