

Fourth Sunday of Advent, 2014

Gospel: Luke 1:26-38

Sermon Title: "I am Mary"

It's me ... Mary. Mary – what a ridiculous name. Seriously, I've never liked it. First of all – it is so very common. Women in our village will call out "Mary, have you finished the mending?" – and half a dozen girls will answer, "Yes, mom." You just have to laugh at that. I don't understand why my parents named me Mary anyway. Do you know what it means? It means "bitter". So, what does that mean? Am I destined to end up a bitter old woman? Why couldn't they have named me something beautiful – like Sarah – which means "princess". We all know that every little girl wants to be a princess – especially in this poor, little nothing of a town – Nazareth – where nothing ever happens.

Okay. I know. I shouldn't complain so much. Mother tells me that all the time. She says I need to be thankful for the life that God has given me. And, I am thankful – I really am. God has been good to me – well, most of the time, anyway. The most amazing thing is this ... well, guess ... yep, I'm engaged. Engaged to be married to the most wonderful man. Well, I don't really know him that well yet. His name is Joseph. He's older than me, of course. Because men like to be settled in their careers before they marry. He is a carpenter – a really extraordinary carpenter. I've seen his work. In fact, when he came to ask my father if he could marry me – he brought with him a gift for me – a beautifully carved box. My father was pleased. He tells me it is a good match. I think it must be ... because everyone is excited about it. Lots of plans are being made for my wedding day which is not quite a year away. But, we've had the public announcement and blessing with all of our family and friends. So, I am now Joseph's and no one else's. And, that's the way it is going to be.

Or, at least that is what I thought. But now I have a problem. A really big problem. It is really hard to talk about. But, I have to talk to someone and figure out what to do. So – I'm going to tell you and maybe you can help me. It is going to sound kind of weird – well, it might even sound unbelievable. But I swear to God – it is true. This is what happened to me. (*Big Sigh*) I was sitting in my room sewing on my wedding dress – when it happened. Well, I was kind of daydreaming too. I was thinking of Joseph. He's awful cute. I was thinking of the home we would have together and of the children we would have one day. I was thinking of how we would teach our children all the important things – the Holy Scriptures – you know, the Torah – and how we would take the children to the Temple regularly – just like my parents did with me. We would be good parents – great parents. And, then suddenly it happened ...

There was a rush of wind – the door flew open – and this blinding light appeared. It sort of seemed like there was a person in the light – or the person was on fire – or something. Oh, I know you think I'm crazy. But, just listen... I hid my face. Light, wind, fire. I know the stories in the Torah. These things usually mean God. And, I figured that I was about to die. What else could it be?!

And, then my head cleared. I rubbed my eyes. And there he stood – an angel. No, don't laugh. I am telling you the truth. Really I am. I knew it was the angel Gabriel. I can't remember if he introduced himself or not. But, I knew as surely as my name is Mary – I knew. And then he said all this weird stuff. He called me "favored one" and told me that God is with me. Well, of course I knew God is always with me. I learned that in Sabbath School. But, "favored one"? I am just – plain ordinary Mary – living a boring life in Nazareth. It was so confusing. I just couldn't figure it out.

And then, get this – he says "Do not be afraid." Ha. That just about made laugh out loud. Because really – this is not an everyday occurrence. Glowing angels don't walk into my bedroom everyday – you know. I mean, really – wouldn't you be afraid? Well, I was (*Long Pause*) ... scared to death. By now, I was shaking like a leaf. I thought – maybe I was dreaming. But it gets worse ... The next words of the angel Gabriel really woke me up. He told me that I was going to have a baby. He told me that this baby was to be named Jesus. He told me this baby – this Jesus – would grow up and be the Son of God. Did you hear that?! The Son of God.

