

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

First German Evangelical Lutheran Church

May It Be to Me As You Have Said

Luke 1:26-38

In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee,²⁷ to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary.²⁸ The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you."²⁹ Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be.³⁰ But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God.³¹ You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus.³² 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,³³ and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end."³⁴ "How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"³⁵ The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.³⁶ Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month.³⁷ For nothing is impossible with God."³⁸ "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May it be to me as you have said." Then the angel left her.

The Christmas story introduces us to many interesting and amazing Bible characters. We meet Joseph. We meet the innkeeper. We meet the shepherds in the field. We meet the angels. Above all, we meet the baby Jesus—the most important character in this drama. On this final Sunday before Christmas, we take some time to think especially of one very important character in the story of the birth of Jesus—that is the mother of Jesus, Mary. Sometimes, in Lutheran circles, we don't spend much time thinking about or discussing the Virgin Mary. We're probably sensitive to the fact that there are those who have taken consideration of Mary to an extreme and turned it into a worship of Mary. That is, of course, not appropriate. But it is very appropriate to spend time considering the role that Mary plays in the Christmas story and looking to her as a wonderful example of humility and faith. As we think about Mary's

reaction to the announcement that she would bear the Christ-child, we learn from the right way for us to celebrate Christmas this year.

Our reading begins with the words, “*In the sixth month.*” These words let us know that it has been six months since the angel Gabriel had made his visit to another unsuspecting believer—the priest Zechariah. Gabriel told Zechariah that his wife, Elizabeth, would give birth to the forerunner of the Messiah. Zechariah had a hard time believing this incredible news. But now the angel Gabriel had another message to tell. This visit was even more unlikely and amazing. The last visit had taken place where we might expect to find an angel—in the temple, with thousands of people gathered around. This time, the angel Gabriel goes to the no-name town of Nazareth and visit a young woman, who had no real title or distinction other than the fact that she was engaged to be married to a man named Joseph. We know her name. It’s Mary. I’m sure on that day, the last thought that was on Mary’s mind was the thought of being visited by an angel. Yet that is exactly what happened. The angel came to her and said, “*Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.*” This was an unusual greeting. So much so that it caused Mary to stop and wonder what was happening.

That greeting, however, was nothing compared with the message that the angel delivered next. He said, “*Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God.*”³¹ *You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus.*³² *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,*³³ *and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.*” Imagine what Mary must have thought when she heard those words. I’m sure she was probably looking forward to one day having children, but I don’t think she ever would have imagined in her wildest dreams that she would have a child who is destined for such greatness—a child who would rule an everlasting kingdom. You can sense some of Mary’s amazement and wonder in the simple question she asks, “*How will this be, since I am virgin?*” She doesn’t doubt the angels message. She is just curious as to who it will happen. That is when the angel says something even more amazing, “*The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.*” The angel told Mary that her child would be a miraculous child. He would be her son, but he would also be the Son of God. That is one incredible message.

That message is what Christmas is all about. Above all, at Christmas time, God wants the people to hear this message which he first sent an angel to speak to Mary. God wants the world to know that he sent his Son into this world. He wants to know that the baby in the Christmas story is no ordinary baby. This baby is truly the son of Mary and the son of God at the same time. Because this baby is both true man and true God, he is the perfect Savior for this sinful world. This world needed a Savior who was truly a man, so that he could do what no other man has done—live a perfect life like God demands and suffer and die a completely innocent death. This world needed a Savior who was also truly God, so that his blood would be precious enough to cover this world's sins and give salvation to all who look to him in faith. On that first Christmas, God sent an angel to bring this message to Mary. Today, God gets his message out a different way. First of all, he wrote his message down on the pages of Scriptures. Then, he uses messengers to tell the story of the Christ-child to the world. God speaks as his Word is read in churches around the globe. God speaks as people sing the truths of Christmas in hymns and carols. God speaks as his people share the true meaning of Christmas with friends and neighbors. God speaks, but do the people listen? Do you listen? Are you going to take time to listen to God speaking this Christmas season or do you have other things that are more important?

Mary gives us the perfect example. Mary shows us how to celebrate Christmas. What did Mary do? She listened to the message. She took it to heart. She said to the angel, *"May it be to me as you have said."* Aren't those great words of faith? Mary didn't question the angel. She didn't ask for more details. She didn't tell the angel his message was too incredible to be believed. She simply said, *"May it be to me as you have said."* Those are words of faith. Those words show an acceptance of God's message and a trust and confidence in the truth of God's Word, no matter how difficult it may be to believe.

This Christmas season, we need to take some time to listen, just like Mary listened to the angel. We listen to God speak to us his amazing message of peace through this Christ-child. We listen as he speaks this message in the various Christmas services held at our church. We listen as he speaks this message in the advent devotions we hold with our family or privately. We listen and we believe. When God says that he sends his one and only Son into this world to wash away sins, we say, *"May it be to me as you have said. Wash my sins away, Lord. I need your forgiveness. I need the peace you send through your Son, Jesus."* Don't think that you can afford to celebrate

Christmas this year without taking the time to listen to the gospel message and take it to heart. That is what this celebration is all about. God speaks. We listen.

Mary also gives us an example of what to do after we hear and take God's message to heart. Shortly after the angel Gabriel left, Mary went to visit her cousin Elizabeth. It was in the presence of Elizabeth that we see Mary's response to the angel's message. Mary speaks a hymn of praise when she speaks the words, which we sing as the *Magnificat*: "*My soul glorifies the Lord and my Spirit rejoices in God my Savior.*" Mary gave all of her praise to God for the wonderful message she had received.

We also have the opportunity to follow Mary's example. First of all, to allow God to speak his Word to us. Then to take his message to heart and believe that it is true. Finally, to respond with our praise. This response can take many different forms. We can sing praise like we do in church every week. We can speak God's praise by telling others about the meaning of the Christ-child's birth. We can also live our praise by glorifying God with actions that are in line with how he wants us to live. As we plan another year of Christmas celebration, let's not forget the lesson that Mary teaches us today. In the end, the most important thing we can do this Christmas is to simply sit, listen to God speak his amazing message in his Word and humbly respond, "*May it be to me as you have said.*" **Amen.**

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