

***“In the six month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. And he came to her and said, ‘Greetings, favoured one! The Lord is with you.’ But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, ‘Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God.’”***

**Luke 1: 26 - 30**

Dear Friends,

I want to share a brief meditation with you this week, written by Nick Fawcett, and taken from his book, “Light Dawns.” It is based on the passage quoted above.

Don’t be afraid, he said! As though angels popping up out of the blue are two a penny, no cause for concern. Well, I’m sorry, but I was petrified, caught between the urge to run and scream.

And then when he started on about being favoured by God, blessed among women, it only made things worse. Who was I to be singled out, I to be chosen – a nobody like me from Nazareth?

Whoever this guy was, he’d come to the wrong house, and the sooner he was gone the better. But he didn’t go, and somehow, despite myself, I listened, my amazement growing by the second as he talked of a child I would bear; a saviour who would rule over the house of David and whose kingdom would never end.

‘How can this be?’ I asked. ‘For a start, I’m still a virgin!’

But he wasn’t finished yet, not by a long way, this child he spoke of to be not just my son, but God’s too, conceived by his Spirit.

Well, if I was troubled before, I’d more reason to be then, for this was mind-blowing stuff, certain to turn the world upside down and change my life for ever, yet somehow I suddenly felt strangely calm, happy to accept whatever was asked of me, no questions asked.

Why?

Because, if God was really speaking, and could actually use someone as ordinary as me, then surely nothing was beyond him, however impossible it might seem. The future was in his hands, not mine, and what better place could there be to leave it!

I am struck by two phrases from St Luke’s account: “The Lord is with you,” and “Don’t be afraid.” In Matthew’s account of the birth of Jesus, we get a different perspective but we find very similar sentiments. In Joseph’s dream the angel says to him, “Do not be afraid,” and then Matthew reflects: “All this took place to fulfil what the Lord had said through the prophet: “The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” which means “God with us.”

Just like Mary and Joseph, when God asks something of us, it can feel like a massive, fear-inducing challenge that is too big to comprehend. And yet as we reflect and pray, and seek wise guidance, how often do we then come to know God's peace which drives away our fear? When we are in God's company, God's presence gradually replaces fear with peace, comfort, joy and strength. As we seek to live our lives increasingly aware of God with us we will find that new challenges are placed before us but that they become new opportunities to grow in our faith and in our knowledge of and love for God.

And so it is that I wonder what God might be asking of you this Christmas? If God can use an ordinary, peasant girl from a back-water town in Galilee for something as remarkable as being the Mother of God in the flesh, then surely God can use you and I too. When God speaks and calls you and I to partner with him in some way, will we be brave enough to reply, "I am the Lord's servant. May your word to me be fulfilled"?

Mighty and mysterious God, for all kinds of reasons we don't find faith easy. We consider what is asked of us, the scale of your challenge, and we feel small, incapable of rising to it. We come up against questions of faith, and we struggle for answers, so much seeming to defy explanation. And though part of us longs to serve you, another part rebels, preferring to serve self instead, resisting your call and turning from your way.

Help us, despite everything that fights against you, that deflects us from the path of faithful discipleship, to stay true nonetheless. Give us the courage, confidence and conviction we need to understand what you want from us and gladly to respond. Amen.

Every Blessing,

Rev Tim