We've been waiting a long time for this, right? You and I grew up listening to our fathers tell the stories of the greatness of our people – the chosen people. I remember learning about the glory of Israel, and hearing about King David and King Solomon – and their vast kingdom. I can sing a lot of the psalms by heart. I learned about the promises of God to send a Messiah to us. I have looked around our world and I can see the powerful Roman soldiers. I hate their arrogance and cruelty. I have prayed for the coming of the Messiah – who would make us a nation and restore the glory we once had. But – it can't be now. It can't be that God is choosing me for this important thing. Can it?

I am only 14 years old! Old enough to be engaged – but I was figuring on waiting a while before I had children. I should be at least – oh, I don't know – 16 maybe. This can't be happening to me. I tried to explain these things to the angel Gabriel. But, he just plowed right ahead with his message from God. He said this baby will be "born of the Holy Spirit". Oh yeah, right – like anyone will believe that?! Oh. My. God. Joseph. What will I tell Joseph? There is no way – in a million years – that he will understand this. He will think...he will think...well, you know what he will think! And, my mother – who is a stickler for rules. And, my father who is so pleased with this engagement to Joseph. How were people going to believe that this baby was God's son, instead of just believing that I was a sinful girl? This is a disaster!

Being engaged is a commitment – as serious as being married. It can only be broken by death or divorce. Just last week, a woman in Nazareth had been killed by her fiancée because she had smiled – yes, I said smiled – at another man. Well, Joseph will either divorce me or kill me. That's all there is to it?! Why can't God see that he is ruining my life! Why did God have to go and choose me?

I was about to say – no thank you – and point out a more suitable mother for the son of God – surely there is another – better – girl in the village – when the angel Gabriel interrupted me. I guess he wanted to make me feel better or something. So, he told me the craziest thing! This will make you laugh. He told me that Elizabeth – you remember my cousin Elizabeth – my older cousin Elizabeth ... Gabriel said that Elizabeth is six months pregnant! Ha. Everybody knows that she has never been able to have any children. It's kind of sad really. And, she's old – like really old. I am 14 fourteen years old – so she must be close to 50. Wow. She should be dead by now – not having a baby. So, that part can't be true. *(Pause)* Can it? I guess I could go visit her. We haven't heard from her in a while – since she lives so far away. Oh, I don't know... Do you know what I should do? If you were me, what would you do?

The angel Gabriel's parting words to me – were words I have heard often before – “Nothing will be impossible with God.” Oh my God. How many times has my father said those exact same words to me. He said them when the other girls in our village were getting engaged a couple of years before me. He told me to trust that God would choose the right time, the right place, the right person for me. And, I love God – I really do. So – I know you won't believe this – but I told the angel Gabriel... Yes. Yes I would do as God asked. Yes I would be the mother of the Son of God. Yes. *(Big Sigh)*

That's all he needed to hear, I guess. And, when I looked up again – the angel was gone, the light was gone and I was back in my bedroom alone. And now, now – I'm not so sure. Because I am really – really scared. Oh not about Joseph or my parents or my friends anymore. I have a feeling that God will work all that stuff out. But I'm scared for this little baby growing inside of me. This Jesus – Son of God. Because I get the feeling it isn't going to go well for him. The way people have talked – the way I have grown up – I have always thought that we were waiting for a military leader – a king – to overthrow the corrupt Roman government. But, I don't think that is what we are getting. A baby. A tiny little baby is what we're getting. Oh, I know – he'll grow up to be a man. And, I'm sure that once Joseph gets used to the idea he will be a great earthly father and teach him to be wonderful carpenter too. But, I don't think a lot of people are going to like this. And, the bad part is – I already love this little Jesus – that I have not yet met. I'm afraid my heart will be broken by all of this. And, I really don't want to end up like my name – Mary – bitter.

Of course, there is that other thing about my name – Mary. My mother always told me that another meaning for my name was – “wished for child”. She told me that she and my father wished for a child and prayed fervently to God for such a gift. She always told me that when I was finally born they commended me to God – praying that God would give to me a servant heart – that I would be open to hearing God's word and will in my life.

Well, I guess this is it. God works in ways we don't expect. I'm going to have a baby. His name will be Jesus. He will be the Son of God. I hope you are as happy as I am.