

## IDLEWILD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

---

The Reverend David J. Powers  
Sunday, November 11, 2022

---

### Luke 1:26-38

If you are joining us for the first time this Advent season, I've mentioned a few times now that we're continuing in our worship series—Minor Figures, Major Faith. We are trying to learn what it looks like to welcome the Christ in our midst, and we believe that there are...there are some characters in scripture that we don't necessarily always pay attention to, and we should because they have things to teach us.

Our figure this day is Gabriel. The angel. Gabriel makes a handful of appearances in this first chapter of Luke that we'll read from in just a moment, but Gabriel first shows up for us in Daniel, actually. In our Hebrew text about the prophet, scripture tells us that Gabriel shows up to Daniel and actually helps interpret a vision, or a dream, for Daniel. Then, later, Gabriel will show up to Zachariah, then to Mary, as we'll read later on to the Shepherds. So this is one of many appearances of this angel of God. To Zechariah, when Zechariah questions whether he and Elizabeth will actually have a child, Gabriel says, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God." As if we needed any more proof. This angel, this messenger dwells closely to the heart of God. And so the messages that we hear come from that heart.

So we'll read this day beginning in verse 26 in the first chapter of the Gospel of Luke.

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. Then 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 forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.' Mary said to Gabriel, '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 I am, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.' Then the angel departed from her.

The grass withers and the flower fades, but the word of Our Lord endures forever. Amen

## IDLEWILD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

---

The Reverend David J. Powers  
Sunday, November 11, 2022

---

“Greetings, favored one, the Lord is with you,” Gabriel says. “Greetings, favored one, the Lord is with you.”

It's a joy to bring good news, isn't it? When you have a bit of good news to share with someone, it's a joy, and Gabriel gets to do that. Sometimes in our tradition the messengers of God, or angels, they show up and they have convicting news to share, but sometimes like this scene in the Gospel of Luke, the angel has good news to share. You think about the last time you got to share good news with someone. Maybe you got to share with them something that was good going on in your life, that you knew was going to encourage them, or that you were just excited to share with somebody. Maybe you had found something out about them that you were going to get to share with them. Good news.

Thinking about our children as they make their way through the end of a semester or of a quarter, hopeful to be able to come home and share good news about how studies have gone. I didn't get to do that very often with my dad. It was more often than not me sharing bad news. I don't think I did as well as I expected to, but sometimes I got to share good news, and I would make my way home much more purposefully on those days.

“Greetings, favored one. The Lord is with you.”

And Mary doesn't know how to receive this message. We seldom do. Not sure about the last time you had an encounter with the messenger of God, but it can be perplexing, and that was her response too. The angel, sensing this, says to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.” It's interesting. Gabriel is going to show up three times in the beginning of the Gospel of Luke, and each time either the first words out of Gabriel's mouth or the second sentence out of his mouth is going to be, “Do not be afraid.” Those are the first words that he speaks to Zachariah in that temple when he's gone in to offer incense before God. “Do not be afraid, Zechariah.” Later when Gabriel shows up amongst the shepherds, “Do not be afraid.” The first four words out of Gabriel's mouth. It's interesting.

I was listening to uh an old Super Soul Sunday. Oprah and Brene Brown. Maybe y'all followed those closely during the pandemic. One of the Sundays I woke up and I got to hear Brene's take on joy. She says joy is actually the most terrifying of all emotions for us, because every time we begin to have a sense of the feeling of joy, there's this foreboding that falls over us. When we have lost our capacity for vulnerability, she says, then joy becomes foreboding. It's interesting then that Gabriel's first words would be do not be afraid. You're going to have some good news, and I don't want you to miss it for fear.

Gabriel though has two kinds of good news to share with Mary. The first is good news for her, but it's a good news wrapped in complexity. You're going to conceive a child; you're going to bear forth into the world the Incarnation of God. That's good news we would hope for her, even if it's scary news too. But it'll take time for that good news to really take root. But it's not just good news for Mary, it's good news also for the world. “He will be great. He will be called the

## IDLEWILD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

---

The Reverend David J. Powers  
Sunday, November 11, 2022

---

son of the most high, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.” So the news that she receives is not just good news for her but indeed for all of creation. Gabriel says, “You are nurturing the Incarnation of God. Within you dwells a spark of the Divine that you did not place there, but that God places there.” Your calling is to nurture it. It's going to make you sick sometimes. It's going to ask a lot of your body and of your mind and of your spirit to nurture the Incarnation of God within you; but when you bear it into the world, it's going to change the world.

It is going to bring a type of peace that only the Incarnation of God can bring. It is going to bring a type of justice that only the Incarnation of God can bring. It is going to bring a type of love that only the Incarnation of God can bring. There is something born of God within you that you are called to bear out.

It's good news, but it's also difficult news, because as Scott Erickson says, “The process of growth is always uneasy... [It's always uneasy] because growth never comes through ease. It comes through the stretching and expanding of one's own capacity to push ahead.” And the difficulty of that growth, “the difficulty of letting God grow you is the trust that is asked of you when you aren't quite clear what the outcome” is going to look like.

Mary knows she trusts Gabriel, that there is a spark of God within her; and Gabriel shares a foreshadowing of what that spark will do in the world, that incarnation of God. But she doesn't really know. We never do. When God has planted within us something divine that is aching to be birthed into the world, it is going to take our energy and our time. It's going to take care and intention. It's going to make us sick on some mornings. It's going to make us joyful on others.

In this season of Advent we wait, but we trust that it is an active waiting. What does that mean though? It means that we are active in the way that we nurture that which is within us which is holy.

We don't simply pretend that God is growing within us and we don't have any role in it; but we actually claim that there's a different type of waiting that leans forward, that's taking part in the growth with God.

In response to this good news that Gabriel shares with her, Mary says some of the most beautiful and faithful words that we will read in scripture together. “Let it be with me according to your word.” That's a hard thing to say...that is a hard thing to say as we begin the journey of laboring God into existence in the world.

But she models for us what it might look like to trust and to fall into faith and trust and grace in this season of Advent. Mary has a desire to serve God through her living, and the only way that we can say that back to God— “Let it be to me according to your word”— the only way that we can do that is through believing that God is indeed with us and God's will is ultimately good.

## IDLEWILD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

---

The Reverend David J. Powers  
Sunday, November 11, 2022

---

So the question remains— what does Gabriel teach us about welcoming the Christ?

Perhaps he simply teaches us to not be afraid. Perhaps that's why that phrase has to be repeated over and over and over again. You do not need to be afraid of the new thing that God is doing within you. You do not need to be afraid of the thing that has been planted within you which is being nurtured right now.

Perhaps it is a new season in your work life. Perhaps it is some new adventure that you have to go on in your relational life. Perhaps it has to do with the way that you are going to nurture your children. Perhaps it has to do with how you're going to engage in your life of faith here at Idlewild. Perhaps the new thing that is happening is actually the end of something beautiful. You have to walk in faith into that too.

I don't know if Mary believed Gabriel when he said that she did not need to be afraid, but I'm not sure we have any other option this morning.

When God is doing something within us, we cannot stop it from growing. We cannot stop it from coming forth within us. The question is how we're going to nurture it, how we're going to care for it, how we're going to be intentional about it. My hope for you is that you might spend some time in the quiet of this Advent season imagining again what God is trying to birth through you and hearing the echo of the angel—first to Zachariah, then to Mary, and later to the shepherds. Do not be afraid. Do not be afraid. Do not be afraid. The God that we worship is good. The creation born within you is good too.

In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, one God, Mother of us all. Amen.