

Session 2: How can this be?

Stillness

As you begin this time of prayer, allow your body to settle into a peaceful and comfortable position. Let your mind settle, putting your preoccupations into God's hands for this time. Listen to the sounds around you, focussing in from those far away to those nearest to you: the sounds within your room, the sound of your own breathing, relaxing as you hear each breath drawn. Mary listened to God's word and pondered it in her heart. Try to open your heart and mind to what God is trying to announce to you right now. The reading for today's session is from the Gospel of Luke.

(Luke 1:26-38)

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, favoured 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 favour 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 for ever, 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.

Reflect

It's not easy to imagine the Annunciation. We don't know for certain what happened or how Mary experienced God's extraordinary communication. Medieval paintings are beautiful but often depict an exalted event, far from the mess and chaos of human reality. If Mary was at home, the domestic setting would be simple and cluttered, full of the banal, everyday features of a girl's life in a simple environment. Perhaps she saw the solid figure of an angel, or perhaps this happened in a dream. Perhaps it began as an inner whisper that gathered and grew into something clear and unmistakable. What we do know is that Mary's first reaction was to ask questions: How can this be? Why me? How can I be sure? How will I manage? These are questions many of us have grappled with at crossroad moments in our lives.

As a woman Mary has little or no value in her society except in relation to someone else. Yet on her response hangs the fate of the whole human race. She feels uncertain, inadequate to the task, confused. But she also has faith in God, a generous heart, willing to take risks and go forward in trust that God will be with her.

In Mary, God-with-us will come to life in her if only she will allow this to happen. God knows her fears and waits patiently for her to make the choice. God knows what is in our deepest heart – better than we know it ourselves. God's way of dealing with us is through collaboration, not dictatorship. Knowing our hesitations, doubts and fears, God waits in both the crucial and the trivial moments of our lives for us to say yes.

Talk to God

Has there been a sense for me, this year, of something wanting to come to birth? This has been an uncertain time, with many unusual demands on us as we adjust to a 'new normal'. Perhaps there has been a sense of loss, of the death of what felt safe and familiar. Have I been able to share this with God, allowing myself the vulnerability of mourning, or have I turned in on myself, relying on my own resources?

If there has been loss and threat, perhaps there has also been a sense of opportunity, of new pathways opening up. The pandemic invites us to a new solidarity with the poor and the marginalized, with everything that is fragile in our world. What strengths and graces have I felt I needed to respond to the world as it is now? I ask God to widen my horizons, to give me the strength of mind and heart to see where this new way of being me in the world may lead.

The word 'angel' means messenger. What messages from God am I hearing right now? What kind of messenger am I able to be to those around me? I can be good news or bad news – the choice is mine. I spend some time with God, listening as deeply as I can to what God is announcing to me.

O Wisdom

Lord and Ruler



Root of Jesse

Key of David

Rising Sun

King of the Nations

Emmanuel

Come, Lord Jesus