

This morning we're going to take a look at The Annunciation, that is, the announcement by the Archangel Gabriel to Mary that she would have a baby, though she was a virgin. My question for us is what did Mary do to deserve God's favor, and is there anything we can do to imitate her process of building a relationship with God.

PRAYER

READ Luke 1:26-38: In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, ²⁷ to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸ And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" ²⁹ But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰ And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹ And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. ³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, ³³ and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." ³⁴ And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?" ³⁵ And the angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God. ³⁶ And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. ³⁷ For nothing will be impossible with God." ³⁸ And Mary said, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to Your Word." And the angel departed from her

There are several characters in this passage. If we were to outline it we might first identify who is the subject, the one who is taking direct action, in order to have a deeper understanding of what's happening.

There's Gabriel, the archangel. Is he the main actor? In this age of "spirituality" it's interesting how much attention angels get. But the word, "angel," only means, "messenger." Gabriel's duty is to deliver a message to another character, Mary.

Is Mary the main actor, the subject of the passage? No. Grammatically, she's the indirect object for she's receiving the message that was given by the subject.

The subject in this passage is the one doing the acting, the one who is effecting change. God is the subject. Thus He's the one we need to focus on as regards what's going on in The Annunciation.

God sent His messenger with these words for the Virgin Mary: **"...behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus.³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David,³³ and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."** (Lk 1:28-31)

God makes promises, and He keeps them. For example, the prophet Isaiah shared this promise from God 800 hundred years before it was fulfilled, **Isaiah 7:14, ...the Lord Himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son.**

God also made promises to King David. He said to him, **2nd Samuel 7:12,16, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom.... And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.**

God's promises are filled with good news: a virgin would miraculously bear a son, fulfilling Isaiah prophesy, and he would reign over Israel forever, fulfilling the prophet Nathan's word to King David. And we also heard from Gabriel that Mary's son would be called the "Son of the Most High," code for the Messiah who would save Israel from its enemies.

This was God's Word to His people, a Word that's more powerful than a Platinum American Express card with no credit limit! God said about His word, **Isaiah 55:11, ...so shall My Word be that goes out from My mouth; it shall not return to Me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.**

When we feel alone, when we're filled with fear, when we're anxious for the responsibilities we have in our home and work, we can take hold of this Word. For in this Word God reveals His plan, a plan rooted in His love for you.

The angel said to Mary, **Luke 1:28, You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus.**

Tucked within God's Word are promises and signs of hope, even in the names of the characters we find hope. For example, the name "Jeremiah" means "Yahweh lifts up," and "John" means "Yahweh is merciful." "Jesus" is the Latin version of the Hebrew name, "Joshua."

And "Joshua" means—drum roll please—Yahweh Saves! This is the greatest promise the Lord ever made, the promise to save Israel from itself, to save the world from its fall into darkness, and to save you and me from our rebellious and fickle hearts. And God kept this promise to save you by giving up His son, Jesus, on the Cross.

So as God prepared to fulfill His promise of redemption through Mary's unborn son, Jesus, she responded like this. She said, "**How will this be, since I am a virgin?**"

Gabriel explained, "**The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.**"

And what did Mary say in return? This is where we learn how to build a relationship with God just like she did. This is how we're going to do great things in the name of God in our homes and work, with our families and church. Mary said, "**Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to Your Word.**"

With those words of faithful acceptance by the unwed virgin of God's will, the whole world tilted about 5-degrees. Everything changed.

With the birth of the Christ-child the devil and his minions lost their choke hold on us, and we were no longer enslaved by him.

A new way of thinking about ourselves was given to us. The love and charity of the human spirit which we experience today was a gift to the human family from Jesus.

Humanity was given assurance of eternal life in a way that was tangible and real. Christ's resurrection from the grave proved there is a reason for hope.

Forgiveness of sins from God Himself gave us the opportunity to begin our lives anew here, today, now.

When Mary said, "**Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to Your Word,**" she opened the door for God's work in her life and in others' lives in ways no one could have ever imagined, in ways much bigger and greater than anything anyone could have ever hoped for.

Mary knew there was something more to life than her own life.

It's all about God. He is the subject, the main actor in our lives. He performed the miracle of bringing forth His Son from the womb of a virgin. He's the one who redeemed your life and mine with His promises of grace and peace. He's the one who sends us forth into this world to make a difference according to His will.

God's grace is often defined as "undeserved favor," meaning, God helps us even though we don't deserve it. Indeed, God grants us His favor because if we were left to our own devices we'd surely run headlong into rack and ruin.

And that's why all He needs from us is an open heart, a willingness to change, a voice that can say with Mary, "**Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to Your Word.**"

When I feel bothered by a relationship, a responsibility, or by another issue, I say: "**Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to Your Word.**"

When I want to take the next step in my relationship with God, growing in faith and love, I say: "**Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to Your Word.**"

The key to building a relationship with God is an open heart and mind, a willingness to say, **“Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to Your Word.”**

Please say it with me. **“Behold, I am the servant of the Lord.”** (Behold, I am the servant of the Lord.) **“Let it be to me according to Your Word.”** (Let it be to me according to Your Word.)

Friends in Christ, this week may you experience the same longing for a relationship with God as did Mary.

This week may your heart and mind be open that you may say these words prayerfully: **“Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to Your Word.”**

And this week may you have the opportunity to share this same good news with another person who really needs to hear it, in the name of Jesus. Amen.