

Luke 1:26-45

The Birth of Jesus Foretold

²⁶ In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, ²⁷ to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸ The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you." ²⁹ Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. ³⁰ But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. ³¹ You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. ³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, ³³ and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end." ³⁴ "How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"

³⁵ The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called^[a] the Son of God. ³⁶ Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. ³⁷ For no word from God will ever fail." ³⁸ "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled." Then the angel left her. ³⁹ At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, ⁴⁰ where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹ When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. ⁴² In a loud voice she exclaimed: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! ⁴³ But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? ⁴⁴ As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. ⁴⁵ Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!"

THE WORD OF GOD.

This whole Scripture reading *is* The result of God's power working through individuals to bring about His divine purpose on earth. God's ways are not always our ways. God has plans for our lives that surprise us all. There is a word Serendipity...Many of us do not use that word often...But Serendipity occurs to us many times when something beautiful breaks into the normal routine of our lives, bringing new vitality and joy. It is all so totally unexpected, and because of it, life would never be the same again.

Our God is a god of serendipities, doing new things, often at times when we least expect them. Our lives might be in a rut or we might be frustrated and worn out from some difficult turns our lives may have taken. Then suddenly, often quite unexpectedly, a new thing happens, and it changes our lives forever. I'm sure if David were with us again in our age and we were to personally interview him; he'd be profoundly baffled and amazed by the manner in which God worked to fulfill the promise that David's house, kingdom and throne would be forever! When God revealed the ancient prophecy to David, God did not have in mind a literal house, kingdom and throne of David! God did not mean political, economic, social wealth, power and status. .. Rather, the ancient prophecy was a reference to God's Messiah, who would come into the world at God's appointed time. The time of Jesus Birth Foretold. Then there's Mary in today's gospel. This young woman--most likely a teenager at the time of the Annunciation--Mary, living out in small town Nazareth, engaged to be married to Joseph the carpenter; is totally taken by surprise, as God's messenger Gabriel speaks directly to her one day. The messenger shocks her nearly to death by telling her that she is God's favoured one; she is going to give birth to the Messiah; she is going to name him Jesus .. "God will save"! If we were to interview Mary today, and ask her whether this was part of her plan; whether she was expecting such a visitor, with such a message, do you think, for even one second, that she'd answer us with a "Yes"? I DON'T THINK SO.. In order to "prove this miracle" about to happen, Gabriel pointed to another miracle. Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month. For nothing is impossible with God What a surprise that was to Mary! What a surprise that is even to us today! God's ways are not our ways!

When God revealed the ancient prophesy to David he was talking about the time in history centuries later; when Jesus the son of Mary and

Joseph was born; would grow up in small town Nazareth; would be baptized by cousin John; would then begin his earthly ministry of teaching, preaching and healing; would then lay down his life on the cross for all of humankind.

God's ways not being the same as our ways? Have there not been times and situations in our lives too like David and Mary? I know there have been in my life. For example, if someone had asked me a 10f years ago if I would be the pastor of North Main UMC; I'd likely have answered them in the negative, and say something like: "I don't think so." Or at best, I'd have said: "That's news to me!" God's ways are not our ways. God calls the strangest people; speaks the most surprising messages to them; and asks them to do the most unexpected things. At first, we, like Mary, tend to respond by being perplexed; by becoming overwhelmed or afraid. We, like Mary, may also be sceptical: "How can this be,..." Or we, again perhaps like Mary, may wish God would not choose us for such an unplanned, surprising future. After all, we are "creatures of habit,"..Think back in your own live to 10 years ago and ask your self if you would have thought you would be where you are today.. In a world that extols the virtues of planned, ordered living; the message of today's gospel instructs us not to be afraid of God's unexpected, surprising plans for our lives. God's word speaks to us, "Do not be afraid." As we look at our own personal lives or the lives of loved ones; we may respond with fear for the future and ask questions like: Am I ready to face and accept the whatever happens..? God answers: "Do not be afraid." Or maybe we fear our future as a Church : what are God's future plans for Us here at North Main? Will we live and grow, prosper and flourish or will we wither and die? God answers us: "Do not be afraid." Even if God calls us to this unexpected, surprising future, can we, like Mary do what he wants us to do? Once again, God's messenger reassures us: "For nothing will be impossible with God." We need to learn to expect great and wonderful things from the Lord. I think the point of the Scripture today for us is that God uses people to bring his grace into this world. We can't be Mary, bringing God's Son into this world, but we can be called by Grace to be God's helpers here on Earth. God's presence in this world came about because He found Mary and bestowed his grace upon her and Mary said it was ok. Being called by God does not mean a life of easy living. We just need to be more like Mary and have faith. Faith that allowed her to say yes to the angel. This child born to Mary spent his WHOLE LIFE - every

waking moment - obeying God's laws in our place. He took the time to preach to the poor and heal the sick - not just Christmas time.

If God appeared to you tonight and said, "I am going to be working through you for a while, would you say - "ok"? Or would you say, "God, I don't think that would work so well"? Or would you say, "just wait for me to finish .. whatever..- the list goes on. The sad thing is that our answers are reflected in the way we approach the holidays every year. If you were to compare how much time you spend doing whatever to worshipping, how does it compare?. When it is suggested to take this extra time during this "busy" season to keep focused on Christ.. we are very jealous of our "time." "I don't have time we say, but that's why God chose Mary. The angel simply said she was "highly favored" - and she said Yes. God surprises each of us sometimes But, he didn't want this birth of Jesus to surprise anyone. He predicted how it would happen, He predicted where it would happen and He sent Gabriel to personally tell Mary exactly what was going to happen through her. What a wonderful surprise Christmas is for us and was for Mary, simply because she said Yes when Jesus birth was foretold to her.