

READ LUKE 1:26-38

God sends the angel Gabriel to the virgin Mary, a young girl who is engaged to a man named Joseph. She is afraid, but Gabriel tells her God has a surprise for her! She will become pregnant and give birth to a son called Jesus, who will rule a kingdom that will never end. Mary is confused about how this is possible, since she's a virgin. Gabriel assures her that this child will be God's son, conceived by the Holy Spirit. Mary agrees to this plan.

FURTHER THOUGHT

Why is it so important to so many that Mary is a virgin? Is it difficult to accept that God would choose an average girl for God's work, so we need her to be pristine or pure? Is virginity more pure than motherhood? Do we set the same standards for the male disciples?

Think about the gender issues in the spotlight today. Have we come a long way since this story? Do women have to be significantly better, smarter and more blameless than their male counterparts in order to be seen as equals? Why? Can God's radical love turn the patriarchy that we've created upside down? How?

Consider this quote from Rob Bell's NOOMA video called Open: "God creates trees, but then gives trees the ability to create more. God creates animals and plants and fish, but then empowers them to create more. God creates people and gives them the ability to create more. So everything in creation is essentially unfinished. God leaves the world unfinished and invites people to take part in the ongoing creation of the world."

Is this story about sexual morality, or the birth of one baby long ago? Or is it a metaphor for creation itself? Are we called to remain pure, or are we called to get our hands dirty by participating in this ongoing creation, spreading love, beauty and kindness? What is the difference? How is this child of God being born through you, in your life?

REMEMBER - Luke 1:28 (The Message Bible)

"Good morning! You're beautiful with God's beauty, Beautiful inside and out! God be with you."



SURPRISE

DAY 1: Do you like surprises? There are surprise visits, gifts or parties, but there are also surprise layoffs, job transfers, and diagnoses. Are any of those surprises inherently good, or inherently bad?



CHARACTER I

DAY 2: Why is Mary chosen for this task? Does this story have anything to say about our current power structures? Does it confront our belief that we have to be "better" than those around us? Do we need to strive to become special? Or are we created special from the beginning? What can we learn from this story about an ordinary girl who brings about extraordinary things?



RESURRECTION _____

DAY 3: Is this story about Mary, one woman who lived long ago? Or is it a story that happens over and over again as we are chosen daily for God's work? Does that idea make this story less mysterious and miraculous, or more? Why?



PRESENCE

DAY 4: Does this story tell us anything about God's presence? Is God only with the kings and the religious leaders? Is God with Mary? Is God with you? Does God dwell only in the church? Is God in some places, or with some people, more than others? How do we know? And how can that change us and the way we look at the world?



LOVE

DAY 5: Is the hard part sometimes just daring to believe that you're loved and cherished enough to be chosen to bring Jesus into the world? Is it also hard to believe that those you struggle to love are also cherished enough to be chosen in the same way? Why?



PROGRESS

DAY 6: What are you being called to birth into the world? Like Mary, have you been called to bring Jesus into the world? In what way? What does that look like for you?



RELATIONSHIP

DAY 7: Is it good news that you are ready, like Mary, to bring Jesus into a world that can be dark and cold for so many people? Does it seem sometimes like this Christmas is darker and colder than others? Why, or why not? How does the angelic proclamation, "Do not fear!" sound to you? What surprise is in store for you?

NEXT WEEK - Luke 2:8-20