

25 March 2021

Writings: Messages

Mary said, "Here I am the servant of the Lord. Let it be with me according to your word" (Luke 1:38).

Over the course of a day, I get dozens of messages. Some are e-mails, others are phone calls and many are conversations with individuals. Whenever I get a message I need to decide upon its importance and how to reply to it. A phone message to call the Bishop immediately is handled differently from an e-mail which informs me someone wants to give me a lot of cash if I will just send back some personal information. Yet, only a few messages are life changing, like the time my mother told me my father had just died. Those moments provoke deep thought and a serious response.

In today's Gospel, Mary responds to the angel Gabriel's message that she will have a son who will be called Son of the Most High and will reign over the House of Jacob forever, by agreeing to participate in God's plan. Her response to the most important message in human history shows she understands its meaning.

Mary's agreeing to give birth to Jesus would have serious implications for her life. She was betrothed to Joseph but they not yet lived together. He would not be the biological father of the child. There is no indication in Luke's Gospel Joseph knew about God's plan. How would he react to the news? What would her family and friends think about this development? In addition, childbirth was a risky undertaking at that time. If she was a teenager (as tradition suggests) what impact would the pregnancy have on her health? Finally, what was the meaning of such things as her child being "great" and "Son of the Most High" and given the "throne of his ancestor David" and that his kingdom "will have no end". With the advantage of hindsight, we understand that Jesus was sent to plant the seeds of God's Kingdom on earth and redeem humanity from Sin. However, it is highly likely Mary knew the full details of God's plan. What she did know was the angel was relaying an important message from God and she was invited to participate in that plan in a serious way. She was asked to trust completely in God's goodness. After receiving the most important message ever communicated to a human being, her reply was the most important response ever given by one. Even if she did not realize its implications at the time, it changed the course of human history.

During this Covid-19 pandemic, people have been bombarded with all kinds of messages. Some provide information: like where you can get vaccinated. Others are exhortations: like why people should get vaccinated to promote the common good. A few are distractions: like the idea Covid-19 is an elite conspiracy to gain control of society. Many people respond to their messages by first determining which are true and useful or fake news. But information also has the ability to get people thinking more deeply about their lives and how they are evolving. Do I like the person I am? Am I the kind of person I want to be or pretend to be? Is the Covid-19 pandemic showing me things about myself I do or don't like? These questions can push them to change. Some of these changes could have profound implications for their lives. Like Mary, they may not know where these changes will lead and whether they can cope with them. They require the ability to believe in themselves and trust God. Their response will likely affect more than themselves.

Most messages do not have a tremendous impact on our daily lives. But, a few of them do. The important thing is to recognize the difference and respond accordingly.

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