

NL MARY, MOTHER OF JESUS  
SUNDAY, JULY 7/8, 2018

FIRST LUTHERAN, MARSHALL  
PASTOR SCOTT FULLER

(Micah 5:2-4a; Luke 1:26-38)  
*New Beginnings*

*Dear friends in Christ: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.*

Please join me in prayer: *Prepare our hearts, Lord, to receive your Word. Silence in us any voice but your own that in hearing we may believe and in believing we may obey your will revealed to us in Jesus Christ. Amen.*

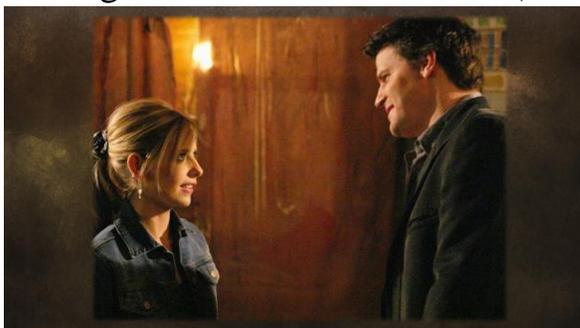
Today's Gospel story describes a young Jewish woman at the moment when she, of all women of all time, is called to be the mother of the Messiah...by an angel...

So since we want to know exactly what's going on here, I thought we should begin by investigating what we know about angels – and what better source to go to than...pop culture??? Take a look at the screens and help me decide which kind of angel we're talking about...

1. Some are silly (Lego)



2. Others may be considered sexy. This guy is actually a vampire *named* Angel from which show??? (Buffy, the Vampire Slayer)



3. Some angel depictions are sentimental, as in *Touched by an Angel*.



4. Others are sensational: *The Blue Angels*



5. The most common are the seasonal Angels



6. And some of the most sublime are famous works of art.



In short stories and t.v. shows, novels and movies, encounters with angels are often portrayed as peaceful experiences, placid episodes, a calm coming together of heaven and earth. Yet in the **Bible**, it's most often the rule that the *opposite* happens.

Last week we heard of John the Baptist's father, Zechariah, who was visited by an angel to tell him that his long barren wife Elizabeth would soon have a son.

**Anyone remember how he reacted to the Angel appearing to him in the Temple?** The appearance of that heavenly messenger left him *terrified* and *fear overwhelmed* him!! And what did the angel say? ***Do not be afraid.***

And we all remember what happened to those men in the fields keeping watch over their flocks by night. When the angel first appeared to the shepherds with good news of great joy for all people – we're told that they were *filled with fear!* Again, the angel said...***Do not be afraid!***

Then decades, later according to Matthew's Gospel, we've heard about what happened when the women first came to the tomb. There they saw God's angel in dazzling clothes sitting on the stone that had sealed Jesus in the tomb. The guards, we're told, fell to the ground in fear...yet to the women, the angel said... ***Do not be afraid!***

The young Mary was no different. Perplexed and puzzled by this angelic appearance, she also needed to hear a promise of peace. Said the angel to the maiden...***Do not be afraid***, a word of comfort from the God of all creation.

In fact, it should come as no surprise to hear that the command, *Do not be afraid*, is the most frequently uttered command in the bible (<https://bodytithethe.com/frequent-command-bible/>). ***Do not be afraid...***

And yet, Mary had every right to be concerned, for not only did she meet an angel, but Mary's calling was unique in all the world, of every time and every place. What God wanted her to do would involve every fiber of her being:

her body, her baby; her heart, her spirit; her life, her love; her dreams, her nightmares, her hopes, her fears...

In the midst of that cauldron of emotional energy, the angel called Mary to live a life of TRUST...one that would be filled with both blessings and sadness, suffering and gladness. And Mary's amazing response was both fruitful and faithful: *Let it be with me according to your word.*



This event gives us an incredible insight into the truth of that old saying, ***The Lord works in mysterious ways!*** For here, heaven's great plan to bless humanity begins not from a stance of sure and certain strength...but from a point of absolute weakness!

The God of everything made, the Author of Life, the Almighty Creator who brought order out of chaos, light out of darkness and land out of sea, who filled both the waters and the earth with living creatures of every kind...

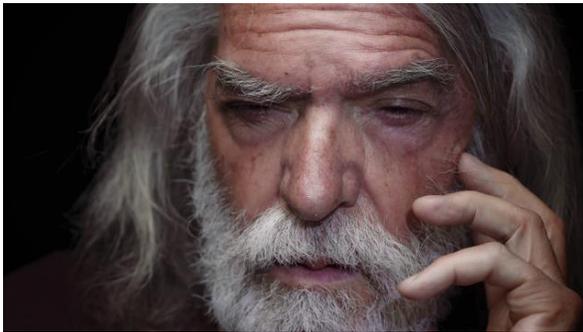
This same God turns to a poor, unwed, teenage girl and asks her to say yes to a plan that would have been rejected by virtually everyone else in her patriarchal and particularly strict society.

Now, when you consider that Mary was maybe 14-15 years old, it's not difficult to imagine her saying yes to that heavenly visitor. The drama of the moment, the request from God himself, the pull of duty...AND, the promise of having a baby...GOD'S BABY!!! All these things combine to create a possibly unrealistic and rosy look at the future for this girl...

