Voices of Sisters
Spirituality



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A young woman sits alone in a humble home in a backwater town. Her life is much like her neighbors'. Simple, focused on family and the needs of the day.

She saw the light first, shining brighter than the sun, blinding her to her surroundings. Then it cleared, and she saw him. He had the features of a man but such a look of goodness and kindness. Purpose.

The only light left was from the lamp; it looked dim by comparison. She knew this was a messenger of God. Her mind went to the Torah she knew. Anytime God sent his messengers, something big was going to happen. Something that changed everything. What could God want from her?

Then he spoke: "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you. Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end."

The words shocked her. She hardly knew what to think or feel. But then, she did: happiness. The "Son of the Most High"? The Messiah was coming! Oh, how they needed it! They were struggling under the Romans.

But it was confusing, too. Wasn't the Messiah coming as a warrior king? No one thought the Messiah would come as a baby. She didn't understand that at all!

And how could she bear the Messiah, she, who hadn't lain with Joseph yet? Then she thought of her cousin Elizabeth. It was just as impossible for an old woman to have a baby. Yet she was!

But what about Joseph? Would he believe her? What about her family? Or the people of Nazareth? If they ever knew the baby wasn't Joseph's, she'd be in serious danger. Yes, she was afraid, too.

"How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"

The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. For no word from God will ever fail."

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She had always known that she wanted to be a mother. She felt such love within her, such an ability to care and help. To raise children to walk with the Lord. To be that loving mother they would always come to.

The news about Elizabeth was amazing! The Lord was truly making miracles happen. For years, she had wanted a child, feeling ashamed and sad. Often, she had talked to Mary about it, as tears ran down her face. And now she was six months pregnant!

This confirmed to Mary that the Lord's work had begun. He was making something new, and she got to be a part of it.

She wondered how Elizabeth was. How did she feel? Happy to be with child, surely, but what about the circumstances?

And she was, somehow, not surprised. A sense of calm came over her. She had felt for years that God was calling her to himself, closer to him and his will. She had always known that there was something different about her. For as long as she could remember, she had been different from the other girls in her village. She only ever wanted to be close to God, to do what was right and good. She believed the truths she learned at the Temple and from her parents, obediently following them.

The other girls often didn't understand her, especially when she wouldn't join in their gossip or unkind talk. It had never bothered her, though. She was content with her close friends and family, helping her mother at home, learning about God and the Torah. She went to Temple faithfully, lingering there when she could, praying and pondering.

She remembered the Torah readings in Temple, the gentle explanations of her father, praying with her mother before bed. Her own prayer had been growing deeper, not in words but in expectation. The silence with God had become heavy with meaning.

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Now she was face to face with an angel and that call had words! Maybe this was how Moses and the prophets felt when they were called.

Now God was calling her forward, and a part of her had been waiting for this moment. She felt afraid but ready at the same time, unsure of how all this would unfold but sure that God would be with her every step along the way. Her life had prepared her for this moment.

Her fiat came from deep within her. It was a yes to God himself, to whatever came next. It was yes to a new life. "Send me," she prayed. "Use me." She wanted to be part of his plan, wherever it took her.

She met the angel's gaze.

"I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled." Then he left her, disappearing as though he had never been there.

She felt a breeze stir, warming her. She felt it touching her body, like a hand on her arm, both comforting and leading her on. She took a breath, the air felt like life itself. Breathing never felt this way before. She took it in, felt it entering not just her body but her soul, her very self.

She wasn't afraid anymore, or confused, or anything else. She felt love: for God, for her people, for this baby. And she felt deeply loved. She knew wherever this path took her would be blessed.

It took me a long time to meet this Mary. I didn't see the strength it takes to be gentle or the faith needed to say yes to God's will no matter what. She had the courage to follow God into an unknown future! For a long time, I couldn't hear Mary's voice or experience her agency in the Annunciation, asking the angel Gabriel a question and making that big decision. She stepped out in faith.

Through the Incarnation, Mary shows us not only the importance of bringing Jesus to a suffering world, but also how to do it. She was the first truly consecrated woman, set apart so we can all be blessed through her. We are all her children.