



READ: Luke 1:26-38 (NirV)

In the sixth month after Elizabeth had become pregnant, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee. He was sent to a virgin. The girl was engaged to a man named Joseph. He came from the family line of David. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel greeted her and said, "The Lord has blessed you in a special way. He is with you." Mary was very upset because of his words. She wondered what kind of greeting this could be. But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary. God is very pleased with you. You will become pregnant and give birth to a son. You must call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High God. The Lord God will make him a king like his father David of long ago. The Son of the Most High God will rule forever over his people. They are from the family line of Jacob. That kingdom will never end."

"How can this happen?" Mary asked the angel. "I am a virgin." The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come to you. The power of the Most High God will cover you. So the holy one that is born will be called the Son of God. Your relative Elizabeth will have a child even though she is old. People thought she could not have children. But she has been pregnant for six months now. That's because what God says will always come true." "I serve the Lord," Mary answered. "May it happen to me just as you said it would." Then the angel left her.

ENTER THE STORY:

The same angel who visited Zechariah in the temple now goes to Nazareth to bring a message from God to a young Jewish girl named Mary. Is it an accident that God sent Gabriel to this specific girl in the town of Nazareth? Of course not! The name of this tiny village, a town that isn't mentioned anywhere in the Old Testament, comes from the Hebrew word for "branch" or "shoot."

Do you remember talking about a special branch or shoot in this Advent? Hopefully, you do!

We've seen this a few times in our Advent. It comes from a prophecy in Isaiah chapter 11 that speaks of a "shoot that will come forth from the stump of Jesse's tree." It was *NOT* an accident that God sent Gabriel to the city of Nazareth or the "City of the Branch!" This was a part of God's plan!

Gabriel told Mary that the baby she would have is the One everyone has been waiting for – the promised Messiah. He is the royal descendant of David and the branch from Jesse's tree. He is set apart from everyone that has come before him and everyone that will come after him.

This all sounds amazing, but why her? What was special about Mary?

From the outside nothing seemed special about Mary. Her family wasn't wealthy or famous, and nobody important had ever come from Nazareth so it wasn't about the town either, but God looks at what is on the inside. Just like Mary's long-ago relative David, she had a heart that loved God. She was happy about the message Gabriel gave her because she knew it was a blessing to be chosen! She knew how long her people had waited, so she gladly offered up her body to safely carry the Living God into this world, bringing Abraham's promised descendant just as he said he would.

May God's perfect plan always cause us to be amazed. This is, truly, the most incredible story ever told.

PRAY: *God, you are worthy of all of our praise and worship. Please help us have servant hearts like Mary and help us make space in our hearts for you. Amen.*