

## **Luke 1: 26-38**

**AS I REFLECT BACK OVER MY YEARS AS A PASTOR WORKING WITH CHILDREN FOR THE CHRISTMAS EVE SERVICE, I CAN'T REMEMBER A SINGLE YEAR WHERE EVERY LITTLE GIRL WANTED TO BE MARY. IT DIDN'T MATTER THAT MARY HAD NO SPEAKING PART AND HAD TO MERELY SIT STILL BEHIND THE MANGER. EVERY GIRL WANTED TO BE MARY.**

**NONE OF THE BOYS, HOWEVER WANTED TO BE JOSEPH. NO WAY. THEY WANTED NOTHING TO DO WITH PRETENDING TO BE HER HUSBAND.**

**IT'S AN INTRIGUING QUESTION THAT LUKE'S NARRATIVE OF THE BIRTH OF JESUS ASKS...DID MARY WANT TO BE MARY?**

**AFTER THE VISIT FROM THE ANGEL GABRIEL, MARY WAS "MUCH PERPLEXED" (NRSV), "GREATLY TROUBLED" (NIV), "THOROUGHLY SHAKEN" (MESSAGE), "CONFUSED AND DISTURBED" (NLT).**

**MARY IS TROUBLED BECAUSE SHE CANNOT BELIEVE THE IMPOSSIBLE POSSIBILITY. ME? WHO AM I? WHY AM I FAVORED? SHE KNOWS HER PLACE. AND THIS SHOULD NOT BE HAPPENING. SHE KNOWS WHO SHE IS. SHE IS POOR, POSSIBLY ILLTERATE, AN UNKNOWN TEENAGE GIRL FROM A TOWN THAT WAS ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE TRACKS. SHE WOULD HAVE BEEN CONSIDERED NOTHING SPECIAL, WORTH VERY LITTLE.**

**IT IS THIS MARY WHO IS GREETED BY AN ANGEL OF GOD AS "FULL OF GRACE," AS "FAVORED ONE." SHE IS NOT DESCRIBED AS EXTRAORDINARILY HOLY. SHE IS DESCRIBED AS FAVORED ONE BECAUSE SHE IS CHOSEN.**

**GABRIEL TELLS HER THE BIG NEWS THAT SHE'S GOING TO BE PREGNANT WITH A SON, BUT NOT JUST ANY SON, THE SON OF THE MOST HIGH, NO LESS, FROM THE LINEAGE OF DAVID, WITH A NEVER-TO-END KINGDOM. OK. WHAT? HOW CAN THIS BE?**

**JUST BEFORE THE STORY OF GABBRIEL'S CONVERSATION WITH MARY, THE FOCUS IS ON ZECHARIAH AND THE BIRTH OF JOHN THE BAPTIST. THAT STORY TAKES PLACE IN BETHLEHEM. BETHLEHEM IS A RESPECTED CITY. AND ZECHARIAH AND ELIZABETH ARE RELATED TO A PRIESTLY RESPECTABLE ANCESTRY. BUT MARY IS FROM A NOTHING CITY, A CITY WITH A NO-GOOD REPUTATION. AND GOD BREAKS INTO HER LIFE.**

**ASHLEY COOK CLEERE WRITES, "THE TENDENCY TO THINK THAT LEADING UNASSUMING LIVES IN OUT-OF-THE-WAY PLACES ISOLATES US FORM THE EXTRAORDINARY IS DEBUNKED BY MARY'S SURPRISE VISITOR." GOD BREAKS INTO ORDINARY LIVES, AND NOT ONLY ORDINARY LIVES BUT ALSO LIVES WITHOUT HOPE AND LIVES THAT HAVEN'T BEEN VALUED AND LIVES WHERE THERE IS GUILT AND NEED FOR FORGIVENESS.**

THE STORY OF THE ANGEL'S ANNOUNCEMENT TO MARY ISN'T CALLED THE REQUEST, NOR IS IT CALLED THE INVITATION. IT'S CALLED THE ANNUNCIATION. THE ANNOUNCEMENT. A DISRUPTIVE CALL. I DON'T KNOW ABOUT YOU, BUT SOMETIMES I THINK I WOULD HAVE PREFERRED THAT GOD COULD HAVE CHOSEN TO SAVE THE WORLD ALL ON HIS OWN. BUT THIS STORY, THIS CONVERSATION BETWEEN MARY AND GABRIEL TELLS US THAT GOD WANTS HUMANITY TO BE PART OF THE EFFORT, EVEN IF IT MAKES THINGS MUCH MORE COMPLICATED AND EVEN MORE DIFFICULT: GOD INTENDS TO DRAW MARY AND ALL OF US INTO WHAT GOD IS DOING.

