

advent week one

day seven, saturday, december 4th

"Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the descendants of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. And coming in, he said to her, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." But she was very perplexed at this statement, and kept pondering what kind of salutation this was. The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall 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 father David; and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end." Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" The angel answered and said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy Child shall be called the Son of God. And behold, even your relative Elizabeth has also conceived a son in her old age; and she who was called barren is now in her sixth month. For nothing will be impossible with God." And Mary said, Behold, the bond-slave of the Lord; may it be done to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her."

Luke 1:26-38

The story of Mary is a stunning one. A young woman of no reputation or status is visited by an angel and informed that she will become pregnant, by the Holy Spirit, with the Son of God. She will carry in her body the Savior of the world, the King that all of Israel has been waiting for. Just as amazing to me, though, is the proof Gabriel offers that such a thing is possible: Mary's old and barren cousin Elizabeth is six months pregnant!

Elizabeth, unlike Mary, is a woman of standing and reputation. She is the wife of a temple priest and a daughter of Aaron, meaning her lineage, like her husband's, could be traced back to him. Despite that, she did not and could not have children, which would have been a source of great shame for a wife in those days. But after many years, God, in Elizabeth's words, "looked with favor upon her" and "took away [her] disgrace among men." (Luke 1: 25)

If Mary had any concerns about the scandal or costs of being pregnant and unwed, she could look to her cousin—humiliated for much of her married life, but never left or forsaken. -->

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day seven, saturday, december 4th, contd.

Mary holds out courage. Elizabeth offers hope. One helps us face the mystery of a life with Christ. The other reminds us that because of Christ, our circumstances don't have the last word; that even in the darkest places, we are seen and not forgotten in God's story. Both women should inspire us to greater faith.

REFLECT: Which woman challenges you most? Is it Mary, willing to move forward into the unseen, or Elizabeth, living with hope despite her situation?

PRAY: God, you have said that you would never leave or forsake us. Remind us daily that no matter where we are, you are there, rejoicing over us, and calling us yours. Amen.