



**Following Mary + Luke 1:26-38**  
**Fourth Sunday of Advent + December 24, 2023**  
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Today our focus falls on Mary.

In our tradition, Mary tends to get overlooked. What more important role in Jesus' life was there than his mother? Yet while there are many Protestant churches named after lesser figures in the story of salvation – St. Michael's, St. Andrew's, St. Stephen's – there are few Protestant churches named for Mary.

Why this oversight? Perhaps it is because she is mentioned in any detail only in Luke's Gospel. In Mark and Matthew she makes only passing appearances. In John, and in Paul's letters, she is never even named.

Yet here in Luke we encounter Mary as the consummate model for our discipleship.

It is now the sixth month of her cousin Elizabeth's surprising pregnancy, about which Mary must have known. Here she finds herself facing something even more unbelievable as the angel Gabriel delivers the news.

Mary is startled by his sudden appearance and then stunned by the information he shares. But has enough wits about to question how this can possibly be. Interestingly, she echoes Zechariah's response to the news of Elizabeth's pregnancy – "How will I know that this is so?" Yet Mary is not penalized for her question as Zechariah was; instead, Gabriel patiently explains how it will come to be, even though the process he describes is as incomprehensible to her as it is to us.

We can be sure that, down through the ages, many people have used this incomprehensibility as a reason to NOT believe in God: Such a thing is impossible, it makes no sense. Try explaining it to Confirmation students! But Mary, the one being affected, does not even skip a beat: "Let it be with me according to your word."

Where else in scripture do we hear this same response of obedience and humility in the face of the incomprehensible? Twenty-one chapters later in Luke, as Jesus is praying at the Mount of Olives: "Not my will, but yours be done."

Back in Chapter 1 of Luke, we go to learn from Elizabeth why Mary is favored and blessed. When Mary arrives, Elizabeth announces, "Blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord." Elizabeth is telling us that Mary is not blessed because she is going to be the mother of Jesus, *but because she believed God's word.*

The blessing that falls on Mary is one we can all share if we embrace the same model of trust and humble obedience. There will be times in every life when we are called to do the incomprehensible: To pick ourselves up after a crisis has flattened us. To see beyond suffocating darkness to the reality that another day will dawn. Even though we have been crushed, to take the life that God has given us and continue to offer it to the world.

Impossible? No, because Gabriel reminds us today that nothing is impossible with God. Like Mary, we have found favor with God because we too believe in the fulfillment of what was spoken to her. And now we turn toward tonight to embrace that fulfillment.