

## Mary – Role Model of the Church

### Sermon for the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Advent

Sermon Text: Luke 1:26-38



*In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, <sup>27</sup>to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. <sup>28</sup>And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" <sup>29</sup>But she was greatly troubled at the saying and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. <sup>30</sup>And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. <sup>31</sup>And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. <sup>32</sup>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, <sup>33</sup>and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end." <sup>34</sup>And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?" <sup>35</sup>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. <sup>36</sup>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. <sup>37</sup>For nothing will be impossible with God." <sup>38</sup>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.*

To be honest, the story that we have as our sermon text today is certainly one of the most peculiar stories in the Bible. That's why we should make an effort to relate to this story. What was it like at that time when the angel Gabriel stopped at Mary's house to talk with her about the miraculous birth of Jesus Christ?

We don't know what Mary looked like. In my opinion, artists have idealized the encounter of the Angel Gabriel far too much. I imagine Mary as a very ordinary girl. Therefore I don't think of Mary as being either especially beautiful or especially ugly. Just an ordinary girl. As a Jewish woman, she was certainly very religious. In artwork, she is often depicted with a book. This is to show that she meditated on God's Word and thought about it. That's probably also why she viewed everything that happened to her as a gift from God. Her betrothed, Joseph, was also given to her by God. She was not especially rich, neither was Joseph. But she was content. She would have children and, as God willed, would also see that these children grew up to be healthy and happy. But that all changed when the Angel Gabriel came into her house one day unannounced. Yes, I imagine this encounter was not exactly peaceful. First because a stranger was in the house and second because he also expressed a very strange greeting! But what came next is even more strange. We can't really even imagine the angel Gabriel's message today: "Mary, you will have a child without the help of a man!" This story has provoked loud laughter and indignant head shaking from around the world. To this day, people make fun of the virgin birth. It is

actually funny. Imagine someone told you such a story. Or your daughter or future wife said to you at the breakfast table: "oh yes, I have to tell you something – yesterday, I became pregnant. But don't worry, it's all in good hands. I'm even still a virgin!" Even the first Jewish writings made fun of the virgin birth. Some of them even made up a story that a Roman soldier was the supposed father. But the truly remarkable thing about this story isn't even the virgin birth. There are other things that can amaze us even more. This for example: Why did God even send an angel to discuss it all with Mary? Couldn't God have just let the child come without asking Mary for permission? Why did God choose this complicated way of birth. To be honest, we could present better methods for how God should have come into the world. For example, Jesus could have simply descended from heaven. Or He could have approached Mary in a spectacular way from out of the sea. No, God simply wasn't interested in these fantastic things. Instead, He made it complicated and awkward. And Mary had to experience in her own life just how awkward it was. Yes, being pregnant with God's Son was not just awkward for Mary. This path was truly shameful and even dangerous because when you look more closely, the religious leaders of the time would have stoned her immediately. That's also the reason why Joseph didn't expose Mary's pregnancy right away. He just wanted to protect her even though he didn't believe the story himself and wanted to quietly leave her later on. One thing is made very clear. Already from the birth of the Son of God, His life is marked with shame and human animosity. Because in the birth of Jesus, it is clear what Isaiah recognized hundreds of years earlier: "*He was despised...and as one from whom men hide their faces...*" (Isaiah 53:3).

The peculiar thing about this story is that God chose it to be this way. Because Jesus wasn't born of Mary by chance. Her circumstances were also not a coincidence. Behind it all is the Holy Will of God. Behind it all is Almighty God Himself. And Jesus is not just the ambassador or creation of God but God Himself. That's why the Angel Gabriel already announces: He will be called the Son of the Most High." In addition to all the other interesting things in today's reading, we must really hold tight to one thing and that is that through His birth, God assumed the shame of all humanity. The revelation of the Son of God into our world is not only an extremely ambiguous matter at His birth - it continues on in the same way in the life of Jesus. The peoples' greatest offense was that Jesus, even up until His death on the cross, constantly chose the humblest path. And the highpoint of this whole paradox became clear actually in His death because not just any person dies a shameful death. No, God Himself dies here. The Creator of the Universe. The One who has no beginning and no end. The One who made everything from the smallest single-celled organism to the great unknown universe... He dies. Yes, that's something that doesn't really fit into our heads or understanding at all. Did God have no other options at all then? Why did God have to take such an agonizing path to free us from sin? For example, God could have simply wiped away all the sins right after the Fall and could have spared us and Himself all the stress. But God didn't do that. Rather, God searches for the awkward and complicated path. He doesn't save people like He summons water out of an inanimate rock. Instead, He personally rescues them and not only includes the whole agonizing story of humanity, but also includes each person individually. We can see all this to some extent through the virgin birth. And that's also the reason why God doesn't just appear unannounced, but through birth. That's also the reason why Mary doesn't suddenly discover that she's pregnant. No, through the Angel Gabriel, God includes her completely in His plan.

Mary not only listened to the angel's speech but also truly took it to heart. And despite the completely crazy proposition, she agrees. "Let it be to me according to your word." May I be permitted to ask a question: What would have happened if Mary had said "no"? Would there not have been a virgin birth

or Christmas or Good Friday and no resurrection of the dead? We have to leave this question unanswered. That's not how it turned out. In addition to the virgin birth, this is perhaps the even greater miracle – that the sinful Mary recognizes everything that should happen to her as God's path for her and said "yes" to it all. "Let it be to me according to your word." She certainly has not always been able to accept this without difficulty. Otherwise she would not have had such thoughts about the lost 12 year old Jesus. And at at least one point, she had serious doubts whether her son was on the right path or not. She probably cried with all the other disciples and stood under Jesus' cross without explanation. Mary is no saint. She is also no saint in her faith. Yet we can see that the birth of Jesus happened with her and not without her. She trusted God in these things. She believes that all these things are possible with God. Because Mary believed in this way, she is a role model for the whole Church. Yes, the great miracle is that God lives in Mary and the greater miracle is that God also lives in His Church. So in this way, Mary is seen as a role model for what would happen with the Church in the future. The Church is the Body of Christ. Christ is in the Church. However not in such a way that the Church is made up of all saints. Also not in a way that the Church exists without challenges and worry. And not in a way that God completely eliminates our human will. What happens to us when we become Christians is very similar to what happened to Mary. That God lives in us is something we can't imagine. It's also hard to understand that faith and the Holy Spirit are given to us in Baptism. These things are at least as hard to understand as the virgin birth. But in faith and trust in God, we say and confess with Mary: "Let it be to me according to your word." Just as Mary didn't have to do anything, we don't have to do anything either. It happens to us according to God's Will. Yes, that's our saying too! We don't always know if we can say this sentence with such conviction but one thing I know and that is that I will never be able to understand God. But He can perfectly and completely understand me. I don't always know how my life should continue, I don't always know how to cope with this sin or that sin, I also don't know if I can believe until the end of my life or not. When I think about myself and my possibilities, I often give up hope. But one thing I know – God, who understands me so well, can deal with my problems. He who conquered sin, death, and the devil did it for me too: "Let it be to me according to your word." Amen.