

Week 1 — Fear Not: When God Interrupts Our Lives

Core Reading: Luke 1:26–38 — The angel and Mary

Optional Readings: Genesis 28:10–17; Luke 1:11–20; Isaiah 6:1–8

Reflection

In Luke's Gospel, Mary is going about her ordinary life when an angel appears to her with words that will change everything. We are so familiar with this scene that it can feel almost gentle. But it was not gentle. It was disorienting, bewildering, and deeply personal.

Interestingly, rather than opening with instruction, the angel begins with a declaration: "Greetings, favored one. The Lord is with you." Before Mary is asked to do anything, she is told something about who she is. She is known. She is seen. She is held within God's attention.

That detail matters. So often we assume that God approaches us primarily with demands, asking for more effort, more faithfulness, more sacrifice. But here, before there is obedience, there is assurance. Before there is calling, there is grace.

Unsurprisingly, Mary is "much perplexed" by this interaction. She wonders what sort of greeting this might be. Fear and confusion are not signs of weak faith; they are natural responses to being drawn into something larger than ourselves. The angel's subsequent reassurance, "Do not be afraid" does not dismiss her fear; it steadies her within it.

And then comes the turning point. Mary is invited into a future she did not design. The life she expected - its rhythms, its security, its reputation - will not unfold as planned. Saying yes will cost her something. It will require trust in a story she cannot yet see the ending of.

This is perhaps where the story begins to sound familiar to our own experience.

Most of us will not be visited by angels in visible form. But we do know what it is to have our lives interrupted. A diagnosis shifts everything. A relationship changes. A responsibility appears that we did not seek. A conviction grows in us that something needs to change. In those moments, we often want clarity before commitment. We want reassurance about outcomes before we take a step forward.

But Mary does not receive a detailed blueprint. She is given a promise: "The Lord is with you." She is given a next step. And she is given room to ask her honest question: "How can this be?"

Faith, in this passage, is not certainty. It is willingness. It is the quiet courage to remain open when God's invitation stretches us beyond what feels manageable.

Lent gives us space to examine our own invitations, and where we may be resisting them. Where are we perhaps clinging too tightly to what we expected? Where might God be reshaping our understanding of who we are or what we are called to? Not every disruption comes from God. But some do, and discernment begins with attentiveness.

Mary's final words are not dramatic. They are simple: "Here am I." She offers herself simply, willingly, despite lacking a full comprehension of what lies ahead. That is often what obedience looks like: not heroic confidence, but steady availability.

As we begin this journey through Lent, perhaps the question is not whether God is speaking, but whether we are willing to listen. And whether, like Mary, we can trust that being known and favored by God is enough to carry us into whatever comes next.

Discussion Questions

- 1. What part of Mary's response stands out to you most — her confusion, her question, or her willingness? Why?**
- 2. When have you experienced being truly *seen* or known — by God or by another person? What did that feel like?**
- 3. When something unexpected happens in your life, what is your usual first reaction?**
- 4. What helps you remember that "the Lord is with you" when you're facing something new or unexpected?**
- 5. Where in your life right now do you feel stretched or uncertain? What honest question might you bring to God, as Mary did: "How can this be?"**
- 6. Mary does not have full clarity, yet she offers willingness: "Here am I." What might willingness look like for you in this season? How might you nurture availability to God's call?**

Closing Prayer:

Holy God,

When we are unsure or unsettled, remind us that you are with us.

Before we strive or respond, help us to rest in being known and loved by you.

Give us courage to say “Here am I,”

even when we do not see the whole path ahead.

Amen.