

SERMON
 First Lutheran Church
 Aitkin, Minnesota

Luke 1:26-38
 Rev. Darrell J. Pedersen
 December 21, 2014

ADULT MESSAGE

God's Christmas plans are much, much bigger than ours. But, they start small and grow. While we may be thinking "**turkey**," God is thinking "**eternity**." In our gospel text for today, **Mary** learns from an angel that she will be the mother of God's own Son. She believes what she is told. She agrees to do what she is asked. And she goes on to proclaim the greatness and compassion of God's coming Lord. God starts with a teenage virgin and ends up with us here today. And here is some pretty big news also; you and I, today, are each one small part in the working out of God's salvation plan.

You heard the story. Mary is visited by an angel. In this short, little passage, we hear the word "**angel**" five times. That's big. That angel tells Mary that she has been chosen to bring God's love and care into our world through Baby Jesus. Today you and I get that same visit. "**Greetings favored one!**" the angel says to Mary. Can you hear those words? Is God speaking to you? Our God intervenes in the lives of God's people. God doesn't always come at convenient times. God comes to us in God's time. God came to Mary. Mary is one of us. God comes to us too. Maybe today... Maybe you...

The angel goes on, "**The Lord is with you**." Mary was given that promise and now two thousand years later, the same promise is ours. God promises to be with God's people wherever, whenever, whatever is going on. This whole, big faith family or you personally – the Lord is with you.

"**Don't be afraid!**" That assurance makes all the difference when:

- You are bringing a baby into the world,
- You are facing your toughest challenge,
- You are uncertain what the future might bring...

Knowing that God is with us makes a huge difference in how we respond to the things that the **world throws at us**, or that **God asks of us**.

"**You have found favor with God**." We don't know how Mary had been living her life, but God must have seen something in her that convinced God that she would say "**Yes**" when God started God's salvation plan. God

has **world-changing plans** and for that God **needs trusting, faithful people**. Mary was one. Maybe you are too...

“You will conceive... and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus.”

Mary was called to bring Jesus into her world. So are we. We do that every time we baptize a person, teach Sunday school, attend worship, share in Holy Communion, contribute to the food shelf, help someone, read the Bible, pray...

“Of his kingdom there will be no end.” We are talking here, about a God who is **perfectly faithful and eternal**. In this world, so filled with trouble and fear, our God can be trusted with our very lives. Do you believe that?

Mary asks, **“How can this be, since I am a virgin?”** **In God’s plan, it’s not about me.** Mary was a teenager, had never had sexual relations with anyone, and if her fiancé chose, she could have been stoned to death for being unfaithful to him. When the baby came, it was born in an animal shelter, in a tiny, unfamiliar town, to parents who barely had two sticks to rub together. Jesus’ birth story is shot through with obstacle after obstacle. It is a wonder that Baby Jesus did not freeze to death, starve to death, or get killed by a dictator’s army. God knows what’s going on in our world. God cares about what happens to us. God can handle it...

The angel responds, **“For nothing will be impossible with God.”** This angel makes some pretty big promises. What’s happening in your life that could maybe use an angel’s visit, a Savior, Jesus? What sorts of impossible things are you facing? Can God help you? **Help you?**

Mary answers, **“Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.”** Did you hear that? Mary is **“no volunteer.”** She is a **“servant of the Lord.”** And she says, **“Yes!”** And her **“Yes”** echoes down through the centuries. It passes through all of God’s people between then and now. And it literally carries Jesus into this very worship space and into our very own hearts. What does God have in mind for your life this Christmas, this year, before you leave this world? What do you hear? Is there a “yes” in your heart? Is there a “yes” on your lips?

Mary is one of us. Mary said **“yes”** to God. So did some people who lovingly host the **Tiny Tots** program at First Lutheran. So did some folks who hosted the **Family Advent Festival**. So did some folks who sang in

the **choir cantata**. So did some folks who **staff the food shelf**. All are bringing Jesus' love and caring into our world.

I have a **food shelf story**. I have an **angel story**. It happened last week. The food shelf was open here at the church. Some of God's people from our sister church, **St. John's Lutheran, Cedarbrook**, made 10 quilts and brought them to the food shelf to be given to families in need. The food shelf served 190 families in November. How do you divide 10 quilts between all of those families? **Ruth Nelson**, the director, a member at **Bethlehem Lutheran**, and her coworkers decided to have a drawing.

A little girl with some obvious medical problems came to the food shelf with her parents. As they shopped for food, she scanned the pile of quilts. She told Ruth, "**My mom and dad said an angel is watching over me and when they get some money, they are going to get me an angel blanket.**" Just then the little girl spotted a blanket covered with flower blossoms. There, floating just above one of those blossoms was a little pixie. To the little girl, it looked like an angel. She got very excited and showed her parents.

"**How can we get this quilt for our little girl**, they asked. Ruth responded, "**Fill out one of these slips for our drawing.**" A disappointed look crossed their faces, (what chance would they have of winning) but they proceeded to fill out the slip. As they went to drop the slip into the box, Ruth grabbed it out of their hands and said, "**Well, look here. You've won! The angel quilt is yours!**"

Do you think that God wanted Ruth to do that? Do you think that God meant that angel quilt for the sick, little girl? Do you think the women at St. John's Lutheran had that figured out? Do you think her parents ever expected to bring such a quilt home with them when they came to get food that day? Maybe it was a part of God's Christmas plan and none of us even knew it...

God's Christmas plans are much, much bigger than ours. But they start small and grow. While we may be thinking **turkey**, God is thinking **turkey**, **angel quilts** and **eternity**. Pretty big eh? I wonder what **God has in mind** for the little girl who is sick? Or for you and me? Mary said, "**Yes.**" And God said "**Yes!**" And so we can all say, "**Merry Christmas!**" **Yes!** Amen.

