

**Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word
Luke 1:26-38**

American poet, MAYA ANGELOU, said, "Life is not measured by the number of breaths we take, but by the moments that take our breath away." She is so right. We don't remember everything that has happened in our lives but we tend to remember those breath-taking moments in our lives. How many moments in your life have taken your breath away?

You might remember the moment your husband knelt before you, gave you a ring and asked, "would you marry me?." That might be a breathtaking moment in your life. Or maybe when your first child was born and you held him or her in your arms! It might have been when your child first said, "mama or papa." It could have been when you first had a deep spiritual experience of God's presence and love. It might have been when you first received a gift from Santa Claus. Or it could have been when you heard the sacred story of Christ's birth, lit a candle and sang "silent night holy night" on Christmas Eve. It could be this very moment of worship today.

What we hear in the Gospel of Luke is a breathtaking story of God's promise for salvation through an ordinary girl. To a girl named Mary, an angel came. And the angel Gabriel greeted her. "Good morning! You're beautiful with God's beauty, Beautiful inside and out! God be with you." (v. 28 MSG) "Mary was thoroughly shaken, wondering what was behind a greeting like that. But the angel assured her, "Mary, you have nothing to fear. God has a surprise for you: You will become pregnant and give birth to a son and call his name Jesus. He will be great, be called 'Son of the Highest.'" (vs 28-33) I believe this must have been a moments that took her breath away for many reasons.

Being the mother of the Son of God would be an incredible blessing and honor. Wouldn't it? During the week, I had a chance to hear about plans for Vacation Bible School. As you know, Samantha Dorsey is preparing for Vacation Bible School and held their a first planning meeting. During the meeting, one child asked "why is Jesus so famous?" Samantha answered, "Because his father is God" and the kids agreed. I think her answer is very wise and a perfect answer to kids! Right? The same thing would be true of Mary. Mary is famous because she is the mother of the Son of God! Being the mother of the Son of the Highest is an honor and blessing. So when Mary heard Gabriel's good news for her, it would take her breath away. At the same time, she was perplexed because she has not married yet and was still a virgin.

I have read a story. "A woman takes her 16-year-old daughter to the doctor. The doctor says, "Okay, Mrs. Jones, what's the problem?" The mother says, "It's my daughter, Debbie. She keeps getting these cravings, she's putting on weight, and is sick most mornings." The doctor gives Debbie a good examination, then turns to the mother and says, "Well, I don't know how to tell you this, but your Debbie is pregnant - about 4 months, would be my guess."

The mother says, "Pregnant?! She can't be, she has never ever been left alone with a man! Have you, Debbie?" Debbie says, "No mother! I've never even kissed a man!"

When the doctor heard of it, the doctor walked over to the window and just stares out it. About five minutes pass and finally the mother says,

"Is there something wrong out there doctor?"

The doctor replies, "No, not really, it's just that the last time anything like this happened, a star appeared in the east and three wise men came over the hill. I'll be darned if I'm going to miss it this time!"

This is a funny story. We laugh when we hear it because we assume that girl in the story is lying. If people knew Mary was pregnant and Mary told them that she had conceived by the Holy Spirit, what would people's reaction be? They would assume Mary is lying. While this story of a 16 year-old-daughter and mother makes us laugh, a premarital pregnancy was considered a serious violation of social code in ancient times. In short, Mary could be shamed, stigmatized, and even killed for her pregnancy. So the angel's announcement of Jesus' birth to Mary was bad news for her personal life.

However, Mary obeyed God's word and said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." (Luke 1:38) She accepted God's good news because she believed that God would fulfill the promises he made to her!" (Luke 1:45) She did not accept only the part of the good news that she liked but she accepted its entirety, even knowing that harm could come to her. What we read today is a breath-taking story of an ordinary girl, Mary's obedience to God's calling. Through the obedience of many people, the divine love of God has appeared to us.

God is also calling us to be a part of God's breathtaking story of salvation. In obedience to God, we can share a small light of hope, love, joy and peace with the world and that can change the world. We may wonder how a small act of kindness and love can change the world. It seems impossible. But nothing is impossible with God. So think of how you can share joy and hope with your family and particularly with neighbors in need in this unusual season of Christmas. Calling or sending a card, having a virtual Christmas dinner with your family, or being a secret Santa for those in need. As God worked with the ordinary girl, Mary, for salvation, God will use our ordinary acts of love for God's extraordinary mission!

It's almost Christmas. Christmas this year looks different but I pray that your Christmas will be another blessed moment that takes your breath away. Merry Christmas! Amen.