

Luke 1:26-38

In the sixth 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, favored 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 favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus.

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 ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" The angel said to 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 holy; he will be called Son of God.

And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God." Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

Sermon

When my daughters Mallory and Hillary were in elementary school, we lived in Kahalu'u. Every Christmas we would drive from Kahalu'u to visit Faye's family in Waipahu.

It was a long drive.

To occupy our time, we would all take turns singing a chorus or two of our favorite Christmas songs. I might start with Silent Night, Faye would sing Deck the Halls, Mallory would sing Jingle Bells, and Hillary always wanted to sing her favorite song—the 12 Days of Christmas.

And she wanted to sing ALL the verses!

And we would groan and complain that she is not following the rules, but she would be laughing and smiling, so we just had to sing along with her.

In this morning's gospel we are reminded that "nothing will be impossible with God." In times when we have to drive halfway around the island singing 12 verses of a song, or even when we are anxious, happy, or scared, it is good to remember that God is fully in charge of our world. Everything happens according to his plan.

And sometimes in God's plan, a moment can change the world. In Luke's gospel, in just one moment, time stands still for a frightened young woman and for a messenger of God.

Imagine Mary, sitting all alone and as she sits, an angel appears and says “Greetings favored one! The Lord is with you.”

Time is slowing down, you can hear a pin drop. You can feel your heart beating in your chest, the birds and crickets are silent, and Mary sits and wonders.

And the angel reveals the plan,

Do not be afraid Mary.

You will conceive and bear a son.

And you will name him Jesus.

He will be great.

His kingdom will have no end.

Mary blinks, she is confused, flustered, then she asks,
How can this be? I am a virgin.

The angel Gabriel quietly explains,

The Holy Sprit will come upon you.

The child to be born will be holy.

Mary's mind fills with fear, hope, doubt,

bewilderment and we wait to hear what this young

woman will say. God is waiting.

And she says, "Here am I."

For Mary, and Joseph too, the great miracle was the simple act of obedience, of saying yes to God.

We all have our daily routines. We make appointments, we make lists, we need to be here, or we need to be there. Can you imagine God stopping you and telling you that you need to change your plans? That you need to change your life? Will you answer, "Here am I?"

When I was in my early 20s, I worked as a zookeeper at the Honolulu Zoo. To get that job, you needed to pass a written test with a score that placed you in the top 5% of all the other hundreds of test takers. What an honor to be chosen! I was favored! This is going to be my career for life! This was going to be the best job ever! But what I actually did every day was pick up poop, a lot of poop.

All day.

Every day.

One day, as I was doing my daily work of picking up poop, a man and his young son passed by me. I heard the man tell his son, “see what will happen to you if you don’t go to college?”

God had sent me a message.

And I listened.

And I answered, without hesitation, “Here am I!”

Christmas is a day for family gatherings, churchgoing, and gift giving. But the greatest gifts are not those wrapped in colorful paper and topped with matching bows. The greatest gifts are those given with an open heart, one wrapped with faith, hope, and love.

Charles Dickens in his classic tale A Christmas Carol said, “I will honor Christmas in my heart and try to keep it all the year.” These wonderful words should be echoed on this day and all the days to come.

In this time of year the days grow short and the nights grow long, yes even in Hawaii.

Although this is a time of great anticipation and joy, there are others who are dealing with sickness or loss and celebrating Christmas may coincide with feelings of sadness, despair, or loneliness.

This is the time to be closer with God. He is the light that shines in the darkness.

Today is the eve of Christ's birth. Be present and involved in this big world in which we live in and minister to God's people.

Like Mary, we came into the world for a purpose. That purpose will not be revealed to us as dramatically as it was to her. Perhaps she heard the word of God so clearly because she was comfortable with silence.

He is here when we speak, laugh, and sing. He is here right now, sitting next to you.

Forgive your neighbor, heal any division, and be patient, peaceful and kind.

God intends for us to live in love.

Mary's life changed in a moment.

Isn't that the way life is?

Isn't that the way God works?

So listen carefully to his message.

And answer with faith and hope, "Here am I."

May God bless you and keep you. Have a blessed Christmas and a Happy New Year. Now go out and change the world!

Amen