

Last week, as we embarked on our Advent journey, we explored the theme of miracles in the context of Isaiah's prophecy. We learned about the prophecy of the birth of Jesus into a world covered in darkness, a nation grappling with despair and gloom, and yet, amidst this bleak backdrop, a word of hope was given: the promise of a miracle. Isaiah spoke of a great light piercing through the darkness, a promise that was fulfilled centuries later in Jesus Christ.

For this second Sunday of Advent, we transition to a momentous event that took place seven centuries after Isaiah's prophecy, the Annunciation of the birth of Jesus, where the promise of this great miracle begins to materialize in a most extraordinary way. This story is about how miracles happen unexpectedly and often to the most unlikely people—even if no one notices them—but become tangible blessings when we receive them.

Today, we are talking about Mary, the mother of Jesus. In Luke 1:26-38, we find Mary, a young woman in Nazareth, who encounters the angel Gabriel. This encounter is not just a heavenly visitation; it is the unfolding of God's miraculous plan in a very unlikely place and person. Here is the story,

“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.”

Mary, a young woman of deep faith and humility, found herself in the presence of the divine. Gabriel's greeting, “Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you,” was not just a salutation but a declaration of the miracle to come. These words marked the announcement of the miracle—the incarnation of God in human form. For this, Mary was chosen to be the mother of Jesus, the Messiah, the fulfillment of the prophecy from Isaiah of light in the darkness given seven centuries earlier.

Now, when Gabriel appeared to Mary, what was her response to the news of her being chosen to mother the Son of God? Her response to the angel is, “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.” Mary's response was humble and simple yet reflected a profound faith and willingness to be a part of this divine mystery. Her eager response

to participate in what God was doing embodied a depth of faith, humility, and willingness that speaks profoundly to our journey of faith and service to God.

What does this mean to us, and what can we learn about miracles from it? When confronted with the divine message, Mary's reaction wasn't one of pride or self-glorification at being chosen for such an honor. Instead, her words, "I am the Lord's servant... May your word to me be fulfilled," resonated with a profound humility and surrender to God's will. This moment in Mary's life offers us invaluable insights into how miracles work in our lives: by making ourselves available and ready to be a part of what God is doing with determination and an unwavering commitment.

Consider how Mary, as a young woman, was likely aware of the social stigma and personal challenges her divine mission would entail, namely, being pregnant without a husband, yet trusted God's promise, and how her faith overshadowed her fears and doubts. Mary is a testimony, an example of faith and trust as the key ingredients for miracles, even when the circumstance or path ahead seems clouded and uncertain.

Perhaps we don't see the miracles happening in our lives and all around us because, just like the people who missed Jesus when he was born and lived as a man among us, we are driven by pride and personal ambition instead of faith and trust. Instead of saying like Mary, "Here I am Lord..." we demand from God or negotiate with him, saying, "If you want me to believe in you or serve you, do this for me or give me that..."

In addition to trust and faith, what else can we learn from Mary's story? Her humility in accepting her role as a servant of the Lord is a powerful lesson in recognizing our place in God's plan. It is not about seeking glory for ourselves but about understanding that we are vessels through which God's work can be accomplished. This humility allows us to serve with the right heart, acknowledging that any success or miracle that comes through our service is not our doing but God's. This is the kind of mindset that makes us grateful, content, and joyful no matter what is happening or what we are going through. And this is a key ingredient for miracles.

Moreover, Mary's story is a testament to the power of obedience. Her willingness to embrace God's plan is a model for us. In embracing God's plan, Mary opened herself to the miraculous. This is perhaps one of the most striking aspects of her story. It reminds us that miracles often happen when we align ourselves with God's will. They don't happen because we have more faith than others but because whatever faith we may have is completely aligned with God's will. Our challenge is not a lack of faith but alignment. For this reason, our openness and willingness to say "yes" to God pave the way for miracles in our lives in forms we might not anticipate.

The impact of Mary's trust, faith, obedience, and alignment with God's plans changed everything; it literally brought light into the world, changing the course of history. In the same way, our willingness to trust and serve God can have far-reaching effects not only in our lives but also in the lives of those around us, including our family, friends, and co-workers. The opposite is also true; ignoring, rejecting, and not taking our faith seriously and God's calling and plan for our lives also have consequences: broken relationships, lost opportunities and blessings in life,

and living without purpose and happiness. They are not curses from God but situations where we didn't let God in.

I don't want to be a stumbling stone or curse to anyone; I want to be a blessing. I want to be the kind of person Mary was, through whom God made miracles happen for the sake of others. I believe that miracles come when we have that kind of faith and mindset when we see ourselves as vessels of goodness, just as Mary did.

This is where the good life is actually found, not in stuff, money, or fame, but in being a vessel of the goodness of God and for the world. This is one of the sources of great joy, saying "yes" to God and committing ourselves to God's plan.

In my personal experience, I have discovered a profound joy in being a part of God's plan, in knowing my life is valuable, has a purpose, blesses people, and helps make things better. When we answer God's calling for us, saying as Mary did, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word," we will experience the miracle of Jesus in our lives. He will be with us and change everything. He will give us a new life, a new sense of purpose, a new mindset and perspective about the world and the things that really matter in life. We will see and treat others differently, in a good way, because we will no longer see them as enemies but as children of God. We will not be driven by greed or ambition but by gratitude and creativity. Hatred and bickering will be cast out and replaced with kindness and compassion. Aren't these things miracles? Yet many people don't even realize how their lives are living, walking miracles because that is not the "good stuff." If Jesus has transformed your life, you already have your miracle, and much more is still coming.

In essence, Mary's response to the Annunciation is not just a biblical account to admire but a powerful guide for our own lives. It challenges us to trust, obey, and serve with humility and faith and to be open to God's miraculous ways to work in and through us. Just as Mary was a part of the greatest miracle of all time, our willingness to be a part of God's plan may align us with his miraculous workings, transforming our lives and those around us in ways we never imagined.

My friends, the good news and invitation is that a miracle is coming and is already here. If we want the miracle to arrive in our lives, to be a part of it, and to experience life abundance the way God intended it for us, we must make sure we say "yes" to God.