

Lady day

Text: Luke 1.26-38

Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word."

Put blue scarf over my head

'Let it be'

I am old now, very old but my stories live within me as if they happened only yesterday. My name is Mary.

When I was a young girl, already I was engaged to be married. I went about my chores, happy, humming a temple song, caught up in all that I was doing. One day, it was the middle of the afternoon I think, I was alone. I was surprised by a presence, a sense, a messenger. Now that is not something that happens every day. I was terrified. I had no idea what it was all about. He said, "don't be afraid". I say "he", but it wasn't exactly a man, more an angel, a messenger, he said, "you're going to have a baby".

Well that shocked me, "me?" I said.

I did say "yes", eventually. And the baby grew, as babies do.

Joseph had a visit too. He had a messenger too, more like a dream, so it was all sorted out. Very tricky in those days, unplanned pregnancy.

My son ended up being born in the most unusual circumstances – I'm sure you've heard, he was born in a shed with the animals. Who could guess?

We were visited by more angels, and farmers, and even kings. We went to the temple after my 40 days and were met by Anna and Simeon, such faithful ones, who offered special blessings on my son..., the scariest thing was, not all these accolades, humble and great, though I stored all the memories, all the words, all the signs in my heart, the scariest thing was that Herod planned to kill my son, and began killing all the baby boys under two - genocide..

Joseph was tuned in. Another dream, and we fled – to Egypt – we got away, with my precious son unlike so many others. Refugees, asylum seekers we were, going to the place my ancestors had fled centuries before.

We did okay and eventually we were able to return home. My son grew up... around bar mitzvah time he got left at the temple—having a real Q and A with the powers that be. I was so proud of him, holding his own like this, though he scared me to death.

He gave me plenty of cause for worry, and pride. One day I went to him with his brothers and sisters because we worried about him and he challenged me, me, his mother. “Who are you really” He asked me. “I’m your mother” I said. A sword pierced my heart that day.

Losing him was the worst thing that could ever happen to a mum – dying I mean – the worst most cruel death, not before being knocked around, bruised, bloodied, hurt. I felt so helpless. But he held up his head. He was so passionate about his cause – about God’s way – justice, healing, compassion. You should’ve seen how he treated that poor accused woman... him writing in the dust... Not judging her at all. You should’ve seen the people he healed, and even Lazarus brought back from the dead.

He only had criticism for the leaders and some of his followers – but he was gentle with his followers – always bringing them back to the fold.

People followed him. They all had their agendas. I watched. I knew.

When he was dying they all left pretty quick – only me and John standing there, and he told us to look after each other. But that wasn’t the end you know – he came back for a bit – my boy – with his cruel scars, shining. He was reassuring. “Peace” he said. He even shared some meals with us. It was weird. My emotions were all over the place.

My darling boy, the saviour of this world, the one we had been waiting for for so long, Jesus the Christ they call him, my boy, only bringing love, only caring.

He’s with me still, in my heart, and with you too, here, in your heart, loving you.

So why have I told you all this? It just came pouring out.

I am only a woman, like you. Don’t put me on a pedestal. I am no more pure and holy than you. I am just a girl who dared to say “yes” to God and not only that once, long ago, but every day, I do it again and again, say “yes” to God.

And what an adventure it's been – trust. It is so hard sometimes especially when you're lonely, when you're old like me – trust, and say yes to God, to life, to love, to freedom, But that's the call you know – the call to you and to me – to say “yes” – and allow God to grow in us. And be born in us. And to let go of this God like you do every child.. We can't hold on – you know that, you who are mothers – Let go, and let God.. Walk in trust and faith and that way, make a difference in this world of ours. That's it. That's all I have to say for now. Just know that you too are blessed. Take off blue scarf.

Michael Marsh reflects¹: Jesus is able to take flesh because Mary's humanity gives him that possibility. This could only happen with Mary's “Let it be.” Her gift to God is her humanity and through her our humanity. The incarnation of God in Jesus is not, however, limited to Mary. It is an affirmation of God's creation and the goodness of humanity. God chooses human flesh, not a cedar house, as the place of God's dwelling. Each one of us can stand as the “favoured one,” the one with whom God is. Each of us is called to grow up to be God-bearers, to carry the life of God within our own humanity.

Mary is a part of us. She is that part of us that is womb-like, the part that gives birth to Christ in our world. Mary teaches us how to say, “Yes.”

Each one of us is to echo Mary's words, “Let it be.” Don't hear this as passivity. This is not a “que sera, sera” attitude. It means we must be vulnerable, open, receptive. It means that we must let down the veils that we think separate us. Mary sees her virginity as a veil of separation. “How can this be, since I am a virgin?” Not only that, but Mary is weaving a new veil for the temple.

Sacred tradition says that Mary was one of the virgins chosen to weave a new veil for the temple. The veil was the curtain that separated humanity from the holy of holies, the place that God lived. Neither the temple veil nor Mary's virginity, however, can

¹ <https://interruptingthesilence.com/2011/12/19/learning-to-say-yes-a-sermon-on-the-annunciation-luke-126-38-advent-4b/>

separate God from humanity. As the Archangel Gabriel declares, "Nothing will be impossible with God."

We all live with veils that we think separate us from God. There are veils of fear, shame, and guilt. Independence and individualism become veils of isolation. Sometimes we are veiled in logic, rationalism, and unable or unwilling to abandon ourselves to the mystery. Often our veils are the life we have created for ourselves. God looks through our veils to see the "favoured one" even when we cannot see ourselves that way. God's words of possibility speak across our veils announcing that God is with us and that we will conceive within us God's own life. God is always stepping through our veils to choose us as God's dwelling place.

"How can this be?" With those words Mary acknowledges that the life Gabriel announces is not the life she was creating for herself.

"Let it be." With those words Mary receives the life God is creating in her. Between "How can this be?" and "Let it be" the impossible becomes a reality, the never before heard of will forever be spoken of, and the veil between divinity and humanity has fallen.

Offer whatever excuses, reasons, and veils you have why this cannot be true for you. Gabriel will tell you differently. "Nothing will be impossible with God. Michael K. Marsh