

**“Mary, Did You Know?”**  
**An Original Dramatic Sermon**

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**Covenant Presbyterian Church, Madison, Wisconsin**

Greetings - Shalom aleychem, Peace be with you!

It seems like yesterday and yet a lifetime ago, when the angel Gabriel startled me with a similar blessing, “*Greetings, Favored One, the Lord is with you.*” (Luke 1:28, NRSV). Now, in my sixties people often ask, “Maryam, (Mary is the shortened name) did you know? Did you know then what Jesus would become?”

Does any mother know what her child will grow up to be? Most parents hope and pray and imagine possibilities for their precious bundle of joy. However, did I suspect my son would perform miracles, lift up the down hearted, preach about the radical love of God? Did I know he would die on a torturous cross? Did I realize when the angel greeted me, what it would mean to give birth to Jesus, the Son of God? Yes and No. More “no” than “yes”.

Please understand, I was just twelve years old, barely a woman when I first heard the prophecy of the Angel Gabriel! You can imagine my surprise and fear when this stranger referred to me as “*Favored One*”. Who am I to find favor in God’s eyes? Who am I to carry God’s Son? I am not a princess, nor a descendant of royal lineage, not like my husband, Joseph whose family traces back to King David. (Matthew 1:1-17) However, my cousin, Elizabeth was a descendant of Aaron from the tribe of Levi. (Luke 1:5) Therefore, I know we can claim our priestly lineage. However, I was not thinking about ancestry when the angel announced I would be the mother of God’s Son.

Honestly, it was almost too much to comprehend. Sure I was afraid, but most of all I was confused. How could it be that I, a virgin, would become pregnant? (I suppose you have thought the same thing) The angel explained the mysterious overshadowing of the Most High and that my child “would be born holy.” (Luke 1:35) I must have looked skeptical when Gabriel shared another bit of shocking news about my older cousin, Elizabeth.

She and her husband Zechariah had been praying for a baby for years. Like Abraham and Sarah, they had almost given up hope when Gabriel announced Elizabeth’s pregnancy to Zechariah. I know how silly this sounds but I was astounded more by this news than my own. The angel seemed to hear my misgivings and answered before I asked. “For nothing will be impossible with God.” (Luke 1: 37)

“Nothing will be impossible with God.” That was an assurance I could carry with me into the unknown future.

Reflecting on those early years, I realize how God made the impossible possible. When the evidence of God's presence was acknowledged, a joy bubbled up in my soul.

For instance, when Elizabeth and I met shortly after I became pregnant, her baby leapt in her womb...and so did mine. I felt so blessed by her words and there was an overwhelming joy in my spirit. We could both sing along with women of faith, like Hannah and Sarah who felt the blessing of God. "My soul magnified the Lord and rejoiced in God my Savior".

I knew that when, I left the safety and comfort of Elizabeth's home, I could face anything with God's help, even the scandal of my pregnancy. I believed then "God has done great things".

And that God would work in people's hearts, even Joseph's. So, surprise! God sent the angel Gabriel to Joseph. Few know that Joseph had an annunciation (Matthew 1:18-25) Probably because there are few stained glass windows, paintings or musical composition about the annunciation of Joseph. Embarrassed by all the attention given to me, I would like you to know about his divine encounter. He considered divorcing me when he heard of my pregnancy. You see, the Jewish tradition of betrothal is not like your idea of engagement. In our Hebrew law, the only **contact** allowed between couples was through an assigned friend, usually a friend of the bridegroom. (John 3:29)

To be unfaithful before the wedding ceremony was punishable by death...of the woman not the man. Joseph being a righteous man was ready to divorce me quietly so I would not be punished. He went to sleep and the angel Gabriel spoke to him in a dream. The midnight revelation convinced him to remarry me and raise Jesus as his own. He obeyed God's wishes and we never looked back. Joseph raised Jesus as his own, teaching him his trades of carpentry and masonry until it was time him to begin his ministry.

In the midst of very ordinary days, something or someone would remind us of Gabriel's prophecy, "*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 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.*"

It happened at Jesus' birth, when the shepherds, angels and visited. I heard them call our baby, the Messiah, the anointed one, the Savior and Lord. I tucked those comments away and treasured them.

Another incident was on the ritual day of my purification, 40 days after Jesus was born, when Joseph and I went to the Jerusalem temple. We gave our sacrifice of turtledoves and presented our baby. Both the prophet Anna and devoted Simeon were at the temple when we brought Jesus into the temple. You should have seen Simeon when he took him in his arms. He began praising God and saying, "*now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word, for my eyes have seen your salvation, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.*" (Luke 2: 29-32)

Anna went out of the temple to tell people that our little son, Jesus, would bring about the redemption of Jerusalem. Joseph and I were amazed by people's reactions to our baby. Maybe we did not really understand how people could recognize his greatness.

We tried to live a normal life after these early childhood events, and we did except for the time in the temple. Jesus was a typical adolescent, I suppose. However, he was a gifted scholar of the Law, Prophets and sacred writings. At twelve years old, we went to Jerusalem for the Passover, and as usual, the whole family caravanned in and out. Unfortunately, we were a day away when we discovered Jesus was not with us. I should have known that he was oblivious to our schedule. He was involved with His Father's work, he said. I was irritated then; I understand now.

I told Elizabeth that I was blessed to be God's servant, to bear God's Son and give him to the world. Moreover, I am convinced that I have been blessed to have traveled this path with God. During Jesus' ministry, he lifted up the lowly, filled the hungry with good things, helped the people of Israel and redeemed the Gentiles. No longer just my son, but the Son of God brought mercy to generation after generation.

I witnessed Jesus' ministry, death, resurrection and the gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Now I can say as Simeon did, "Let your servant go in peace, for my eyes have seen the glory of God".

Could I have known the extent of Jesus' influence in the world? No. However, I believed the Angel Gabriel's words, "Nothing will be impossible with God".