



THE ANNUNCIATION

LUKE 1:26–28, 30–31, 34–38

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a virgin whose name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "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." Mary said to the angel, "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 am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

It is likely that at one time or another, in our classrooms or in our lives, we have found ourselves wondering: *How can this be? How does this happen to me?* These words may fill our mind or escape our lips in times of profound grace or in moments of struggle. We cannot fathom our fortune or blessings at an unexpected breakthrough with a student, an unexpected

answer to a problem, the opportunity to continue the work of Christ the Teacher (*How can this be?*). Or, we wrestle with deep frustration over failed efforts, things beyond our control, an unreachable student, a feeling of abandonment (*How does this happen to me?*).

In such moments Christ's first teacher, Mary, in her infinite grace and authenticity, becomes our teacher. When the angel announces that she is the chosen mother of Jesus, Mary does not get stuck in awe or confusion; she does not stop at the question, *How can this be?* Rather, her trust in God frees her to move forward with this powerful, enduring message: "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior . . . for the Mighty One has done great things for me" (Lk 1:46, 49). In moments when we feel either blessed or worn down, we too can go beyond the question to find the answer, the heart of the message. We can refocus, renew, and remember to proclaim the greatness of the Lord—for indeed, he has done great things for each one of us.

PRAYER

Father, today help us remember the awe and the bewilderment we often share with Mary. And let us, with Mary, be moved to proclaim your greatness!

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THE VISITATION

LUKE 1:39–42, 44

[After learning that she was pregnant by the Holy Spirit], Mary went with haste to the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leapt in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. As soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leapt for joy."

Some teachers make it all look so effortless. Their charismatic presence alone can engage students and stir up excitement for learning. Their knowledge of their students and what motivates them seems downright mystical. They have the perfect explanation for everything, and can present the most difficult ideas to the most challenging students in such a way that the concept sticks forever. Their classrooms are organized and vibrant. Their grading is always done. Their students are happy and well behaved. Yes, it seems these teachers are the lucky few who were blessed with some elusive gift.

So what's your average, run-of-the-mill, trying-to-get-it-all-together teacher (like myself) to do after seeing such masters at work in the classroom? How tempting it is to feel inferior, to give up, to lament, "Why don't I have that gift?"

I wonder if John the Baptist felt this temptation. In many ways, the story of the Visitation begins a "tale of two teachers," with John, still in Elizabeth's womb, selflessly and exuberantly witnessing the presence of the Master Teacher before either was even born. Would John always feel this way? Would John feel inklings of inferiority as the boys grew up together? Would he grow weary later in life, with crowds asking constantly, "Are you the one?" (knowing that the answer was always "no")?

Perhaps the greatest testament to the teaching power of John is this: a truly awesome teacher would always find the humility, over and over, to say, "No, I am not he," and to continue leading people toward the true Christ, helping them recognize and choose to follow him. And that, of course, is the ultimate mission of any Christian school teacher—to help our students recognize, know, and follow Jesus.

The example of a gifted teacher is itself a gift to the rest of us teachers. May God grant each of us the grace to see such an example and, rather than falling victim to inferiority, affirm, "That's the teacher I want to be." May he grant us time with, and receptive minds and

hearts toward, such master teachers, observing their ways and learning their secrets. When we fall short, may he give us the strength to get up and try again. And most especially, may our efforts, like John's, always show our students the way to Jesus.

PRAYER

Lord, help us to be humble students of Christ the Teacher, learning his ways and pointing others to the path of life.

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MAGNIFICAT

LUKE 1:46–49

*And Mary the mother of Christ said to Elizabeth,
“My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his
servant.
Surely, from now on all generations will call
me blessed;
for the Mighty One has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.”*

In parallel stories in Luke’s gospel, the Angel Gabriel announces miraculous births to Zechariah and Mary. Zechariah greets this news of Elizabeth’s pregnancy with doubt, momentarily closed to God’s message and therefore to the joy promised. To Mary, Gabriel announces something far more incredible. Mary’s response to this mystery defines her as the first teacher of Christ.

The difference in their responses is subtle. Zechariah, realistic and grounded, asks, “How *can* this be?” There is doubt in his heart at the improbability of the promise. While Mary, in a far more confounding

situation, responds, “How *will* this be?” And then, “I am the Lord’s servant. Let it be done unto me as you have said.” There is much magic in this moment. This is Mary’s first act as a mother, as the first teacher of Jesus. As he enters her womb, she teaches him to respond to God’s mystery with wonder, openness, and joy.

Mary does not understand, but she also does not doubt. Unlike Zechariah’s initial response, she stands before mystery in *wonder*. Wonder is at the heart of education, which seeks to deepen our relationship with reality and with creation. As teachers, being people of wonder allows us to teach with wonder. Jesus is the perfect example of one full of wonder at God’s goodness, and his ministry is defined by eliciting this wonder in others. “Now when Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were astounded at this teaching” (Mt 7:28).

Mary also responds with radical *openness* to the wonder of God’s activity. Where Zechariah is initially closed, Mary is open like a child. Her “yes” is the first act of Christian discipleship, but also the first act of a great teacher. This “yes” in the face of mystery requires humility and faith. Zechariah is too bound to his preconceptions, his sense of control. Teaching requires a deep openness to what God has done, and will do. Christ is the perfect teacher because he is perfectly open to God’s presence and will.

The results are striking. Zechariah is stricken dumb and cannot proclaim the joy that should be his. Mary's response is pure joy. She runs to Elizabeth and sings, "My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior!"

The fruits of wonder and openness are the joy and peace of Christ the Teacher.

PRAYER

Lord, fill us with your Spirit so that we may be witnesses to wonder, and teachers of wonder, today.

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