

Dec 7. In Gabriel's Absence.

“I am the Lord’s servant,” Mary answered. “May your word to me be fulfilled.” Then the angel left her. [Luke 1:38]

Well we were the family that put our Christmas decorations up waaaay too early this year. Embarrassingly early. I’m comfortable admitting that I regretted it within the first hour of everything being up. The house just seems so cluttered and chaotic, the kids are fighting nonstop over the lamb from the nativity scene, and my husband keeps hitting his head off a flying Santa dangling from ‘the big light’ in the living room. Beyond the mess though, there is a general ‘meh-ness’ about Christmas this year- I can’t be the only one who feels tired before it’s even really started? Everything is still so uncertain for so many people, that to switch the Buble album on and argue with little calendar windows seems a bit capricious.

Sometimes I think about how it must have been for Mary to deal with a pregnancy when her life seemed up in the air. Granted, a visit from an angel is sure to validate most peoples’ reasons to trust, but I’m pretty sure if it were me I would be riddled with doubt nonetheless, not least because there was so much more riding on an unexplained pregnancy in her situation.

The part of the verse that currently stands out to me is: ‘then the angel left her.’ It seems mad to me that this girl (likely still a teenager) has just received the most outrageous and scandalous information and then simply left to get on with it. Perhaps to begin with her servanthood felt easy in the wake of the Gabriel’s visit, after all he did say “don’t be afraid”... Filled with fresh purpose it might have been easy for a while to trust and obey what God had promised her.

As the months went on though, I wonder whether she felt abandoned? I think we could all sympathise with Mary if she found her trust to be lacking. As each day heightened morning sickness, back-pain, bone-tiredness, and a fear of the impending childbirth experience, it would be easy to assume that some of that hope may have lost its glimmer. Not only that, but she wasn’t to be sure how her local community were going to accept this information or even how Joseph might adapt to Fatherhood on the back of all of this. And to add the cherry on top, they’re called out of their comfort zone for the sake of a census to wander the streets until the last moment. It can’t have felt like there was much glory in contractions next to a goat. You and I know that God was with her the whole time sewing purpose into each phase, but you and I also know that sometimes it’s hard to connect our head knowledge of God’s presence to how we actually feel.

But at last, interrupting this weariness and disarray, the long awaited for hope of the world arrives. To have everything else fall away and look into the face of what she had waited for for so long must have been like taking a breath for the first time in months. However, the soaring elation at the baby’s arrival was only a foreshadow of the hope that that same baby was to eventually fulfil. Mary finally holding God’s faithfulness in her arms was the start of her seeing promises held time and time again in the most tangible way.

I think it's ok to feel weary. We're all tired and exasperated by how frustrating and uncertain times have been. For some, it may be difficult to feel even an ounce of hope, but know that He IS coming, that each and every one of his promises are held, and you can approach him with all of your weariness in hand. You don't need to have the house wrapped in fairy lights to sit in quiet wonder.

As the carol goes: "a thrill of hope, the weary world rejoices. For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn."give Him the worship He deserves. It was indeed a Holy night.