

This morning's Gospel lesson is the well known Annunciation passage in the Gospel of Luke. While it is about Mary and her experience, it is also about us and our experience. Let's see what the Spirit might speak to us as we work our way, verse by verse, through this sacred story.

1:26-27 As the passage opens Luke tells us that God knows where we live. Nazareth was an obscure village in Galilee, far from the centers of human power and action. Yet to this small, rural town God sends his messenger Gabriel to tell a young woman some incredible news.

1:27 God not only knows where we live, God knows us by name. Mary, Joseph, Tom, Nigel, Ron, Margaret, Julie, Kim, Harry, Bev, Jan, Lynda, Frank, Bob, Amy, Mike, Joan, [your name here], look around you, God knows each one of us personally, by name. The Lord understands exactly what is going on in our lives, all about our spouses, our families, and our friends. Our loving Father knows all about our relationships and what they are like, just as he knew about Mary, Joseph, Elizabeth, and Zechariah.

1:28 And what God says to Mary God also says to us, "Hello there, beloved! I am with you. I love you. You are the one with whom I am well pleased. I pour out my amazing grace on you, and no matter what has happened or will happen, I am with you. I am with you, St. Augustine's-in-the-Woods, I, the Lord, am with you."

1:29 And like Mary, when we hear these words spoken to **us**, we wonder how can this apply to **me**? How can I be so thoroughly known and still be be-loved? We know ourselves as unworthy of such affection from a holy God.

We certainly do **not** sing with Maria in the "Sound of Music": "So here you are, standing there, loving me, whether or not You should, so somewhere in my youth or childhood, I must have done something good. Nothing comes from nothing, nothing ever could, so somewhere in my youth or childhood, I must have done something good."

That's about the **worst** theology ever written into a song. Maria takes credit for Captain von Trapp's love for her. **Maria is the un-Mary**. I love what Elyse Fitzpat-

rick wrote in her blog about this lyric: “So, I reasoned, if I could just be good enough, earn enough Brownie points, get my act together, and do “something good,” then people like Christopher Plummer would certainly sing to me in moonlit gazebos in Austria. Right?”

The biblical Mary is no Maria. She knows herself, even her young self, well enough to be shaken and perplexed by these beautiful, divine words. “How can they apply to me? Wait a minute, I really need to think about this.” I really like this quality about Mary in the Gospels: she does a lot of pondering and wondering. She is not a woman of snappy come-backs. She takes time, she thinks, she reflects. “Why would God talk to **me** in this way? Why would God say **I** am loved and be-graced?” That’s literally what the verb means: having been graced, blessed here and now with the presence of God.

1:30 And so the Lord’s messenger eases her anxiousness, her fear. “It’s all right, Mary. God knows you and loves you. Believe it, young woman, you have found favor in God’s eyes. He looks at you with love. God carries your photo in his wallet.”

1:31 And then the angel said to her, *dropping the other shoe*, “You are about to get pregnant and have a kid” What?! And perhaps, Mary, 1500 years before St. Teresa of Avila, also thought, “Dear Lord, if this is how You treat Your friends, it is no wonder You have so few!” St. Teresa said this as she was bucked off her horse into a river on the way to visit one of her monasteries.

“Yes, you will soon give birth to a son, and his name is already picked out for you, so no need to rummage through all those popular-names-for-Jewish-babies books. He will be called Jeshua, Jesus, Yahweh saves, as a sign of God’s promise to save you and all the people.

1:32-33 “And there is a wonderful future mapped out for him. People will call him God’s Son, and call you the Mother of God (not bad, eh?). He will fulfill God’s un-forgotten promise that the Lord **will reign** over his people with peace and justice forever. And, . . . well into the 21st century people will call desperate touchdown passes ‘Hail, Marys.’ Pretty cool, eh?”

1:34 And Mary, apparently done pondering, said to the angel, “Uhhh, riiiiight . . . But I see a small problem. I have no husband, and I don’t fool around. I am the Virgin Mary, you know.”

1:35 And the angel said to her, “Let’s let God take care of the details. What God wants to bring to birth in you and through you will be very special. I know all parents think that about their kids, but in your case, it will be really true. You are all children of God, but Jesus will be God’s very holy child, fully human, like you, yet like no other person ever was or will be, the incarnate Son of God.”

What God wants to bring to birth in us here and among us here is very special. It cannot be brought to birth in the same way in any other place. Our church is to be a vehicle of Jesus’ holy presence, his saving presence, here on Whidbey Island. Does this seem unlikely in our current situation?

1:36 In verse 36, the angel continued, “And just so that you might be assured that God is in the business of doing seemingly impossible things, your old Auntie Elizabeth is going to have a baby too, and she’s six months farther along than you.”

Henri Nouwen wrote this about Mary’s situation.

“Mary receives the great and shocking news that she is going to be the Mother of the ‘Son of the Most High.’ This news is so incomprehensible, and so radically interrupts Mary’s humble life, that she finds herself totally alone. How can Joseph or any of her friends or relatives possibly understand her situation? With whom can she share this most intimate knowledge, which remains inexplicable even to herself?

“So God does not want her to be alone . . . God offers Mary an intimate human friend with whom she can share what seems incommunicable. Elizabeth, like Mary, has experienced divine intervention and has been called to a response of faith. **She** can be with Mary in a way no one else possibly could Through these two women God decided to change the course of human history.”

1:37 Unbelievable for these two women, so far apart in age? Unbelievable for us, so far apart sometimes in our understanding of our life together? Perhaps, but “nothing will be impossible with God.” “Nothing will be impossible **with God**. As another faithful woman wrote in the midst of the 14th century Black Death, “All will be well, and all will be well, and all manner of things will be well.” And if God can their worlds, then God can change ours. Not even in our troubled parish will anything be impossible for God, with God.

1:38 And Mary said Yes. Yes to God. Yes to the impossible. Yes to the painful. Yes to the months of waiting that lay ahead. Yes to see what God would do in her, through her, and for her world.

Will we say yes to what God wants to do in our lives? Are we willing to be full of Christ and give birth to what God wants to do here, whatever the obstacles? Whatever other people serve, are you and I willing to be, first of all, servants of the Lord? And say with Mary, “Let it be to me, Lord, as **you** have said? Let it be so.”

Paul McCartney used this verse from Luke to write a song about his mother Mary. But I hear the **Virgin** Mary coming to us here at St. Augustine’s in these beautiful words:

When I find myself in times of trouble, Mother Mary comes to me
Speaking words of wisdom, let it be
And in my hour of darkness, she is standing right in front of me
Speaking words of wisdom, let it be

And when the broken hearted people living in the world agree
There will be an answer, let it be
For though they may be parted there is still a chance that they will see
There will be an answer, let it be

And when the night is cloudy there is still a light that shines on me
Shine on until tomorrow, let it be

I wake up to the sound of music, Mother Mary comes to me
Speaking words of wisdom, let it be
Whisper words of wisdom, let it be

And though it may sometimes seem that the angel of the Lord has departed and left us to our own devices, he has also left us with the astounding good news that Jesus Christ **is** coming to birth in our midst.

O St. Augustine's, pray to the Lord that this may be true for us, according to the word and plan of the Lord. Thanks be to God, precisely at this season of our life together, - thanks be to God for God's inexpressible gift.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.