



The Nourishing Vocation Project

Engaging the Living Word

[Luke 1:26-38](#)

What is this particular text?

- The Annunciation
- Announcement
- Foretelling
- Visit from a holy messenger
- Call and invitation

How does the text function within the scriptural story?

- A major, life-changing, reality-altering turning point
- God communicating God's desire to be nearer to humanity
- Continues the tradition of holy birth through surprising women

How can this text function in the church today?

- How would the church be different if it responded to God's call the way Mary did?
- What if the church greeted marginalized peoples as favored ones?
- Mary takes time to ponder. What does faithful pondering look like for the church?
- How would the church be different if it called people ages 0-30 favored ones?
- How do we as a church discern when God is communicating with us?

What does the text do to you? How do you react to the text? What feelings does this text engender in you?

- I relate to Mary. I have had many interactions where I have pondered the meaning and intent of a greeting
 - I often question interactions as they're happening because I'm not sure if I'm safe or not
- Makes me a little jealous – I wish I were as certain as Mary when she answers Gabriel
- Makes me feel a little uneasy
- So many questions
- Brings up feelings of nostalgia
 - Mary's response is part of the rosary, which I learned while milking cows with my dad as a little kid. The radio in the barn was set to a station that had an evening rosary hour

What do you have to say to the text?

- I don't think I would react the same way if an angel encountered me
- I admire Mary's response to Gabriel in verse 38
- I think I would need to ponder what sort of interaction that was, too, if an angel greeted me that way
- Mary's mind must have been spinning with all the unknowns
- Mary just agreed to have a child with God, who is both within and beyond any and all gender identities and expressions. That's super cool
- Those who are favored by God are often not favored by society



- I am grateful that God gave Mary a choice. She gets to say “yes” or “no,” unlike pregnancies in other ancient religious traditions

What do you see through this text from the story itself?

- An angel greeting a young woman, likely only in her early teens, as “favored one”
- A puzzled young woman whose entire world is about to be flipped upside down
- The text centers Mary’s voice and experience
- It doesn’t appear that Joseph was part of this conversation at all
 - The decision was Mary’s to make

What do you see from within your church/community/world? (2022)

- Lots of pondering and uncertainty
- The church wants to say yes to God, but is often sidetracked by its own biases and its inward focus
- Deeply faithful people who dare to say yes to God
 - even when it means having to leave the church to do so
 - even when it means they won’t be as well liked
 - even when it means letting go of relationships
 - even when it means leaving a much-loved place
 - even when it means being judged
 - even when it means giving up power, money, social status
 - even when it means risking it all
 - even when it means engaging in the terrifying task of daring to be their most authentic selves
- I’ve often heard churches speak of young people as people they need to attract to appear more diverse, not as full members
- Young people struggling with the church because it has made them feel undervalued, less than, like they’re simply a number
- Crises of today:
 - Young people intentionally rejecting organized religious practice
 - The institution of the church can function as a powerful gatekeeper
 - Birth pangs in the church and the culture are always hard

What do you see within yourself?

- Times when I have been perplexed by what God is doing in my life
- Times when God has communicated something to me
 - Sometimes I say yes without doubt; most of the time I have doubts
- Times when I have known that God is with me
 - And times I didn’t realize God was with me until much later
- I distinctly remember feeling very affirmed by God as a teenager – and also very perplexed by God
- Times when I have wanted to say no to God

What is the context – textual and historical?

- Comes after John the Baptist’s birth being foretold
- Precedes Mary’s visit to Elizabeth
- This passage only appears in Luke



What questions does this text raise for you?

- Why is it so important to describe Mary as a virgin?
 - And what is the significance of Mary describing herself as a virgin?
- What do angels look like?
 - What do their voices sound like?
 - What do they smell like? Do they have a smell?
 - Have I ever encountered an angel and not known it?
- What if Mary had said no to God?
 - What would God have done?
- What *is* virginity?
- When is God perplexing?
- How would a teenage parent read this text?
- What does being favored by God mean?
 - What does it feel like?
- What were Mary's thoughts after the angel left?
- Did Mary feel pressured to say yes?
- Who have God's messengers been in my life?
 - Have I ever recognized them in the moment?

What words/themes seem of particular import?

- "Favored one"
- Perplexed
- Overshadow
- "Here am I"
- Angel
- "the Lord is with you"

What is the Gospel / transforming Good News within this text?