Yet, you and I are left to wonder just what Mary understood when she said to the angel, ***Here I am, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.***

The realist inside me wants to ask her... ***WHAT WERE YOU THINKING???***

- Was she so naïve as to assume that everything would work out fine?
- that Joseph would give 2-thumbs-up when told that she was pregnant with “God’s” baby,
- that their families would surround them with their unquestioned support,
- that she and Joseph and Jesus would all live happily ever after???
- Do you think that Mary possibly had her head in the clouds??**



Charles Dickens, in his novel David Copperfield, describes a likeable character who spends most of his time with his ***head in the clouds***. Mr. Dick is a man who’s locked in a world of childish innocence. Simple-minded and unable to care for himself, he spends hours every day writing his memoirs. Yet for all his labors, he never makes any progress on his book.

The problem is that he always gets confused, and starts mixing the events of his history with the grand events of England’s history, and his mind always ends up muddled. Sheet after sheet of carefully written script is continually discarded to the floor...

Yet...he has a creative way of dealing with all that evidence of his incompetence. When the weather permits, he gathers his discarded documents, slathers them together with glue, attaches them to a light wood frame and adds a tail. Then with a ball of twine and a gust of wind, he lofts his kite skyward, sending it (and his problems) high up in the sky.

**Then**, and **only** then, does he find a sense of serenity. A peace that passes at least his understanding settles in whenever he sends his problems heavenward on a wing and a prayer.



Who knows what Mary thought of her future? Who knows if she had any awareness of the pain and pitfalls that God's plan might produce?

But two things seem evident:

1. With her *not fully developed pre-frontal cortex*, I'm guessing she didn't spend too much time worrying about what could go wrong...right?
2. Yet I'm also thinking that **God** saw in **Mary** what **Jesus** will see in a Jewish man years later. When Nathanael is brought by Philip to meet Jesus, the Lord says, *Behold, an Israelite in whom there is no guile.*

The word that I think best defines *guile* is: **deviousness**. This means that Mary, like Nathanael, exhibits everything opposite of guile: trustworthiness, truthfulness, honor and grace. People like that are meant to be treasured, aren't they? There are far too few of them in our world today!

I'm guessing that Mary was such a person – honest, loyal and true – so that the word of the angel was for her as good as gold, because it came from God.

At its core, this story is about revelation – which Webster defines as *an act of revealing or communicating divine truth; something that is revealed by God*

*to humanity*. It fits our story perfectly. God revealed the truth to Mary that she would become pregnant, and that her child would bring salvation to the world.

Yet, at the same time, it also brought to an end her childhood plans for how her life would unfold. No doubt her dreams had included marriage, and a family, and then growing old with her husband to delight in their children's children... Yet this angelic visitation brought an end to those dreams... even as it opened her eyes to a brand new vision.

Sometimes such a moment is an experience of pure grace. Other times the grace is revealed only through suffering and tears. **Most** of the time, I think such experiences are a mixture of both...but always, always, God's promised grace *has always* – and *will forever* – bring Gospel blessings *to* us and *through* us when we say Yes to the Lord's Word.



Does anyone remember that popular 1990's hospital drama, *Chicago Hope*? One of the main characters was a doctor whose story line had him suffer a life-threatening aneurysm. It brought his life as a surgeon to an end, which felt like a threat to his entire being, his entire life.

Yet fortune smiled and he was able to move into the field of psychiatry, where he could continue his calling as a physician – he just had to change his scrubs for a lab coat, so to speak. On one show, he met a young man who was suffering his younger brother's suicide.

He talked about the struggle of trying to move on in spite of such a terrible loss... But the young man's anger made him lash out and challenge the doctor by accusing him of being clueless to the pain of loss.

In response, the doctor asserted that he knew a little about the challenge of moving on, and explained the changes his medical condition had wrought on his life. He said to the patient, *I wouldn't recommend an aneurysm as a way for people to discover something about themselves. But that experience proved for me to be a **revelation** that who I am as a person is more than being a surgeon.*

The young man less-than-enthusiastically received his counsel, and assured the doctor that he would have no such great revelation to bring *his* struggles to an end. At this, the *defining moment of the program*, the doctor told the patient that through his struggles, he'd discovered an important truth: **revelation is never an ending, but always a new beginning.**



The same can be said, I think, for **most** of life's significant moments, those that cause us pain as well as those that bring us joy. From the specter of death to the celebration of a birth; from problems with health to good, long lives; from broken marriages to healthy relationships; and from God's revelation in Jesus Christ to the revelations we discover about ourselves **through** life: never are such things meant to be ends in themselves, but doorways to new beginnings.

Always we are being pushed or pulled by God to begin again, to be renewed in our calling day in and day out. Always we're called to let go of life's burdens, NOT like Mr. Dick who is only free of them as long as his kite stays

in the air, but for good – again and again, at the entrance to the stable or gathered around the Lord’s table.

All of these moments can and will be used by God as vehicles of heaven’s love, means of revelation through which the Spirit gives us Jesus’ words of forgiveness and love.

So the final question for us today is this: what new beginning is God calling you to consider? I’m pretty confident that the Lord’s summons to us will not be quite so dramatic as Mary’s – and yet, that doesn’t make them any less important to the work of the Gospel in the world.

So I invite you to spend some time this week in prayer and ask God to guide you in embracing your calling to be who God wants you to be. You might be asked to take hold of one thing – or to let another drop. To start something new – or let something old stop. My prayer for us all is that we will be blessed with the grace and faith to say with Mary, *Let it be with me according to Your Word.*

Amen.