

She was an ordinary girl in an ordinary town doing an ordinary thing on an ordinary day. There was nothing special about Mary or Nazareth or Galilee or fetching water from the well. She could have been anyone from anywhere doing anything at anytime.

Until the angel appeared and transformed ordinary time into extraordinary time; until Gabriel interrupted the grim desperation of Mary’s peasant existence, *Luke 1:28 (NRSV) “Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.”*<sup>1</sup>

“What on earth are you talking about?” That is to say, *Luke 1:29 (NRSV) She was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be.*<sup>2</sup> She was no noble woman from Jerusalem; she was a Nazareth girl; no shame in that; no glory either, but “favored one?” What was a “favored one” doing fetching water from this well?

We don’t see the scene that way. The annunciation to Mary was a popular theme for European painters, and we see the scene through their eyes. We see Mary, dressed like a Renaissance noble woman in a grand gown standing in a large room in her family estate receiving the news from Gabriel. I wonder how many noblemen’s daughters provided the inspiration for these portraits of Mary?

Their art is exquisite, but the passage of time and thousands of miles combined to create quite a distance from the likely setting. Nazareth had no family estates. They were a few miles away in Sepphoris. Joseph likely earned his living there. It was only an hour commute for this workingman to find work, and a steady income wasn’t easy to find in Galilee. Mary probably lived in a modified cave. She had no room of her own. There was a room for their animals and some storage, a room to cook in, and a room in which they slept. Basic. Simple. Down-to-earth.

The Eastern tradition of the annunciation has its roots in the Holy Land. In this tradition, Mary is no noble girl in a villa overlooking a vineyard. She’s a Nazareth girl doing what girls in small towns the world around did in the first century – she’s fetching water at the well; an ordinary girl on an ordinary day in an ordinary town doing an ordinary thing.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*. 1989. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

<sup>2</sup> *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*. 1989. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

Who knows what was on her mind? Perhaps she was thinking of her life-to-be with Joseph? Perhaps she was mustering the strength to lug a heavy water jar (or two) up the hill to her home? Who knows? Whatever was on her mind, it was likely ordinary; the kinds of things girls with chores think to pass the time away.

Until God interrupted, until God overshadowed the ordinary and revealed the extraordinary: *Luke 1:28 (NRSV) “Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.”*<sup>3</sup>

We evade the extraordinary by ignoring the ordinary. Mary is a model of what it means to be a Christian – a follower of Jesus of Nazareth, but I wonder if we make too much of her? I wonder if we make her too “special?” That’s a wonderful way to keep her at a safe distance. We celebrate her submission to the will of God *Luke 1:38 (NRSV) “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.”*<sup>4</sup> We celebrate her response without considering what God is asking of us. We honor this extraordinary woman without wondering what we are capable of when God overshadows our lives and we respond, *Luke 1:38 (NRSV) “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.”*<sup>5</sup>

Ah, but this is the season of Advent; Advent reminds us that the moment that changes everything may be right around the corner. An ordinary guy in an ordinary town doing an ordinary thing on an ordinary day may be about to be changed forever. The change in them may change the world.

Hyperbole? Too many Christmas cookies washed down by too much coffee? Don’t sell yourself short. Don’t sell God short. Go to the well. Go about your business open to the possibility that God will make contact with you. You will meet angels unawares. They won’t have shiny wings and a trumpet; they’ll have something more – a message from God for you. A message you need to hear. A message the world needs to hear.

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<sup>3</sup> *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*. 1989. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

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<sup>5</sup> *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*. 1989. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

A message like, *Luke 1:28 (NRSV)* “Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.”<sup>6</sup> “Who me? I’m nobody special. I’m nobody at all. I don’t matter. I’m just an ordinary person doing an ordinary thing at an ordinary place on an ordinary day.”

Go to the well. Dare to believe that being a “favored one” doesn’t depend on measuring up to what other people expect. We don’t have to earn their approval. We don’t have to buy all the “must have” gifts to celebrate Christ-mass. We can celebrate the birth of Jesus of Nazareth without sacrificing ourselves to the god Mammon.

We can go to the well. We can surrender our pride that puts us at the mercy of other people’s expectations (or the expectations we tell ourselves that God has of us) and embrace the core value of Christmas – God gives us a gift. We don’t earn it. We don’t deserve it. Earning and deserving are the farthest things from God’s mind. God’s gift is simple and free: *Luke 1:28 (NRSV)* “Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.”<sup>7</sup>

What on earth am I talking about? I’m talking about changing your identity; your sense of who you are, what you value, what gives you hope, fills you with peace, inspires your joy, and renews your love. I’m talking about answering “who am I?” with “God has graced me. God is with me.” *Luke 1:38 (NRSV)* “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.”<sup>8</sup>

Mary was an ordinary girl doing an ordinary thing at an ordinary place on an ordinary day, but look at what God brought to life through her! We’re ordinary as well, but God reveals the extraordinary through the ordinary. “Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”

Dare to believe that you are God’s favored one. Surrender your pride that puts you at the mercy of great expectations. Dare to receive the gift of Christmas. You are blessed. You are loved. You are worthy. Give these gifts!

Don’t sell yourself short. Don’t sell God short. Go to the well. Amen.

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<sup>6</sup> *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*. 1989. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

<sup>7</sup> *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*. 1989. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

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