

Love Came Down
December 22, 2013

Luke 1:26-38

26 In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, 27 to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. 28 And he came to her and said, "Hail, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" 29 But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and considered in her mind what sort of greeting this might be. 30 And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. 31 And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. 32 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 father David, 33 and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there will be no end." 34 And Mary said to the angel, "How shall this be, since I have no husband?" 35 And 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 called holy, the Son of God. 36 And behold, your kinswoman Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. 37 For with God nothing will be impossible." 38 And Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.

Advent is a special time of year. It is a time of preparation and watching and waiting for the coming birth of Christ. We are on our final Sunday in this special season, we have found Hope amidst the bedlam, we know that Peace is found in Bethlehem and last week we heard the Joy shared through the songs of our Christmas Cantata. One of the most important parts of advent is remembering what the season is about and this Sunday is the one where we are reminded of what the season truly revolves around. This is the season of Love. It is love that was brought to us in the gift of a child. Love came down on that night so long ago.

This part of the birth story that we hear today, however, is not the first of the extra ordinary births we hear about in scriptures. In fact we enter this story in Luke after reading about John the Baptist's birth. His birth in itself was so extraordinary that it is almost difficult to see how Jesus' birth can top that. John the Baptist as we know was born to Elizabeth and Zechariah both older and past the point of children and yet God favored them to have a child. There is also the story of Rachael finally giving birth to Joseph and Benjamin after being barren for so long, and Abraham's wife Sarah was also a mother well past the normal age.

Yet as miraculous as these stories are there is also a common thread to all of them. We can truly see God at work in and through these miraculous births. So as we hear in our Scripture today the next miraculous birth to be is Jesus, God's own son. Today we hear about Mary, the mother of Jesus. There is not a lot that we know about her. So we will have to step out from what we know into what we can imagine and wonder about this woman who gave birth to Jesus and in such an extra ordinary way.

She was young, during that time many did not live past the age of 50 or 60 years old so most girls were married between the ages of 14 and 16. Men were older when they married and typically would marry after the age of 18 if not even later after establishing some sort of work. Her marriage was probably an arranged contract between her family and Joseph's. We do not know if they knew one another before this time or if they had grown up together. We just know that when Gabriel visits wedding plans are already set in motion; at least contractually she is pledged to marry Joseph.

She is also obviously faithful. We can guess this through the fact that Gabriel calls her highly favored, and he claims that the Lord is with her. Can you imagine the angst she must be feeling. Scriptures tell us that she was troubled by this greeting but it is also a point of terror. Here she is a seemingly simple girl and then her life is turned upside down by an encounter with someone.

Is not that the way it goes sometimes though? We are so focused on what we are planning on doing or getting ready to do and then our entire world is flipped upside down or shaken because we have met someone new or had a conversation that changed our perspective.

Mary a simple girl meets the angel Gabriel who in the course of a short conversation changes her entire world, her entire perspective. He tells her to not be afraid because she has found favor with God. She will give birth to a son who will be called Jesus and this Son will reign over the house of Jacob forever.

I personally have always had a giggle about Mary's oh so practical response to what Gabriel tells her. She says how will this be? I am a virgin. She has just been told that God will cause these wondrous things to happen and to her practical mind she is so focused on the logistics the how, and the why.

You see that is what we all often do in the face of our God. Gabriel has explained to her all these things and rather than trust and wait for God's timing we like to however, question how and why and try to come up with ways for our humanness to compensate for God's wonders. We often have to take God's miracles and because we can not see them we have to figure it out and break it down so we latch on to the first concern we can wrap our heads around.

But see Gabriel tells us that nothing is impossible with God. That is what we believe. Through God all things are possible. And it is our belief in God that helps us to see the possibilities. We can see them pretty easily. It is a simple matter to look around us and see the possibility and the potentiality God has surrounded us with. However faith is more than just seeing, faith is also acting. But it becomes a question of what compels us to act. We can look around us and believe but what compels us to act out of our faith and our belief?

LOVE came down, is that not enough? Love came down, Love compels us. Love is the reason God blessed us with the Birth of Jesus. Recall John 3:16-17 For God so loved the world that he sent his only begotten Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the World to Condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

God loved and that Love came Down. Love came down to be with us, to save us, and to help us believe. Love came down, now what are you going to do with it?