

Sermon – Advent 4 – Luke 1:26-38

The Bible contains many significant greetings and meetings. This one between Gabriel and Mary is one of the best known. Famous artists have been drawn to the subject. It's a key element in the Christmas story – but we are often reminded of it during the year! Behind the two characters are two worlds, one a world of light where God lives and from which Gabriel, the messenger, comes; the other our world, one of shadow and darkness, of hope and disappointment, where Mary lives. When the two meet, it is as if two worlds are in collision.

Notice that Gabriel doesn't come to a centre of worldly power like Rome, nor does he come to a powerful leader like Caesar. His destination instead is an obscure country on the map and the person he visits is a simple country girl. This is the story of God's salvation being worked out behind the headlines.

The opening scene may seem puzzling to us. Gabriel gives a warm greeting to Mary. "You who are highly favoured, the Lord is with you." Why should she be troubled at such encouraging words? From her side what did she see? Was it an angelic being with wings? Did he seem to be a normal human being? We could speculate! But, to us, the greeting is full of promise. This is a divine encounter. Heaven is in touch with earth. The Creator comes to the creature. It is a heart stopping moment and Mary who has worshipped God with her people begins to realise that this is a personal encounter and that a divine mission is coming to her – uncertainty, fear excitement. These are some of the emotions that must have invaded her mind! She hears what she is to become – the bearer of God's Son. Many Jewish girls in her day wanted to be that! Does her pulse return slowly to normal as she takes in the wonder? She asks the obvious question as to how it is all going to take place. Gabriel seems to draw his breath at this point and spell out, perhaps more slowly, what will happen to her. He also points to her cousin Elizabeth who, from being barren, has been touched by the God of the impossible.

Did Mary sense that God's way of blessing was the way of the cross? To have a child out of wedlock was scandal and disgrace. It could ruin her life and leave her without friends and social standing. She faced the cost as well as the privilege of bearing God's Son.

The meeting of these two people, the angel and the teenage girl, had begun with frightened uncertainty. It ended with glad acceptance! Mary says, "May it be to me as you have said." A possible dark tunnel of the future is lit up with the light of her calling and the knowledge that the Mighty One has done great things for her.

As God in Jesus comes to meet you this Christmas time, allow your heart to be stirred by the thought of a divine encounter. Give thanks that he has a plan for you and that he has promised to be with you. Whatever challenge the future may hold, bow your head, submit gladly and say with Mary, "May it be to me as you have said."