

3

Nothing Is Impossible

Mary and the Angel

Luke 1:26-56

At the beginning of an Advent retreat I attended, a wonderful painting was displayed at the front of the room: *The Annunciation* by Fra Angelico.* Our retreat leaders invited us all to come look at it and then began a discussion centered on the painting. They encouraged us to notice the humble posture of Mary and the powerful presence of the angel. We also discussed the background imagery of creation, showing Adam and Eve in the Garden. But I found myself most captivated by Mary's blue robe that symbolizes royalty and surrounds her dress of pale red, which symbolizes her human nature. God was draping Mary in his kingly glory. And she gracefully accepted her calling.

GROUP DISCUSSION. Describe a time in your experience, or in the experience of someone you know, when life's direction was changed by one event or decision.

*You can view the *The Annunciation* altarpiece at the Museo Nacional del Prado: <<http://www.museodelprado.es/en/ingles/collection/on-line-gallery/on-line-gallery/obra/the-annunciation-7/>>.

PERSONAL REFLECTION. “All of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ” (Galatians 3:27). Picture yourself draped in God’s glorious robes of blue. What thoughts and feelings do you have?

When Mary met the angel she was probably about fourteen years old, as that is when betrothal and marriage took place at that time. *Read Luke 1:26-38.*

1. This passage chronicles some amazing events. What words and phrases give you an idea of what this experience was like for Mary?

2. The angel referred to Mary twice as “favored” by God (vv. 28, 30). The word is based on the Greek word for “grace.” What insight does that give you into why God chose Mary to give birth to Jesus?

3. Sit with the word “favored” for a moment. What would it be like to hear God call you “highly favored”?

4. What specific information does the angel Gabriel give to Mary about the son she would bear (vv. 31-33, 35)?

5. Mary responds to the angel’s declaration by asking how the promise would be fulfilled (v. 34). Do you think Mary’s question was an expression of doubt? Explain.

6. What do you think would have been your response to a call from God for such a sacrifice on your part?

7. *Read Luke 1:39-45.* In what way would the information given by the Holy Spirit to Elizabeth encourage Mary and strengthen her faith?

8. *Read Luke 1:46-56.* What aspects of God’s character are mentioned in Mary’s praise to God?

9. How does Mary describe herself in her poem to God?

10. In this passage we've seen Mary's faith in God, her humble servantlike attitude, and her personal knowledge of the character of God. Which of these traits in Mary are you most drawn to? Why?

11. Verse 37 says, "Nothing is impossible with God." In what area of your life do you need to embrace this teaching?

Ask God to build in you an attitude of humility and gratefulness like Mary.

Now or Later

As you reflect on God's goodness to you, you may want to write a song or poem or letter to God that expresses your joy in him. Then pray or sing or read what you have written. Share your "hymn" with your group or with a Christian friend.

4

Divine Interruption

Joseph and the Angel

Matthew 1:18-25

In his dramatic retelling of Scripture, *The Book of God*, Walter Wangerin imagines the conversation Joseph might have had with Mary's worried father and then with Mary.

Pale in the interior dark—scarcely visible, as if she were winter's breath on the air—Mary was gazing out at Joseph, hesitating, chewing her bottom lip. Oh, the worry on her features broke his heart!

Joseph couldn't help himself: he ran past Joachim and gathered Mary into his arms and held her tightly to his body.

"I love you," he whispered in her tender ear. "Don't cry, don't cry. I love you, Mary, and I know who is sleeping in you, and I will love him, too. It is well. All is well. I know what God is doing, and I love you."*

*Walter Wangerin, *The Book of God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), p. 438.