*The LCA provides this sermon edited for lay-reading, with thanks to the original author.*

Sermon for the Annunciation of our Lord

# The Text: Luke 1:26-38

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

Dear friends in Christ,

Today, we celebrate the wondrous announcement that set in motion Jesus' earthly life and ministry. We heard that the angel Gabriel came to Mary with the truly astonishing news that she would become the mother of God's long promised King and Saviour, whom she was to name Jesus. Today we get to celebrate this wonderful event in God's plan to rescue the whole creation. This is a plan which continues today and in which we are all involved.

It’s remarkable, and thought-provoking, that we’re so often addressed with a similarly gracious and friendly greeting to the one that the angel had for Mary. We heard how the angel appeared to Mary and said "Greetings, favoured one! The Lord is with you." At the opening of the service and before the sermon we hear “Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.” Two or three times each service we hear “The Lord be with you.” Indeed, the Lord is with us, and we are favoured by the Lord.

It's rather remarkable and thought-provoking that God should repeatedly approach us with a message which is so similar to the very favourable and friendly greeting that Mary heard. What might that mean? How do we respond to God’s wonderful greeting? Perhaps we hear it so often, that we don't react to it much at all, apart from saying a response that we’ve learned over the years. The gospel writer recorded Mary's reaction for us, no doubt recounting Mary's own memories of that wondrous day. We're told that “she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be.” She was perplexed by the angel's words. Mary knew that these words from Gabriel were words from God. It was God's greeting, rather than the angel's presence, which was the focus of Mary's attention and concern. We can't be entirely sure, but we can guess that Mary's unspoken question was 'what can God want with me?' She might well have considered herself to be no one special and so thought 'I'm insignificant and unimportant. What can God want with me? What can I do?'

I think most of us can relate to those kinds of questions. I'm pretty sure that most of us ask questions like that from time to time. We wonder 'What can God want with me?' We might wonder about our purpose and why we’re here on this earth. We realise that we're not particularly powerful or influential. We might wonder what God can want with us, and with our congregation and with our church as a whole. We might even feel that we're becoming less powerful and less important, which makes us wonder even more.

Whether we feel that way or not, the fact is that God has a plan in action and God keeps on with it. God continually approaches us with kindness and favour as though something of importance is to be achieved through us. As I said, I think that it's very remarkable and thought-provoking, and I might add, humbling and disturbing, that God should repeatedly approach us with a message which is very similar to the kind of favourable greeting that Mary heard. God continues with this wonderful plan of rescuing the whole creation, and part of that plan is that God's kindness, mercy, and favour is to be delivered by and through us.

Together with Mary, we might also want to shout out the obvious question, 'how can this be?' We know that Mary wondered how she was going to become the mother to the Son of the Most High. We, in our turn, might wonder how we’re going to be bearers and deliverers of God’s grace, favour and mercy in this world, in our society.

I'm not sure which of the two is harder to imagine and understand, the virgin birth or God working through the church. Both situations are completely impossible for people to achieve on their own. Fortunately, the angel Gabriel's answer lets us hear the truth of Mary's situation and ours. He said, 'the Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; ...For nothing will be impossible with God.' God is at work. God makes these situations possible. This is God's saving plan, and God is bringing it to fruition.

The amazing thing is that God chooses people, like Mary, and you, and I, to carry out this saving plan. Remember that the Holy Spirit is upon you, through your baptism and through God's word. The truth is that the power of the Most High is at work in us. Jesus, the son of Mary and Son of the Most High, comes to us in the experience of people gathered for worship around God’s word and sacraments. God's word and sacraments touch each of us, transforming our lives, our futures, our destinies, shaping us, making us vehicles of God's mercy and favour.

This wonderful account of God’s announcement to Mary teaches us that God is at work. God takes the initiative and works. The owner, author and driver of God's saving plan is God. We’re chosen to play a part in this plan as the result of God's kindness and favour. The prime criteria that God is looking for in us, as partners, is faithfulness. God can work with trust and devotion.

In response to God’s astonishing announcement, Mary answered with the voice of faithfulness and devotion: 'I am the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.' Mary placed herself under the word of God, becoming a vehicle for God’s love. She answered as we have been taught to pray, 'Your will be done.' She got herself out of the way so that God's power could accomplish wonderful things. The impossible became possible.

Let’s have no doubt that God has chosen us and blesses us for a purpose. This is described well in the opening paragraphs of the Ethical Standards of our church *(LCA Standards of Ethical Behaviour – LCA* available at http://lca.org.au/policies.html*)*. We read:

“God created the church to continue his work on earth. Its task is to celebrate love and life, and to be the vehicle for God’s continued work of bringing love to life in the world. The church lives on the gifts of God – God’s forgiveness, God’s love, God’s own life. In its worship the church experiences the love of God in words and actions of forgiveness and of empowerment. Infused with the real presence of Jesus Christ, love comes decisively to life every time the people of God gather.

The life of a Christian is a life of faith active in love, empowered by the love of Christ himself. Indeed, we have no other obligation, except to participate in this world transforming gift of God’s love.

Love changes people. The experience of being loved brings with it a kind of newness that brings out the best in us. We become more open to the gifts of life and the needs of others, and we live in a new way, a renewed way. Love brings life.”

God equips us for this purpose by making us more and more open to the word, so that together with Mary we can say, we are servants of the Lord, let it be with us according to your word. God made Mary the bearer of Jesus the Saviour. God makes us vehicles of divine mercy and favour expressed in our lives. It’s our amazing privilege and task to carry God's mercy and peace into the world, trusting in our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.