MARY ASKS QUESTIONS AFTER GABRIEL SPEAKS TO HER. SHE ASKS, "HOW CAN THIS BE?" IT'S A QUESTION MOST OF US HAVE ASKED AT ONE TIME OR ANOTHER. ONE COMMENTATOR SAYS THAT THESE FOUR WORDS, WHEN WE UTTER THEM, MAY WELL SIGNIFY THE NEARNESS OF GOD. WE ASK THE QUESTION IN VARIOUS CIRCUMSTANCES. IN HOSPITAL WAITING ROOMS, AT THE BEDSIDE OF A LOVED ONE DYING, WHEN THERE IS A GOOD REPORT FROM A DOCTOR, OR WHEN WE WONDER WHY SIN AND DARKNESS HAVE SUCH A GRIP ON OUR WORLD. HOW CAN THIS BE? PERHAPS THESE FOUR WORDS, 'HOW CAN THIS BE' EXPRESS THE UNDERLYING CONVICTION WE HAVE, WHETHER WE ACKNOWLEDGE IT OR NOT, THAT GOD IS INVOLVED IN OUR LIVES IN WAYS THAT ARE MYSTERIOUS, IN WAYS WE DON'T UNDERSTAND, JUST LIKE MARY DIDN'T UNDERSTAND. HOW CAN THIS BE?

WE DISTANCE OURSELVES FROM MARY WHEN WE FORGET HER ORDINARINESS. WE DISTANCE OURSELVES FROM HER BY READING THE STORY AS THOUGH SHE HAD NO CHOICE ABOUT HER RESPONSE. SHE SIMPLY SURRENDERED.

GOD BREAKS INTO ALL KINDS OF LIVES. INTO YOUR LIFE. INTO MINE. YES, THE ANGEL ANNOUNCED THE IMPENDING BIRTH AND DIDN'T ASK MARY FOR HER ASSENT, BUT THERE WAS STILL A CHOICE FOR MARY AND THAT WAS WHETHER TO TAKE HOLD OF THE UNKNOWN LIFE THE ANGEL HELD OUT TO HER OR WHETHER TO DEFEND HERSELF AGAINST IT HOWEVER SHE COULD. WE HAVE A SIMILAR CHOICE IN OUR OWN LIVES---TO SAY YES OR NO. YES, I WILL LIVE THIS LIFE THAT IS BEING HELD OUT TO ME, OR NO, I WILL NOT. I WILL EXPLORE THIS UNEXPECTED TURN OR EVENTS, OR NO, I WILL NOT. BARBARA BROWN TAYLOR WRITES, "YOU CAN SAY NO TO YOUR LIFE, BUT YOU CAN REST ASSURED THAT NO ANGELS WILL TROUBLE YOU EVER AGAIN, BUT IF WE SAY YES TO OUR LIVES, IF YOU SAY YES TO YOUR LIFE, YOU TAKE PART IN A THRILLING AND DANGEROUS SCHEME WITH NO SCRIPT AND NO GUARANTEES. LIKE MARY, WE CAN SURRENDER AND AGREE TO BRING GOD INTO THE WORLD THROUGH OUR WITNESS. LUKE PRESENTS MARY AS THE FIRST TO HEAR AND ACCEPT THE GOSPEL AND THEN TO PROCLAIM IT.

**MARY HAD THE LAST WORD: HERE I AM. HERE I AM. WILL IT BE OUR WORD AS GOD BREAKS INTO OUR LIVES?**

**THE TENDENCY TO THINK THAT LEADING UNASSUMING LIVES IN PLACES LIKE WHITE, SD., AURORA SD, BROOKINGS SD, ISOLATES US FROM THE EXTRAORDINARY IS DEBUNKED BY MARY'S SURPRISE VISITOR. GOD BREAKS INTO ORDINARY LIVES....EVEN LIVES IN THE PRAIRES OF SOUTH DAKOTA. GOD BREAKS INTO ORDINARY LIVES WITHOUT HOPE AND LIVES THAT HAVEN'T BEEN VALUED AND LIVES SADNESS OR CONFUSION. GOD BREAKS IN. GOD ARRIVES IN THE STORIES OF OUR LIVES. THIS IS THE POWER OF THE STORY AT CHRISTMAS TIME; THAT EVERY WORD OF GOD IS POSSIBLE. MAY WE, LIKE MARY, BE A HOME FOR THE GOD WHO DESIRES TO MAKE HIS HOME IN EACH OF US. AMEN.**