

An Expected Surprise

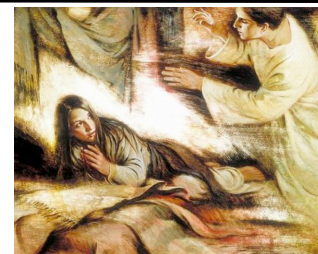
Advent 2013

Luke 1:26-38 Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, ²⁷ to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸ And having come in, the angel said to her, "Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!" ²⁹ But when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and considered what manner of greeting this was. ³⁰ Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹ And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name JESUS. ³² He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. ³³ And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end." ³⁴ Then Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I do not know a man?" ³⁵ And the angel answered and said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God. ³⁶ Now indeed, Elizabeth your relative has also conceived a son in her old age; and this is now the sixth month for her who was called barren. ³⁷ For with God nothing will be impossible." ³⁸ Then Mary said, "Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her. (NKJ)

FROM JERUSALEM TO NAZARETH

The wonder of the incarnation is the condescension of God the Son to redeem a lowly, sinful people. At the time of Christ's coming, the plight of the Jews exemplified the condition of all of humanity.

Not surprisingly, preparation for the Messiah's coming begins at the Temple in Jerusalem with a priest visited by Gabriel. However, the story takes an unexpected turn when the archangel travels to the despised, backwater village of Nazareth and appears to an insignificant peasant by the name of Mary.



ANTICIPATION AND SURPRISE

The coming of the Messiah was expected by God's people. Yet, how God choose to bring that about was a complete surprise. The Jews would expect God's choice to bring the Messiah's forerunner into the world through a priestly family, serving in His house in the capital city. God's choice of bringing the Messiah into the world through a lowly handmaiden in the most despised region of Galilee would be appalling to the Jews.

A SURPRISE ENCOUNTER

Everything about Gabriel's encounter with Mary was surprising.

- Gabriel "came into" where Mary was. The term means to accost, impose, approach. Gabriel was not invited; he did not ask permission. He came to make an announcement.
- Gabriel's first word is a command, "Rejoice." She is to rejoice because:
 - she has been "much graced" by the Lord. This is an active grace.
 - the Lord is with her. She will not face this alone.
 - she is blessed among women. She is being given a privilege no other woman will share.
- Mary was "greatly troubled," perplexed by what Gabriel had said.
- Her response must have been, "how am I worthy?" – a response shared by all of God's elect.