

What if an angel were to show up in your kitchen – or your office or classroom or wherever you happen to regularly hang out – what if an angel were to show up there and say, “Greetings, favored one. The Lord is with you.”

What would you think? What would you say? Would you be afraid, freaked out, anxious, in shock? “Perplexed” is the word the NRSV uses to describes what Mary was feeling. It’s a fitting response – why would God show up in her kitchen? Mary’s a nobody: a teenage girl from Galilee, the blue collar, backwater, drive-through part of Israel. There is no reason anyone should take notice of her, let alone the Lord of the universe. Yet suddenly she finds herself keeping company with one of the Lord’s messengers. And she’s not sure what to think.

If you’ve ever felt unnoticed, as if people have no reason to pick you out of a crowd, you should be paying attention. Because this story reminds us that if God can come to Mary, God can come to you.

First things first, though: so how do you know if God is involved? After all, the book of Hebrews reminds us that sometimes we ‘entertain angels unawares.’ It’s not as though Clarence from *It’s A Wonderful Life* is walking around announcing that he’s on a heavenly mission. Mary had a bit of a clue by Gabriel’s introduction, but will we? Not likely. Our encounters with God’s messengers are more likely to look like a neighbor or a brother-in-law or a patient at the clinic. And they’re less likely to say, “greetings, favored one” and more likely to say *care to join me* or *can we talk about something* or *I need your help*.

In fact, the only way you'll know that God might be involved is if you're really paying attention. That means being a little less worried about your own plans for the day and more aware of what's happening in the world around you. It means looking for a chance to make a difference, letting your heart be captured or curious or convicted. You might feel a nudge, or a tug, or something that just makes sense. And you might find yourself wondering, *could this be a God thing?* Will it always be God trying to get your attention? I don't know. But neither will you ... unless you're willing to listen.

That kind of listening – the subtle, nuanced kind – isn't easy. But let's face it, it's not necessarily any easier to hear God outright. Because sometimes when God has ideas for us they don't always match up with the plans we've made for ourselves. Mary surely had her own thoughts about how life was going to go: a nice Jewish wedding leads to a pleasant-if-unremarkable life of homemaking and child-rearing and caring for aging relatives. But then she found herself face-to-face with an announcement that she would bear the Son of God. And she had some decisions to make: would she modify her plans and give God room to work in her life ... or would she say no?

Those are the kinds of decisions we have to make, too, when God starts poking around our lives. Because often we have our own carefully ordered plans ... the way we think our days are going to go. We think if we just work hard enough or act nice enough or plan carefully enough we will get the life we want and believe we deserve. And while planning is good and hard work is important and being nice or giving or kind is always appreciated, none of those things means you are in control. Only God can see the bigger picture. Only God knows what opportunities and possibilities will come your way.

But God is in the possibility business. Think of God as the original Home Depot.: *You can do it. I can help.* Or, better yet, like Lowe's: *Let's build something together.*

You know, it might help to remember that God has already greeted you like Gabriel approached Mary. In baptism God says, *I am with you. You are important to me.* Indeed, God is rather fond of you. Every day when you look in the mirror, remind yourself of that. God is rather fond of me. Say it out loud, if that helps (and if your spouse or child happens to overhear you, all the better).

Because while I don't know exactly what God has in mind for you, I do know this: *You can trust God's plan because you can trust God.* That was the heart of Gabriel's message to Mary. And that's the heart of the message Gabriel asked Mary to share. You can trust God's plan because you can trust God. Mary knew this to be true because she's been raised with stories of Abraham and Moses and David. She knew God was faithful and cared about his chosen people. Maybe this is why she was able to say yes to God's plan. She and God started building something together: a baby who would save the world.

If you think about it, all it takes to be a messenger for God is to have a message to share. You don't have to be flashy or perfectly polished or articulate. Your message comes from your heart, a heart that's been touched by God's love. Ultimately that's what God needed Mary to do. That's what God needs us to do. To speak a word of hope or love or forgiveness. To watch and wait with those who are struggling. To take care of the lonely or hungry or sad. To proclaim that *nothing is impossible with God.*

Friends, you don't always know what God has in store. It could be the challenge of raising faithful children or finding new ways to serve as you move into retirement.

God might ask you to mentor a teenager or deliver a prayer shawl to a shut-in or strike up a conversation with someone you don't know. But along the way, God is about the business of getting us to let go of our ideas and be open to his.

If you're not sure you can do this, remember this story. God noticed a lowly teenage nobody named Mary, too. He sent an angel her way to let her know he was rather fond of her. She didn't know what to think ... but she trusted God's plan. She said yes. And God used her to bring a message of hope to the whole world.

Sometime this week, I have a feeling you're going to get a visit from an angel. Will you be open? Will you say yes? You'd better start listening now. Remember, if God can come to Mary, God can come to you. Amen.