

HERE AM I

Scripture Readings: 2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16; Luke 1:46b-55 or Psalm 89:1-4, 19-26; Romans 16:25-27; Luke 1:26-38

“Here am I, the servant of the Lord.”

I sometimes wonder where Mary was when Gabriel greeted her. The gospel writer of Luke is startlingly short on details. We know she was in Nazareth but that’s about it.

Where would a young 13 or 14 year old woman of marriageable age have the time or the space to meet the occasional angel? Where would there be space in a small first century peasant house with Mary surrounded night and day by her family members? It’s not like Mary would have her own room sporting lace and posters of her favorite rock star on the walls. Where would a coddled and protected girl go without an escort before she was married off at her father’s pleasure? She could go to no mall with giggling girlfriends or even to the local coffee house to check out the boys while in turn they checked her out.

How did this life changing encounter with angel take place?

We only know that the angel came and pronounced favor on Mary and proclaimed the good news that she would bear a child—a special world changing child—before she married.

Good news? How could this favor be good news?

Pregnant and unmarried in a world that stones women who show before the appropriate time, this is good news?

This news is not romantic or quaint, it is sheer terror; a dark path in the midst of a young woman’s life barely begun. Who would willingly walk in such shadows, and who would ever walk with her?

Why would Mary ever agree to this favor? As she declares I have been faithful and righteous, how could such a favor be possible? Such favor asks her to risk her family, Joseph, and her life.

So was it assurance that the angel offered when he simply told her, “For nothing will be impossible with God.”

And so Mary says, “Here am I, the servant of the Lord.”

With those words, she echoes her ancestors Abraham and Jacob when they were called by God; she reflects the favor discovered by her ancestral sister, Hannah, and she echoes the words of Hannah's son Samuel. She stands with the prophet Isaiah who also responds to God's call to redeem God's people, "Here am I."

Does Mary's voice quaver as she says those words; does she feel terrified—what new parent doesn't?

A child: will he be normal; will he be perfect? Does she envision him cradled in her arms as she gently washes him, nurses him, when he laughs with delight, or when he cries over some little owie? Does she imagine her child grown up reaching out to others with a loving touch, healing in his words, offering good news of hope, and like his ancestors, Samuel and Isaiah, will he redeem his people?

Does Mary feel the shadow when she envisions her child? Does she sense the cross and his brutal death so that again she will cradle him in her lap; the last breath gone and her tears splashing on his broken face?

Light and shadow—the hopes and fears of every parent—all must pass before her in that brief instant. And yet, still she answers, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord."

Do we hear God calling us whether through angels in many guises or in the quiet of a still small voice? Do we stand with our ancestor and our sister Mary saying, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord?"