- The most marginalized are the favored ones of God
- It's ok to be perplexed/confused by God – it happens to everyone at some point, even Jesus' own mother
- God sends messengers to us
- God has a way of making seemingly impossible things happen
 - Wondrously mysterious
- God wants to be close to us
 - God initiated contact with Mary out of a desire to dwell among humanity in a new way

What is the as-over-againstness of this text?

- Mary being called "favored one" doesn't mean others aren't favored; it's not a competition
- Answering when God communicates isn't always a simple 'yes' or 'no'
- Mary's 'yes' isn't a simple answer
- God's call is often unexpected
- God's call is often to and for surprising people
- Imagining the new things that God is doing stretch and challenge us



Who does this text say that Jesus is, or if not Jesus, then who does this text say that God is? What does this text say about God?

- God favors those with little to no power
- God sends messengers
- Jesus has a lot of power. Even before he was born, God told Mary he would “reign over the house of Jacob” and that his kingdom would “have no end”

What have others said about this text?

- [“How could Mary have possibly imagined](#) what would follow that first “Here am I” and how many times must she have been compelled to say it again and again throughout the life of this baby, this child, this man who was so very much a part of her? Like all who came before her, she responded in a way that risked all that she had been, all that she had loved, whatever future she might before that moment have imagined for herself. Only hers feels different to me, more intimate, yes, even more risky somehow, seeing as she was at the lowest end of the social order with so little to lean back on should it all go bad.” Janet Hunt
- [“When Gabriel appeared to Mary,](#) the news was not only huge for her. It was huge news for the world. From that day forward, things would be different. Nothing would ever be the same, because God was coming near to humankind. As Anglican priest and theologian Sir Edwyn Hoskyns put it, the Incarnation is “a dagger thrust into the weft of human history.” In other words, the birth of Jesus forever changed the fabric of our world. In fact, the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem made us fully aware of how God the Creator is woven into our lives and relationships, into our joys and our sorrows, into our pasts and our futures.” Carrie Ballenger
- [“We don’t know what Mary was doing](#) when the Angel Gabriel showed up. Holy scripture doesn’t tell us. I’m willing to bet, however, that getting pregnant with and ultimately giving birth to the Son of God was not on her to-do list for the day. Whatever she was doing Gabriel interrupted her day; physically, emotionally, and spiritually. With Gabriel’s announcement Mary’s life and world are interrupted. Her plans and expectations are interrupted.” Michael Marsh

What will I teach or proclaim?

- Answering God’s call means showing up authentically, as you are
 - This can be incredibly risky
- Marginalized people often ponder interactions as they are happening to gauge whether or not they are safe
 - Mary did this when the angel Gabriel first spoke to her
 - I often do this as a transgender person
- I wonder if you have ever gotten a message from God. What did God communicate?
 - I’ve received a small handful
 - One was shortly after I encountered trauma and the harsh realities of death for the first time at the age of 14
 - God communicated that I could get as angry and sad as I wanted, but nothing I did was ever going to make God let go of me
 - The basic message was that I could cling to God with one hand and throw punches at God with the other, and that was ok
- Saying yes to God involves a huge amount of trust.
 - A person isn’t always in a position to have the amount of trust it takes to say yes to God
 - This is where it’s important to rely on the community we have in Christ



- There will be others who have the capacity to say yes to God when we cannot
- There will be others to hold God's promises for us when we cannot believe them for ourselves
- God has a way of interrupting our lives
 - Be specific about ways God has interrupted mine
 - Be specific about ways God has interrupted the community/congregation's life
- Those whom God favors are not those society favors
 - God favors the most oppressed because the odds are stacked against them
 - So many of the powers and institutions people put their trust in were made to operate on the oppression of vulnerable people
 - Jesus' mother, Mary, was one of these people
 - Be specific about who it is that God favors
 - Neurodivergent people
 - Mentally ill people
 - Disabled people
 - Unhoused and underhoused people
 - Poor people
 - Immigrants
 - LGBTQIA2S+ people
 - BIPOC people
 - Victims of war
 - Be specific about concrete ways in which the church or, better yet, your specific audience, can listen to, learn from, and directly assist those whom God favors
- God, who is within and beyond each and every gender and gender presentation, wants to be near us. God wants to be among us