

**December 20, 2020**

This story of Mary and the Angel Gabriel is full of mystery. Mary is perplexed and pondering the conversation... She hears of giving birth, and of a son who would change the world. Mary is probably all of 16 years old, engaged to be married, innocent and her life is all in front of her.

She has plans, hopes and dreams, her life is going in a very concrete direction, and then suddenly, this huge shift of circumstances... This is hard for me to relate to, by nature I'm not someone who makes big changes in short periods of time. I have to mull things over... I have to think about it... I have to sleep on it...

And the miracle in this story is Mary's acceptance, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." There's something very intriguing about this. There is wonder, and yet at the same time there is trust and conviction.

Mary's heart is open, she's receptive, she will go in the direction of walking with God. She is the servant of the Lord... Through this innocent, child-like faith, God will become enfleshed amongst us. Incarnation will happen, God will show up!

In my own personal devotions this past week, I came upon a phrase that stopped me in my tracks...

It read, "*It began with Mary, but each of us is asked to make our own contribution to giving flesh to faith in the world.*" Giving flesh to faith...

What that means to me, is that Mary was willing to be an instrument of God...

And in a very real way, we also are instruments of God. Moved by Faith, we show up to be God's hands in this world. It's God's work and our hands. God is present

in and through us, in all the ways we love God and love the neighbor. Christmas is about celebrating God's presence!

Lots of stories today... I think this pandemic has changed me a little bit... I think all the darkness has me looking for light anywhere I can find it. And I'm seeing the presence of God in a lot of ways. Let me tell you about the previous week...

Tuesday night, Duke comes to the council meeting, he gives me a box full of rosettes, all beautifully packaged up, he and Kathy had been cooking. He tells me when I go out to visit, bring them with and give them out. Sure enough, I dropped by to see someone. I rang the doorbell, they came out of the house, I said I had some rosettes that Duke and Kathy had made, would they like a few?

Almost with tears in their eyes, they said they always made rosettes but this year decided not to, they were overjoyed to receive them! - Giving flesh to faith...

Wednesday night I got together with the confirmation kids. We've been talking about the bible and how God speaks to us through the bible. I read a psalm to them, I read it three times and asked them what words they heard. Just one word... And it launched a whole conversation about Kairos and Chronos...

Qualities of time and how God gives us all different skills and interests... I went away from that conversation feeling like it was a holy moment... Those kids are wonderful! - Giving flesh to faith...

Thursday night I had a council meeting with Cannon River. There was still some money to be given away. There is a bulletin board in the coat room that is literally covered with thank-you notes. And every time I see it, I'm moved by their compassion to open their hearts and be generous. - Giving flesh to faith...

The mission committee at Cross of Christ is the same way, and even in the midst of a pandemic, they were collecting food and gas cards, and Lynette has found a way to keep the Adopt a Family alive and well. Tons of packages in Dalen Hall – Giving flesh to faith...

Saturday morning, Noelle, one of our third graders has been asking about her “grown-up” bible, so we got together with her family, presented it to her, and together we read the Christmas story. Giving flesh to faith...

Saturday afternoon, with the family gathered in the cemetery, we commended Agnette Peterson, to the mercy of God. Giving thanks for her life, and supporting one another... Giving flesh to faith...

Last Sunday afternoon at Cannon River we baptized Elliot Vieths. We celebrated God’s promises to reach down and claim us as His beloved. Elliot became a new member of the Body of Christ... Giving flesh to faith...

God’s been busy in our community, and it’s been such an honor to give witness to all the light that’s been shining.

Christmas is just a few days away. The good news is that the God we worship, shows up. The God we worship knows what it’s like to live in our skin, to walk in our shoes, to hug and to be hugged, to know how it feels when we are cold, afraid and despairing.

The God we worship wants to be near us, wants to receive our prayers, wants to hold our hands, to forgive our sins, to be with us in pain. And our God comes to us today, even in the midst of the darkest times possible...

It is just simply surprising good news. God is always taking that first step... And all we can say is thanks be to God! Amen...