

BEING WITH OUR SISTER MARY

Guided Meditation offered by the Rev. Titus Presler in St. Peter's Church, Cambridge,
in the Principal Liturgy on the Fourth Sunday of Advent
Year B, Advent IV: Luke 1.26-38

+ In the name of God who gave birth to the Word,
God the Word made flesh,
and God the Spirit who empowers the Word for life. Amen.

*The way of imagination has much to offer us
in our spiritual journey with God
and in our appreciation of what comes to us in the word of God.*

*Today we find ourselves at a place of great wonder and great power
in the story of God's coming to us in Christ Jesus —
the story of the Annunciation, Gabriel's announcement to Mary that she will
conceive and bear a holy child, the Son of God.*

*What I offer you today is not a sermon but a guided meditation,
an opportunity to enter into this story in prayer and with imagination,
an opportunity to discover and receive what God may have for you in this story.*

So I suggest that you get comfortable where you are,
relaxed and in repose,
in a position where you will feel fine for ten or fifteen minutes;
you may wish to close your eyes, or you may wish to keep them open.
I will read the story again, piece by piece,
and along the way I will offer some suggestions for how you might wish to enter
into the story in your prayer.

*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.*

The "sixth month" is the sixth month of the pregnancy of Elizabeth, pregnant with the
boy who became John the Baptizer.

Focus on Mary at the outset.

In first-century Palestine, young women were married usually during their teenage years,
so Mary might have been that young.

Imagine her as she might have been.

As a Middle Easterner, her skin was probably tan and her hair dark, but beyond that, it's
up to you:

What did she look like?

What sort of features did she have?

How did she express herself facially and with her hands?

How did she carry her body?

Was she tall? Was she short?
Let your imagination decide, and then imagine her.

Imagine the town of Nazareth.
It was an ordinary town of white-washed, mud-brick homes, on narrow, dusty streets.
Fields and olive groves surrounded it.

Imagine the time of day and what Mary was doing when the angel came.
Was it night-time, and was she awakened from sleep?
Was it at dawn, and the angel found Mary at prayer by her bed or out in the courtyard?
Was it mid-morning, with Mary bustling about with household chores,
washing clothes, washing dishes, or tending the garden?
Was it mid-afternoon, hot, with the sound of crickets, and Mary sewing or weaving?
Was it in the cool of evening, with the sun setting, and Mary starting to work on the
evening meal?

You decide.
Then rest there with Mary, as you have imagined her to be.

The angel came to Mary and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be.

Imagine the angel.
Did the angel appear visually?
If so, what did the angel look like?
And what did Gabriel sound like?
Was the angel more like a column of light, or a distortion in the visual field?
Was the angel more an inner presence, accessible to Mary's spirit?
How did Mary know it was an angel?
How did she experience the angel communicating with her?
Let your imagination decide, then rest there.

Imagine Mary's response of perplexity.
What was she wondering?
What was she afraid of?

The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor 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."

Rest with this news coming into this ordinary setting.

The grand talk about Mary's child to be —
 greatness, Son of the Most High, throne of David, reigning forever, and everlasting
 kingdom —
 rest with those phrases.
 Rest with the news of what God was up to.
 Rest with the news of what God *is* up to.

Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?"

Imagine Mary receiving the grand news.
 She is counseled, "Do not be afraid."
 Is she still afraid, or not? Is she less afraid, or more afraid?

What does Mary mean in her question, "How can this be?"
 Is she puzzled about the how?
 Does she fear consequences — with her parents, with Joseph, with her friends, with
 neighbors in Nazareth, with the synagogue?
 Imagine Mary's thoughts and feelings.

*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."*

Hear deeply these words of the angel, and rest with them.

Imagine what Mary might have been feeling as she heard these words.
 Did she feel doubt, fear, joy?
 honor, embarrassment, outrage?
 humility, exultation?
 Does she feel reassured, or pushed out to the edge?

*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.*

Hear Mary's words deeply within yourself.

Imagine Mary thinking it over.
 Imagine what Mary was feeling.
 Imagine Mary making her decision.
 Rejoice and give thanks for Mary in her decision.

Now, ask yourself: What edge in my life is God pushing *me* toward?

Now, say within yourself, "Here am I. Let it be with me according to your word."

We don't know *exactly* what Mary did next,

but we do know that she acted on the promise:

very soon, she traveled up to see Elizabeth, to confirm the promise.

Imagine now what *you* will do next, with the edge toward which God is pushing *you*.

Now offer it all up to God:

your journey with Mary,

your journey with yourself,

and what you are going to do next.

Amen.