

Love-Words
4th Sunday of Advent
December 20, 2020
Trinity Bixby
Rev. Lucus Levy Keppel

[Luke 1:26-38 \(NLT\)](#)

[Psalm 89:1-4,19-26 \(CEB\)](#)

In one of the most startling coincidences ever, the first thing that the Angel Gabriel says to Mary is... “Hi!” Well, sort of. In Greek, Gabriel’s first word is “Xaire”¹ It was the ancient greeting of Greek-speaking people, derived from the word for rejoicing, gladness, or grace. That’s why many translations begin with “Rejoice!” It’s particularly startling, given that nearly every other visitation from an angel in the Gospels begins with “Don’t be afraid.” Instead, Gabriel appears to Mary and says, “Xaire kexaritomene!” – “Rejoice, you rejoicing one!” or maybe even, “Grace be with you, grace-filled one!” Gabriel finishes greeting Mary by saying, “The Lord is with you.” And then, we get one of the most relatable verses in the Bible – “She was confused by these words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be.” Yes, Mary, I’d be confused by these words, too!

“Wondering” or “pondering” on these words – the Bible indicates that Mary has long enough to have an internal dialogue² - or perhaps it’s one of those instants that stretch into eternity, that *feel* long enough to have written a dissertation, but only take a few moments in real time.

Yet, notice too that Mary’s reaction is not fear – an angel has appeared, and she spends the first moments wondering about the way the angel greets her! Mary, a daughter of poverty, does not shrink away from the greeting full of divine grace, but instead wonders what it may mean. Only then does Gabriel say to her, “Don’t fear!” or “Don’t flee in terror, Mary – for you have found grace with God!”

You see, God’s grace is Gabriel’s primary message for Mary – God’s grace is

¹ Pronounced, *KHAI-ray*, with a guttural first consonant like the *-ch* in *Loch*

² The Greek root here is actually *dialogizomai*

with her. God's presence is with her. God loves her. And she, a lowly daughter of poverty, an unwed teenager, is to bear the Christ-child. To bring all that God has promised her to the whole world. For Jesus is also called "Emmanuel" – God-with-us. That's why one of the primary messages of Advent and Christmas is that God loves us. God's grace, God's favor, God's divine presence – is with us. And, as Gabriel put it, "no word, no topic, nothing is impossible with God"

So, just as Mary had difficulty understanding God's greeting of grace, we, too, often have difficulty with God's presence. After all, why would God be with us? We are in the midst of an awfully difficult year, a time of fear and isolation. But, the good news is that God is always with us. God's grace, God's love, is with us all the more in the difficult times we are in. Because God's love and grace are not "rewards" for doing well in life – but comforting gifts that lift up the lowly and cause us to burst into song.

That's just what Mary does – after hearing this news from Gabriel, and spending time thinking deeply about what it all means, she sings a song that expresses her joy and wonder while evoking Biblical songs – including her namesake, Miriam's song, from the exodus from Egypt. She also references a bit of Psalm 89, "I will proclaim your faithfulness... from one generation to the next" – which goes on to say, "Loyal love is rightly built – forever!" Just as Mary represents a new generation of God's loyal love, so too do her words echo to us today, reminding us that the words of love never falter. God's love is surely with us.

Let us live into Advent and Christmas and beyond, heading lovewards by speaking love-words, even the impossibility that God is with us – and God is with you, too. For no word is impossible with God – and God's grace and love abounds in you. Amen.