

A sermon for the season

The angel Gabriel said to Mary: "You will conceive and bear a son." Luke 1:31a

We don't know, when Mary first heard the announcement, whether she heard it as good news, or not. But that is what it was. It was the announcement of what was happening to her. We have come to call this good news, "the gospel". In this case, the Gospel according to Luke, as announced by the messenger Gabriel.

Pay close attention to what the gospel is not. It is not a description, commentary, invitation or command to do something. The message includes those things but they are not the main thing. The main thing is the news that God is doing something good to you and for you. This news always comes out of the blue, just as it did to Mary. It is new every day.

The angel did not say to Mary: "You will conceive in your womb and bear a son and all you have to do is accept it." That would have been terrible, although some preachers do exactly that. Another thing the angel did not say to Mary: "You have to make a decision for Jesus." That would have put the young woman in a terrible predicament. "Let's see, do I accept him or not? How do I know if I am really sincere in accepting him?" That would have thrown Mary back onto herself, an impossible situation.

Another thing the angel did not say to Mary was: "Open your mind to God's word," or: "Open your heart to Jesus." These are not the kinds of operations we are capable of performing on ourselves, nor could Mary. But some preachers say things like that. They remind one of Red Skelton, who said he had written a book entitled, "Brain Surgery Self Taught." It's impossible.

With God, all things are possible. The gospel is the good news of what God has done for you and is doing to you right now. He opens your ears to hear his word, just as Jesus opened the ears of the deaf man. If he did not, we would be deaf to his word. He is changing your heart, too. As he rolled the stone away from the tomb, he is changing your heart of stone into a heart that can love and praise him.

The miracle of the gospel breaks through to us. It is new every day. It does not change, but it changes us, in a way known by faith, not sight.

And Mary said:

'My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior."

Luke 1:46

Merry Christmas to you and yours.