
 Life Changing Encounter



In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. And 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 call his name 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 father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end. And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?"

And the angel answered 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 called holy—the Son of God. And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. For nothing will be impossible with God." And Mary said, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her. (Lk 1:26-38)

The story of Annunciation is familiar. Luke tells it in few stages. First, we have the angel Gabriel greeting Mary (Lk 1:26-28) scaring her to death (Lk 1:29). To remedy the situation, Gabriel assures her that all is well (Lk 1:30) and spells out the content of his message (Lk 1:30-35). Finally, in order to convince Mary that "nothing is impossible with God" (Lk 1:36), he gives a sign: the pregnancy of barren and old Elizabeth. The story ends with the famous phrase: "Let it be" (Lk 1:38).

Fear of God

The Bible states that the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom. When Moses met God, he was afraid to look at Him (Ex 3:6) and when Isaiah had a vision of the Almighty he shouted: "Woe is me! For I am lost" (Is 6:5). The same happened to Zachariah (Lk 1:12), shepherds (Lk 2:9) and Mary (Lk 1:29).

An encounter with God brings "holy fear". In front of Him, we realize how tiny, insignificant, and

often sinful we are. Not to fear God is tantamount to foolishness. Not to fear Him means we have never met Him in the first place. Yet, it is not yet the whole story. God frightens and He calms us down. "Do not be afraid" is the most used phrase in the entire Bible. In the Christmas story, Zachariah, Shepherds, and Mary, all hear it. God does not come to punish but to save. "Your prayer has been heard" and "you have found favor with God", says Gabriel to Zachariah and Mary respectively (Lk 1:13; 1:30). The angel of the Lord tells shepherds: "I bring you good news of great joy" (Lk 2:10). Fear turns into rejoicing.

Nothing is Impossible

Fearful Moses dares to oppose a mighty Pharaoh. The nation of slaves gets freedom and its own land. Terrified Isaiah becomes one of the greatest prophets in the history of salvation. Zachariah and Elizabeth get their dreamed son and a young damsel becomes the mother of the Lord (Lk 1:43). "Is there anything impossible for the Lord?" (Gen 18:14), God asks Abraham.

There are three dreams in the entire bible: a child, a land, and a righteous king. All dreams seem impossible and yet God made them true. The dream child, Isaac, was given to Abraham in his old age. The land was given to Israel. The righteous king is given to the whole world in the person of Jesus. Is there anything impossible for the Lord?

Old Sarah laughs at the news that she is going to nurse a son (Gen 18:15). Elizabeth hides her pregnancy for five months (Lk 1:24). Mary asks the perennial question: "How can it be?" (Lk 1:34). Promise gets fulfilled. Impossible becomes reality. Gabriel clarifies our doubts: "Nothing is impossible for God" (Lk 1:37).

Mary as Model

Although the conversation takes place between the angel and Mary, yet it is all about Jesus. He is called the Son of the Most High and the fulfilment of God's promise given to David in ages past (2 Sam 7:12). The birth of John closes the old chapter of longing and hoping. The birth of Jesus begins the new chapter of fulfilment. God has come to save us and to establish His kingdom. Paul summarises the whole thing saying: "For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory" (2 Cor 1:20).

The Gospel of Luke presents Mary as the perfect Christian. When Jesus talks about the true family, he states that his mother and brothers are those who listen to God's word and obey it (Lk 8:19-21). Mary did it. She listened to the word of the angel and obey it. Her "let it be according to your word" is a pattern for us. She is not to be 'worshiped' for her perfect answer but 'imitated'. She was the first to receive Jesus into her life by accepting the word of God. Do we follow her example and listen to God's word, which directs us to Jesus? Do we welcome the Lord to our lives?

Conclusion

We live in different 'Nazareths', small and insignificant villages and towns of this world. Today Gabriel comes to us, with the Bible in his hand, announcing the history of salvation. Opening the Bible for the first time can be a frightening experience but after a while peace and rejoicing follow. We learn that nothing is impossible for God. Like Mary, we accept God's plan of salvation for our lives. We say "Let it be according to your word" and Jesus is conceived in our lives. Our Christian journey with God begins. Believe me, it is the most exciting journey one can take.

May God bless all of you who remember us in prayer and support our ministry here.

New Life Asia Team