

Mary (*midrash for Advent worship 12.15.2016*)
based on Luke 1:26-38

As long as I live, I will never forget that day.

I was hanging out the laundry to dry.

My mother had gone to the market.

My father was off in the fields, tending goats and sheep.

My sister was asleep in the house, sleeping off a cold.

My younger brothers were at the home of my beloved aunt, playing with their cousins.

The chores were left to me. I didn't mind. I liked doing the daily tasks.

I have always liked feeling useful.

As I hung up my father's best tunic,

the one he wore to temple,

a white dove flew across the clear, blue sky.

I paused for a moment,

resting on the clothesline, staring at her.

I rarely saw these birds and it caused me to stop, just for a moment.

Where had she come from?

What brought her that day?

What was her life like?

I have a habit of pondering things,

turning them over again and again in my heart and soul,

stopping and noticing the things that other people tend to overlook:

a child instinctively reaching for his mother's hand,

the way the fig vendor in the market embodies kindness in every transaction,

the ways the buds begin slowly on the trees,

the moments when the first stars come out at dusk.

My mother called me a day-dreamer,

staring off into the night sky

or off to the far horizon of the town, when she would rather I be doing my chores.

My parents sometimes thought that I was listless or uncaring or easily distracted.

They are hard workers.

So am I, but I like to take time just to think,

To stop and consider the deeper questions of life:

What does it mean to bear the image of God every day, in all we do?

How does the Holy One live in our words and our deeds?

How is God living in me?

I suppose if I had been born a boy, I would have become a priest or a rabbi.

I loved the words of scripture.

My mother used to sing over and over to me the song of Hannah as I sat in her lap:

*My heart exults in the Lord;
my strength is exalted in my God.*

*Talk no more so very proudly,
let not arrogance come from your mouth;
for the Lord is a God of knowledge,
and by him actions are weighed.*

I had memorized it, just as she had, adding my own thoughts over the tender years of my childhood.

Anyway, the dove stole across the sky, catching my eye
circling around, lingering in an unusual way.

And then she was gone, as quickly as she had come.

I turned back toward the house and before me stood

a beautiful, powerful angel,

beaming with a bright light

his feathers fluttering in a gentle breeze

I stumbled backwards and shielded my eyes, while they adjusted to his brightness.

In a clear, resonant, melodic voice, he said:

Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.

It was all so strange, so confusing and yet, it seemed normal.

I was young enough not to have too many expectations about how life is supposed to go.

In retrospect, an angel interrupting the daily laundry didn't seem so strange to me.

He reassured me not to be afraid, which I really wasn't.

Somehow his presence seemed so clear, so calming and also so empowering.

He told me that I was pregnant, which *was* very strange to me.

I was already pledged to Joseph, but our wedding day was still many months away.

Many arrangements were still being made.

I hardly knew the man at all. We had met perhaps twice.

And certainly there was no reason to be pregnant!

And yet, I had already felt these strange stirrings in my body.
 I found myself waking up
 in the middle of the night with a sense that something was changing,
 something would suddenly be different, something ominous was taking place.

The angel told me I would be giving birth to the Son of God,
 the descendant of King David, a new ruler over Israel.
 I was stunned, to be sure, but I said simply:
 Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.

I don't know where those words came from,
 but they became the guiding words for my life:
Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.

Later, I would tell my cousin Elizabeth that my soul magnifies the Lord.
 It became my own version of Hannah's ancient song.
 My spirit rejoices in God my Savior.

Now I *was* very scared to tell Joseph, but I could not avoid telling him.
 I turned the conversation over in my heart and soul many, many times,
 imagining all the ways it would go.
 Somehow, I felt the angel's presence with me in every step of those imagined conversations,
 encouraging me, reassuring me that all would go well,
 that I had nothing to fear.
 And sure enough, the angel was right. Joseph accepted it, with absolutely no hesitation.
 I was stunned, and yet it seemed exactly how things should go.
 Later, he would tell me about how God had come to him in a dream,
 that the angels had been busy that season.

And together, we would welcome this wonderful, peculiar God-child into our lives.
 Together we would raise him as our own, and yet as someone set apart.
 And together, this little old soul would teach us so much about love, about kindness,
 about the image of God in each other,
 about caring for the forgotten people in the world,
 about saving and treasuring our souls,
 about living this precious God-given life as fully as possible.

And every day, I can hear that angel over my shoulder, saying,
 Greetings, favored one, the Lord is with you,
 Do not be afraid, for you have found favor with God.
 And I believe it.