

*Mary said, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word..." (Luke 1:38)*

There are only two kinds of faith. On the one hand, there is the faith which finds as little difficulty as possible. This is the 'faith' which we have on our own terms, in our own time, and by our own choosing. It is the faith which hears God's Word and looks for the excuse not to obey and the way out of following Jesus. On the other hand, there is a kind of faith which could not be any more different. This is the faith which calls us away from comfort and ease and safety and idolatry. This is the faith which comes on God's terms, on his time, and by his own choosing. This is the faith that hears God's Word and does it, the faith which hears Jesus' call and follows.

In the first chapter of his Gospel, Luke the evangelist sets these two types of faith next to each other in Zechariah and Elizabeth. The proclamation of Gabriel to Zechariah, that he and barren Elizabeth would have a son, was pure good news. Yet, Zechariah doubted, questioned, and looked for proof. *How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years* (Luke 1:18). So, Zechariah was silenced for a time. But the same angel appeared to a young woman, Mary, bringing an even more unlikely – and unbelievable – word of good news, that the Son of God would be born to a virgin and save his people from their sins. Mary, though, doesn't call the word of the angel into question or seek an answer on her terms. Instead, in her curiosity, she hears that *nothing is impossible with God* (Luke 1:37). At that word she shows her faith – *Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word* (1:38).

Luther once preached, "If you're going to be a Christian, you will believe and do things which other people do not believe or do. Yes, I'll have to appear odd and strange to other people who are vexed and offended because of my faith." This is what true faith looks like – believing God's Word despite evidence to the contrary. We see this perhaps most clearly during Advent. Advent is a season of faith. It comes at the darkest time of the year, yet it asks us to put our faith in the *light which shines in the darkness* (John 1:5). It comes, at least for us, during some of the coldest days of the year, yet it asks us to look forward to warmth of God's presence at Christ's second coming. It comes amid wars and rumors of wars still today, yet it points us to the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6). The Word of God comes even to us sinners, doubters, and failures, offering forgiveness and life.

In Advent, God calls us again to a true, humble, lasting faith in his Son. This faith comes only from the power of God's Holy Spirit as a gift. Yet, it's not in something theoretical, but in something real and tangible. Faith listens to God's faithful Word. And that Word to us is clear: *The Lord God will give to [Jesus] the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end*" (Luke 1:32–33). Come soon, Lord Jesus, and reign among us!

-Pastor Squire

"Let the earth now praise the Lord, who has truly kept His word and at last to us did send Christ, the sinner's help and friend."

("Let the Earth Now Praise the Lord," *LSB* 352, v. 1)