

Wouldn't it be nice?
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Wouldn't it be nice to have a faith as strong as Mary's? An angel had appeared and told her that she was selected to bear the Son of God, asks one question, and then replies "Let it be done to me as you have said."

The next thing that Mary does is go visit Elizabeth. It isn't clear exactly how much time passes between the angel's visit and Mary's departure, although I have always envisioned that she left in a hurry. Have you ever wondered why Mary went to see Elizabeth? Was she scared? Was she confused? Did she wonder if Elizabeth had any maternity clothes that she could borrow?

I don't know why Mary went. I suspect God led her to Elizabeth. As soon as she walks in the door, Elizabeth proclaimed

"Blessed are you, and blessed is the child you will bear! Why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished!"

Why did Mary go to see Elizabeth? Perhaps she needed to be with someone who she could talk to, since they both had unexpected pregnancies: Elizabeth, thought to be too old; and Mary, still a virgin — perhaps Mary thought Elizabeth would be one of the few who could share this experience with her. Joseph's first thought was to break off the engagement because of how it would look; Elizabeth's first thought was to sing praises to God. There may be a lesson there about the people we surround ourselves with: do they build up our faith and hope, or do they worry about appearances first?

Whatever the reason, Mary went to see Elizabeth. Elizabeth's proclamation prompted Mary's song of praise. Mary did not sing this song immediately — it took some time, and the faith of another believer before she offered her song. There may be times in our life when we are called to unexpected service of the Lord, which may not feel immediately joyful. There may be anxieties, questions, doubts. That was certainly the case when I realized a call to ministry was upon me — the support of those who knew me and encouraged me was vital. Without it, I am not sure I would have been able to follow that calling; at the very least it would have been much more difficult.

Wouldn't it be nice to have a faith like Mary's? It is within our reach. Mary's faith was simple, in many ways. She was not without questions, not without doubts. She did, however, have a faith and a trust in God. Elizabeth said it best:

"Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished!"

Mary believed. She believed that God would do what God had said, and that God knew what He was doing. It does not say “Blessed is she who fully understood.” Faith and facts are two different things. We are called to a life of faith. Facts, when they are available, are wonderful, but we must live with a certain amount of uncertainty. It has always been this way; it has never been easy.

In Genesis we are told that Abraham and Sarah both laughed at God when they heard the promise that they would have a child. How could such a thing be possible? And yet we all sit here as their descendants. The angel told Mary: Nothing is impossible with God. Hard to believe? Surely no harder to believe than the savior of the whole world appearing as a child, born in a manger. No harder to believe than that He proclaimed the good news, was crucified and buried. No harder to believe than that on the third day He rose again, and was seen by many.

All these things are difficult to understand if we are looking for facts as evidence to prove or disprove. We are called to faith seeking understanding. We will be frustrated if we mistake the calling for understanding seeking faith. This is a cart which cannot go before the horse. The eyes of faith — the heart of faith — come first, and the understanding will follow. Will we understand everything? Eventually yes. Right now we see through a mirror darkly. One day — one glorious day — we will see face to face.

Will we be willing to believe, to trust? God will use us as well. We are Christ's body now on earth. Being perfect is not a prerequisite. God has used some of the most unlikely characters — old men and women to start a new nation, a young, unmarried girl to bear His only Son, a motley crew of fishermen and others to begin the Christian church. The only requirement has been a faithful willingness to follow where He leads us.

Will we follow? It is not blind faith, we are called to; God did give us minds to use and pursue understanding. But we are called to follow in faith. Will we follow? Will we give up the logical when we must? Will we celebrate the birth of a child who we believe was the Son of God, although we cannot prove it? Will we follow a God who has not appeared to us personally? Will we trust in a God testified to in Scriptures which have been passed on for thousands of years? Will we celebrate a meal together, to strengthen our faith and our sense of community with one another? Others might see it as ridiculous to gather around a table with a bit of bread and a bit of juice, and call it a celebration. Wouldn't it be nice to have a faith like Mary's? To believe and to follow even when we cannot always explain or understand?

That is what we are doing. That is why we are here. I cannot prove that the grace of God has overcome the power of sin and death, but I can testify to it. We are called to this table to celebrate that death and resurrection. Will we come? Will we follow, not just here in the safety of these walls, but out there once we leave this place?

If we hope to have a faith like Mary's, we will try. We will surround ourselves with those who can help and support us, and we will follow. Is that what your heart desires?